



**The University of Sydney**

Consultation in the Lismore Local Government Area  
Analysis of Telephone Survey  
Conducted May/June 2000

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## Table of Contents

Introduction .....	1
Acknowledgments .....	1
Summary .....	2
Background.....	4
Survey Methodology .....	6
Knowledge .....	7
Identifying LGA and Councillors .....	7
Identifying Mayor and MPs.....	9
Attitude.....	11
Council's ability to consult .....	11
Extent of involvement.....	11
Desire for increased consultation.....	13
Willingness to join a Residents Feedback Panel (RFP) .....	13
Respondents' final comments.....	15
Behaviour .....	16
Voting in last election.....	16
Issues recalled.....	16
Contacting staff or councillors .....	18
Extent of involvement with Council and councillors.....	18
Classification.....	21
Reasons for wanting consultation .....	21
Particular issues for consultation.....	23
Being active in community.....	24
Limitations .....	26
Findings.....	28
Further Research .....	30
Recommendations .....	31
References .....	32
Appendix 1: Questionnaire .....	33
Appendix 2: What is a Residents Feedback Panel? .....	38
Appendix 3: Question 7 (f) Comments .....	42
Appendix 4: Question 7 (h) Comments .....	45
Appendix 5: Questions 8 (b) Comments .....	49
Appendix 6: Question 10 Comments .....	53

## Introduction

This opinion survey was conducted by Dr L. Carson, Government and International Relations, School of Economics and Political Science, University of Sydney, Australia. This analysis of the opinion survey has been prepared in order to:

- Provide feedback for the participants. Though the telephone survey was completed anonymously by residents of the Lismore local government area (LGA), respondents who participated were asked if they would be interested in reading a report of the survey's findings. This analysis will be sent to all respondents who requested a copy.
- Provide information for those who are mentioned in the survey. This includes elected representatives of Lismore City Council as well as staff members who have expressed an interest in the findings. The State and Federal representatives who are mentioned will also receive a copy of the analysis.
- Provide information to the wider Lismore community. This is a difficult task. It is hoped that Lismore City Council will use the information as it deems appropriate. Beyond that, the analysis will be sent to the two newspapers and two radio stations that operate in the Lismore area. Hopefully this will result in dissemination of the findings to a wider audience.
- Finally this survey will provide the basis for future research: (a) to enable future comparative studies in the Lismore LGA and (b) to provide information that will be used in forthcoming research that is to be conducted in relation to a specific consultation method—i.e. the Residents Feedback Panel.

The analysis examines each survey question using a variety of explanatory forms: tables, charts and an analysis of the data via discussion. There are 23 questions in all, numbered as Question 1-Question 10, with some questions having multiple strands of enquiry. The original questionnaire is reproduced as **Appendix 1**. The entire analysis is summarised in the section that follows—**Summary**. The consultation method that sparked the survey—the Residents Feedback Panel—is described in **Appendix 2**. Detailed information derived from the survey can be found in **Appendix 3, 4, 5 and 6**.

## Acknowledgments

The researcher acknowledges the efforts of the three interviewers who conducted the opinion survey, as well as the respondents who generously gave these interviewers their time and attention. Also acknowledged is the assistance of, and ongoing interest from, those elected representatives and members of staff in local government who continue to maintain an interest in meeting the needs of the residents they serve.

The survey is part of a larger research project that was funded by:

- University of Sydney Research Grant (URG 2000)
- Institute of Public Administration Australia/University of Canberra Public Administration Trust Fund

Dr Michelle Wallace, School of Social and Workplace Development, Southern Cross University, Lismore also provided support in the early stages of this project.

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## Summary

Voting in local government elections is compulsory in New South Wales. Of the 27,098 eligible voters, 84% of residents in the Lismore local government area (LGA) participated in the last election; a similar proportion (88%) of respondents claim to have voted. This is an indication perhaps of the accuracy of the responses that follow—i.e. that the respondents' views are a genuine sample of the wider Lismore LGA. Though this survey focused on local government, State and Federal representatives would be surprised by the lack of familiarity with them. No general mandate could be claimed by either since most respondents were unable even to name them.

Similarly, no general or specific mandate can be claimed by elected representatives from Lismore City Council. Though 68% of respondents claim to recall who they voted for in the 1999 election, 37% could name one or no councillors. When asked to recall issues that influenced their vote, only 38% could recall an issue. This would seem to indicate that though there is a high turnout for local elections there is a lack of engagement with either candidates or issues.

Respondents however have considerable familiarity and exposure to Council as a regulator or service provider. Two-thirds of respondents claim to have had contact with Council staff in Council offices over the last few years, and 38% claim to have attended some sort of meeting or site inspection organised by Council. In contrast only 24% have contacted a councillor or encouraged others to do so and only 18% would seek help from a councillor if a problem developed. However 68% would contact Council staff.

When asked to rate Lismore City Council's ability to consult, 68% were satisfied or more than satisfied. This is an increase in the response to a similar question that was asked in 1995 (when only 49% were satisfied or more than satisfied). Lismore City Council appears to have "lifted its game" in the intervening years. Though generally satisfied, 59% of respondents still want more consultation. The questions that followed helped to clarify the ways in which more consultation might occur.

Consultation is a broad term. It can mean communication—keeping residents informed—or it can mean full partnership in decision making. Respondents suggested that the continuum is clear to them—only 5% want to control the decision-making process but the majority believed that Council needs to hear their views.

How would residents wish to be consulted? Given their busy lives, their desire to be heard and a declared level of community responsibility, it is not surprising that 68% of respondents stated they would be part of a Residents Feedback Panel (RFP) once this consultation method was described. Given the history of RFPs in Lismore (see **Background**) such a panel is unlikely to be established in the near future.

What issues would residents wish to be consulted about? The responses might indicate the areas where least satisfying consultation has occurred for them: roads, traffic, roundabouts, rates, major developments, items of major expenditure (eg the swimming pool), environmental issues, safety or crime.

The results of this opinion survey contribute to the scant research on citizens' spheres of concern. The survey seeks to ascertain whether or not a NIMBY (not in my backyard) attitude underpins residents' relative concerns. The results both confirm and disconfirm this belief—ie residents' concern diminishes as issues move further away from home, but respondents were concerned with far more than their own backyard. While 84% want to be involved in making decisions on issues affecting their street, 87% want to be involved in making decisions on issues affecting their neighbourhood. A diminishing number but still a considerable proportion (72%) want involvement in the whole LGA.

In a sobering postscript, in the last open question (when respondents had a chance to say anything that had not been said), 45% of those who responded took the opportunity to express negative comments about Council—most of these comments related to elected representatives, not members of staff.

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The survey data would lead one to question the validity of the oft-repeated excuses for not consulting—particularly those that blame residents—eg people are not interested, it might create a culture of complaint (see **Background**). In contrast, respondents demonstrated awareness of their civic responsibility—to participate in Council’s decision making; they expressed considerable interest in Council affairs; when complaint was mentioned, it was dismissed as being not useful. Though satisfied with LCC, respondents wanted more opportunities to be involved. In summary, residents showed no interest in making unrealistic demands or in needing to complain.

Overall, these survey respondents reflect a disengagement from local elections and current elected representatives. It could be surmised that such disengagement would lead to less interested or less active citizens. However the survey demonstrates that this is not the case. The political disengagement from elections or elected representatives is coupled in fact with a desire for more, not less, meaningful political engagement—on citizens’ own terms. These terms are for more consultation, particularly about issues in their own streets and neighbourhoods and on major LGA issues. This consultation, according to respondents, is essential in order to know what’s going on in their community and in order for Council to benefit from hearing their views—it is a two-way process that is needed. Respondents considered that they, and Council, have a responsibility to do this and any consultation method must be convenient and fit in with their already-busy lives.

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## Background

The initial research project in the Lismore LGA that preceded this survey was entitled *Citizenship in Practice: Innovations for Democratic Participation*. The project was looking at the changing nature of citizen participation in decision making through the establishment, trial and monitoring of a Residents Feedback Panel. This began with the written support of Lismore City Council (LCC) and the financial support of the University of Sydney. Additional funding for a complementary aspect of the project (ie transcribed interviews with practitioners who had established panels) was provided by the Institute of Public Administration Australia/University of Canberra Public Administration Research Trust Fund. Southern Cross University (through the School of Social and Workplace Development) also pledged in-kind support. It was to cost LCC nothing.

The establishment of this panel was proceeding when seven of the twelve councillors on Lismore City Council (LCC) unexpectedly withdrew their support. These councillors stated that LCC did not need any additional consultation since representatives were elected to make decisions. One councillor was reported in the local newspaper as describing the standing panel as “just another mechanism to slow up operations” (The Northern Star, 26 May, 2000) and “a threat to democracy” (North Coast Advocate, 15 June, 2000). The opposition to any improved methods of consultation perplexed some residents who wrote in outrage to the local newspaper (Letters to Editor: Northern Rivers Echo, 15 June; The Northern Star, 29 June). Councillors from nearby LGAs (Byron and Ballina), expressed interest in relocating the research project to their shires (The Northern Star, 26 May; North Coast Advocate, 15 June). In order, then, to provide the context for this telephone survey an explanation of the Residents Feedback Panel has been reproduced as **Appendix 2**. This explanation was given to LCC councillors prior to their meeting on 6 June, 2000.

The unexpected turn of events meant that the funded research had to take a different direction. The focus was to remain on citizen participation in decision making—a phrase that can be narrowly or broadly defined. For this research project citizen participation was situated in formal political institutions—ie the extent of engagement with one’s local council. Citizens can be just as involved in decision making within voluntary associations, for example, and this distinction arose when the survey data was analysed. The focus also needed to remain on democratic innovation, hence the questions that were asked about a particular consultation method—the Residents Feedback Panel.

Given that a telephone survey had been conducted in 1995 by the same researcher, a decision was made to repeat this survey and to add additional questions. The aim was to do a comparison of attitudes and knowledge of Lismore residents between 1995 and 2000 and to use this new opinion survey as a stepping stone for future research on citizen participation in local politics. A tiny survey that was conducted by undergraduate students in 1992 was also drawn upon for comparative purposes. The overall focus, then, was to be on community consultation in the Lismore LGA, exploring LCC’s ability to consult as well as the community’s expectations of its Council.

Councils give a variety of views for not consulting—and these reasons were revisited as analysis of the data took place. The ten most-repeated excuses are (Service First, 1998):

1. don’t have enough time;
2. too costly;
3. will raise expectations unrealistically;
4. will not be representative;
5. people won’t understand complex issues;
6. people will never agree;
7. people are not interested;
8. there have been few complaints so things are okay;
9. it might encourage people to complain;
10. we don’t know how to consult.

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It was hoped that this survey would contribute towards an understanding of the validity of these views—at least in the Lismore LGA.

It was assumed that any findings could provide information that would be of interest to elected and appointed decision makers in Lismore, particularly about the community's desire for involvement in decision making. Indeed, the findings (see **Summary** and **Findings**) provided clues about how to strengthen participatory practices in the Lismore LGA. With this in mind, some tentative suggestions are offered to LCC (see **Recommendations**).

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## Survey Methodology

Over a two-week period (late May to early June 2000) an opinion survey was conducted by telephone in the Lismore local government area. Six hundred randomised telephone numbers (in the 2480 post code area) were assembled using a commercially-available CD-ROM (Australia On-Line). These telephone numbers are anonymous—no names were attached to telephone numbers at any stage.

Three Lismore-based telephone interviewers successfully connected with approximately 500 residents. Of these 174 agreed to answer the survey. To ensure randomness, interviewers were instructed to ask for the person whose birthday was “closest to today’s date” though sometimes this did not occur (see **Limitations**). Most calls were made during the late afternoon or early evening as well as on weekends. About 35% of those who were reached by phone agreed to complete the survey—this is a good response rate and compares favourably with market research response rates in general (pers. comm. Sol Lebovic, Newspoll, 26 May, 2000).

The opinion survey consisted of 23 questions—18 were open-ended. These were designed not to lead the respondent in any way—to gain unprompted responses. Five were closed questions offering a multiple-choice selection of answers from which to choose; the interviewer prompted these responses. Some of the latter enabled a single response, some multi-response (Hill, 1996:123-126). Interviewers were also instructed to note, briefly, any additional comments and these comments were transcribed (see **Appendix 3, 4, 5 & 6**).

The purpose of the chosen questions was “to find out about respondents’ behaviour, to understand their attitudes, or to gather details about them for classification purposes” (Hill, 1996:127). Further, questions were designed to establish levels of political knowledge. For example:

### *Knowledge*

Can you name any elected representatives of your local council?  
Can you name the current mayor?

### *Attitude*

How would you rate your local council in terms of its ability to consult with residents?  
How much would you wish to be involved in making decisions that affected your neighbourhood?

### *Behaviour*

Did you vote in the last council election?  
If you had a problem with a nearby development who would you contact?

### *Classification*

What sort of things does someone do who is active in the community?  
Are there any particular issues you would like to be consulted about?

With a sample size of 174, there is a 95% confidence that the answer for the population as a whole will be within less than 4% of these results (Fowler, 1993:28). For example in Question 6a, 64% of respondents stated that they had occasion to contact Council staff in the last few years. This indicates that the result for the population as a whole has a 95% chance of being within the range 60% to 68%.

Finally, through an analysis of the data, conclusions were made about what residents know (from knowledge questions); what they think (attitude questions); what they do (behaviour questions); and what they might do in different circumstances (classification questions).

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## Knowledge

### Identifying LGA and Councillors

What do residents of Lismore know about their Council and their local representatives? Two-thirds of respondents claimed to recall who they voted for in the last local government election—in September 1999. The question—*can you recall who you voted for?*—was designed to focus respondents' attention on the question that followed. However, it is perhaps noteworthy that two-thirds of respondents claim to remember *who* they voted for in the last election—particularly when only 38% could recall an *issue* that influenced their vote.

When asked to name the council that looked after their area (Question 4), 90% were able to do so correctly. All participants were residents of the Lismore LGA. However, 7% claimed to live in an LGA other than Lismore; some of these confused the LGA with State or Federal boundaries, or neighbouring LGAs. In the telephone survey conducted in 1995, 90% of respondents were able to correctly name Lismore City Council as their local council so the response rate was identical in 2000.

TABLE 1 Identifying LGA

Response	Proportion of respondents (1995)	Proportion of respondents (2000)
Correct	90%	90%
Incorrect/unanswered	10%	10%

When asked to name any elected representatives of their local council (Question 5), the challenge became somewhat tougher. Being asked spontaneously for detailed information such as a list of names is challenging for any respondent. Had they been prompted (eg with a list of names from which to choose) the response would have been different. However this unprompted question was asked in 1995 so it provides a good basis for comparison.

The difficulty of quickly responding to a question such as this is somewhat proven when one notes the increase in those who were able to answer “Gates” when asked to identify the Mayor in a later question (Question 5 b). It may mean that respondents had extra time to recall.

Comparisons between 1995 and 2000 are difficult because of the change in elected representatives. However, six councillors now in office were councillors at the time of the 1995 survey. One councillor, Reg Baxter, was re-elected in 2000 after a period out of office. The other five, Ros Irwin, John Crowther, Ken Gallen, Frank Swientek, Diana Roberts have been in office since 1995.

Naming does not translate into support, merely familiarity with either the name or the councillor's reputation. In fact some people added comments such as—“the bastard” after naming particular councillors. Some respondents described people as the school teacher or the woman who used to be Mayor. These were not included in the count.

Some councillors have served for longer periods than others and with varying profiles. Ros Irwin and John Crowther have both served terms as mayors. John Crowther is the longest-serving councillor having been with Lismore City Council for more than two decades.

In 1995, 59% could name one or no councillors; 15% could name five or more. In 2000, 37% could name one or no councillors; 26% could name 5 or more. Both results demonstrate a lack of familiarity with elected representatives in local government. However, there is a definite increase of recognition rate since 1995.

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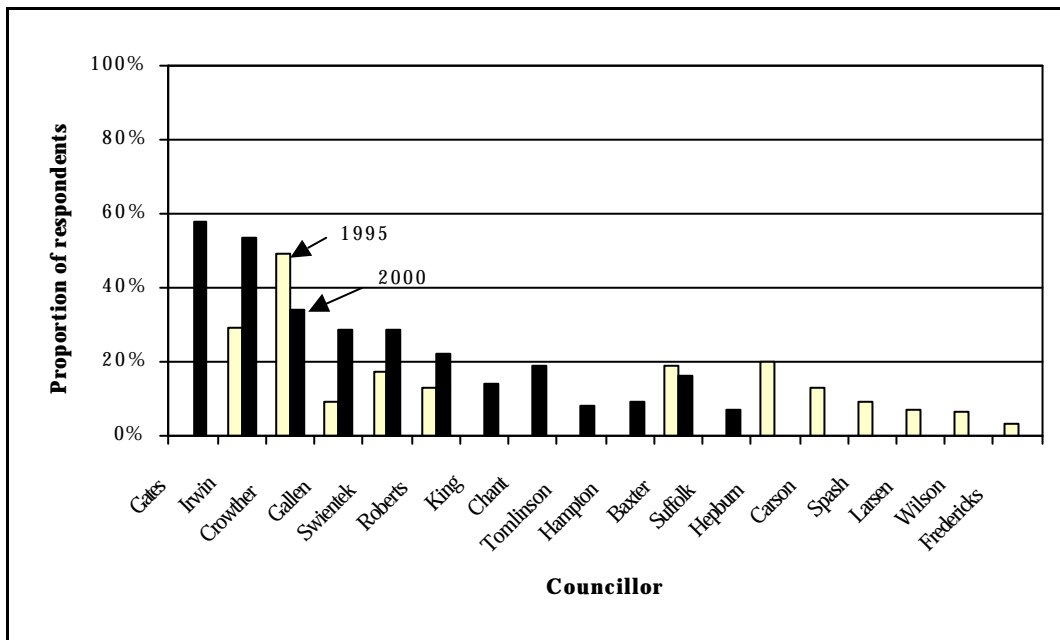
TABLE 2

Identifying councillors.

Councillor	1995	2000
Gates	N/A	58%
Irwin	29%	53%
Crowther	49%	34%
Gallen	9%	28%
Swientek	17%	29%
Roberts	13%	22%
King	N/A	14%
Chant	N/A	19%
Tomlinson	N/A	8%
Hampton	N/A	9%
Baxter	19%	16%
Suffolk	N/A	7%
Hepburn	20%	N/A
Carson	13%	N/A
Spash	9%	N/A
Larsen	7%	N/A
Wilson	6%	N/A
Fredericks	3%	N/A
<b>Average</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>22%</b>

NB: N/A signifies that the councillor was not in office during the year specified.

FIGURE 1 Identifying councillors.



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## Identifying Mayor and MPs

Naming twelve councillors is certainly a challenge and it would be considerably easier to recall the name of the Mayor (Question 5b) or State and Federal Members of Parliament (Question 9). This also provides a point of comparison—between familiarity of a local political identity and that of State or Federal representatives.

Some additional comparative data is at hand. In 1992 students of Southern Cross University (or University of New England, Northern Rivers as it was then known) conducted a survey in Lismore (face-to-face in public locations plus door-to-door interviews). The sample of 100 (90 of them Lismore residents) had a high level of awareness of the current mayor (64% could name him). This level of awareness of the person who holds the mayoral position is constant. Though this specific question was not asked in the 1995 survey, it was in 2000 and the results are the same.

No direct comparison with 1995 is possible but Crowther (Mayor in 1995) was named by 49% of respondents amongst the list of councillors in 1995. A more direct comparison therefore would be to look at those who named Crowther amongst councillors in 1995 and those who named Gates as a councillor in 2000—ie 49% in 1995, compared with 58% in 2000—a notable increase. These percentages do not translate into support, they indicate familiarity with the name or reputation of the Mayor.

Residents' familiarity with local MPs had diminished. In 1995 63% could name one or both parliamentary representatives—State and Federal. In 2000, 56% could name one or both. The two current MPs, Thomas George and Ian Causley, were recently elected for the first time in the Lismore region. It is therefore appropriate to compare their recognition rate with the current Mayor who was also new to office (Figure 2). Again this recognition rate should not be interpreted as support, simply familiarity. Various comments were attached to the naming of these representatives, for example one Member of Parliament was described by one respondent as “invisible”.

The higher recognition of a local mayor compared with state and federal representatives may suggest a stronger identification with local communities rather than distant political institutions. This is relevant in relation to Castells' prediction (1991, cited by Mowbray, 2000) that networked local communities could become stronger as the power of the nation state diminishes (see **Further Research**).

FIGURE 2      Recognition rate of State and Federal MPs and Mayor.

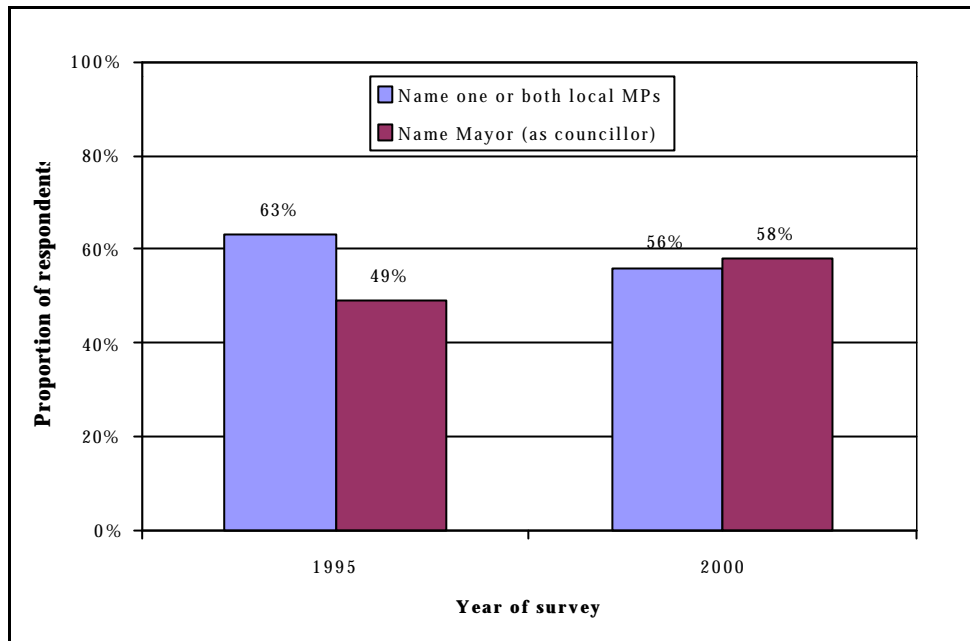
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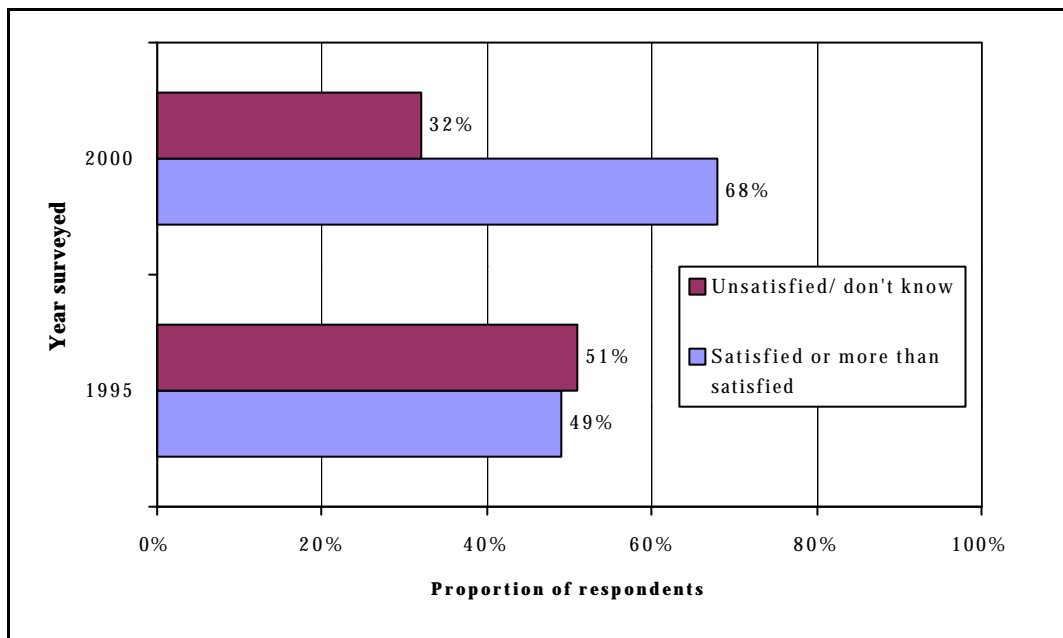
## Attitude

What do Lismore residents think about consultation and their Council's ability to consult? Do they want more of it or less? Are they interested in innovative democratic processes?

### Council's ability to consult

Lismore City Council is well regarded in terms of its ability to consult (Question 7d) and there has been a considerable improvement since 1995. This level of change does not happen overnight and does not occur in response to a one-off event. Responses to Questions 6a, 6b, 6c and 6d indicated the extent of residents' involvement with Council-organised consultation processes and these occur over an extended period of time. Levels of satisfaction would take some time to change so it can be assumed that the change has occurred slowly over the intervening years between 1995 and 2000. The current Council has inherited a considerable and positive legacy in terms of the community's perception of Council's ability to consult.

FIGURE 3 Satisfaction with Council's ability to consult.



### Extent of involvement

The results of this opinion survey contribute to the scant research on citizens' spheres of concern—does a NIMBY (not in my backyard) attitude underpin residents' relative concerns? The results both confirm and disconfirm this belief—ie residents' concern diminishes as the issue moves further from home. However, respondents were concerned with far more than their own backyard. While 84% want to be involved in making decisions on issues affecting their street (Question 7a), 87% want to be involved in making decisions on issues affecting their neighbourhood (Question 7b). A diminishing number but still a clear majority (72%) want involvement in the whole LGA (Question 7c).

The following tables provide a comparison with the responses in 1995. The 'neighbourhood' question was not asked in 1995. The question was included in 2000 in order to gauge the diminishing levels of interest

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that might occur when the issue moves beyond one's immediate geographic sphere of concern. It can be seen that any substantial change in the extent of participation would involve incremental change. However the level of interest is reasonably constant between street and neighbourhood. Respondents were as interested, if not more interested, in being involved in making decisions that affected their neighbourhood—not just their own street.

TABLE 3 Involvement in decisions affecting one's street.

Response	Proportion of respondents (1995)	Proportion of respondents (2000)
Totally involved	N/A	37%
Major issues only	N/A	47%
Sub total: wanting to be involved	74%	84%
Not involved	13%	11%
Don't know	13%	5%
Total	100%	100%

TABLE 4 Involvement in decisions affecting one's neighbourhood.

Response	Proportion of respondents
Totally involved	24%
Major issues only	63%
Sub total: wanting to be involved	87%
Not involved	10%
Don't know	2%
Total	99%
Missing	1%

TABLE 5 Involvement in decisions affecting local government area.

Response	Proportion of respondents (1995)	Proportion of respondents (2000)
Totally involved	N/A	15%
Major issues only	N/A	57%
Sub total wanting to be involved	54%	72%
Not involved	36%	23%
Don't know	10%	5%
Total	100%	100%

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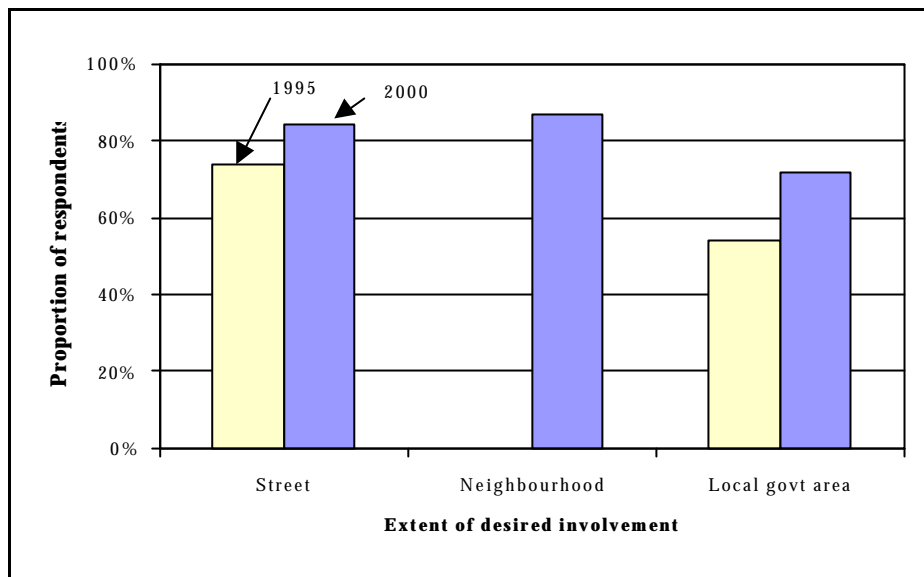
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FIGURE 4 Extent of desired involvement in Council decision making.



### Desire for increased consultation

Perhaps because of the reasonably high level of satisfaction with, and therefore confidence in, LCC's ability to consult, respondents want to be consulted more than they are now (Question 7e).

TABLE 6 Desire for increased consultation.

Response	Number of responses	Proportion of respondents
Yes	103	59%
No	66	38%
Don't know/unclear	5	3%
Total	174	100%

### Willingness to join a Residents Feedback Panel (RFP)

Question 7 (g)—*would you want to be part of a Residents Feedback Panel?*—was designed to discern the level of interest that residents had in being part of an innovative democratic process should such a consultative process be established in the Lismore LGA. As this consultation method was proposed to LCC and later rejected by a majority of councillors it was of particular interest to the researcher. This question was asked of residents prior to media coverage of the final controversial decision (6 June 2000).

Given that seven out twelve councillors voted against the RFP, there is a curious symmetry in the results of the survey. An almost identical proportion of residents was *in favour* of the RFP as the proportion of councillors who *opposed* it. The councillors would seem to be out of step with their constituency.

Only 10%-15% of people would usually take up an invitation to be part of a feedback panel (going by overseas experience). Yet over two-thirds said they would either *definitely* want to be part of a feedback

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panel or answered *positively* that they thought they would be. Only 19% were not interested at all. The 69% positive response is unlikely to translate into acceptance of an invitation.

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TABLE 7

Willingness to join a Residents Feedback Panel—N=174.

Response	Proportion of respondents
Definitely interested	29%
Yes, I think so	40%
<b>Sub total: interested or definitely interested</b>	<b>69%</b>
Not sure	10%
Not interested at all	19%
Don't know	2%
<b>Sub total: not interested/ not sure/ don't know</b>	<b>31%</b>
TOTAL	100%

It is helpful when noting the extremely positive response to turn to the respondents' individual comments which explain their reason/s for wanting to be part of a feedback panel (Question 7h). These comments are as relevant to the general practice of consultation as they are to this particular consultation method and for that reason can be found under the section on **Classification** and are reproduced in full as **Appendix 4**.

### Respondents' final comments

Respondents were given an opportunity to make any final comments—again unprompted (Question 10). These responses have been reproduced in full as **Appendix 6**. Only 33 additional comments were recorded and of these almost half took the opportunity to have a final swipe at Council. Comments have been categorised as follows:

TABLE 8

Final comments—N=33.

Category	Number	Percentage
Negative comments about Council	15	45%
Need better consultation	5	15%
Footpaths, roads	4	12%
Federal or State Govt issues	3	10%
Comments on the survey	2	6%
Safety as a community issue	1	3%
Health	1	3%
Waste management	1	3%
Need less consultation	1	3%

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## Behaviour

How do Lismore residents currently engage with their Council? What local issues influence their vote? What is the extent of their current involvement with LCC? Who would they contact if a problem emerged?

### Voting in last election

The last local government election in New South Wales was held during September 1999—eight months before the phone survey was conducted. Voting is compulsory for local government elections in NSW. According to official figures<sup>1</sup>, in the 1999 election 83.8% of Lismore residents voted (Source: Electoral Office of NSW)—88% of respondents claimed that they had voted in the last local government election.

An over-claim, or over-reporting, in relation to voting in elections is not unusual (Rose, 1974:697). However in this case—given the accuracy resulting from sample size ( $\pm 4\%$ )—the response rate would seem to indicate that respondents answered honestly. This gives added confidence in the accuracy of the overall survey results.

TABLE 9 Respondents who voted in last election.

Response	Proportion of respondents
Yes	88%
No	10%
Don't know	2%

### Issues recalled

Question 2 asked: *Were there any issues that influenced your vote in the last council election, any that influenced you to vote for a particular candidate?* Responses to this question shed some light on the controversial issue of the electoral mandate. Some months after the completion of this survey an issue was being debated in Lismore that provided a case study for understanding the notion of a mandate.

Lismore's Mayor, Bob Gates, claimed a mandate to spend over \$4m on renovating the Memorial Baths even though the option under discussion was not raised at the time of the 1999 election. An analysis of media coverage indicated that no candidate took a strong position by running on the single issue of a local swimming pool at that election.

The claim by any politician to have a mandate is suspect and needs closer examination. Firstly, we should distinguish between a *general* and a *specific* mandate—the former is a general mandate to govern; the latter is a mandate to implement a specific policy based on a single issue (Goot, 1999).

A specific mandate is a problematic claim. One way of approaching this is to ask people after they vote, why they voted the way they did. If we want to validate a claim for a specific mandate we would have to ask voters to recall the issues that influenced their vote. In this way a statistically-significant survey can strengthen or undermine a claim by an elected representative that a specific mandate exists. Question 2 of this survey undermines the claim.

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<sup>1</sup> Assuming Lismore's electoral roll is an accurate listing. The roll shows 27,098 eligible voters. Votes cast were 22,709 (formal=21,601; informal=1,108). Therefore 83.8% of those listed on the electoral roll actually voted.

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Only 38% of respondents could recall any issue that influenced their vote. Of those that did recall an issue, a mere 10 respondents (or 6%) mentioned the swimming pool. Only 3 respondents (or 2%) saw it as the *only* issue that influenced their vote. Of course this mention of the swimming pool as an issue does not translate into support or opposition for a particular aquatic option; these few voters could have been voting for or against any of the options being discussed at the time of the election.

FIGURE 5 Proportion of respondents who could/could not recall issues.

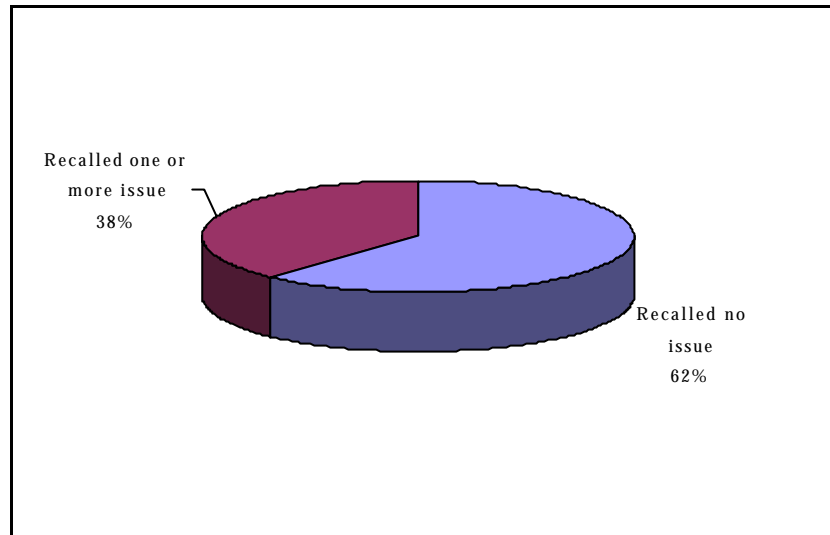
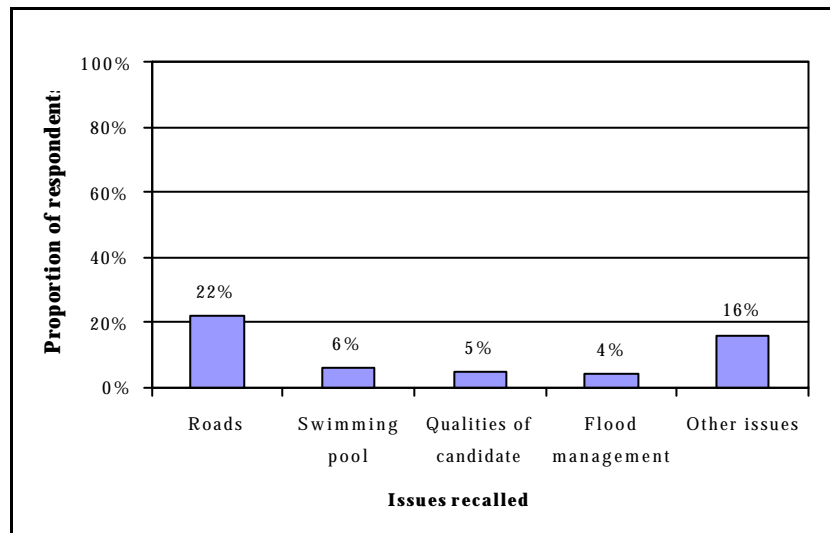


FIGURE 6 Issues that were recalled—by proportion of respondents. Note that respondents often named more than one issue; therefore percentages will total more than 38%.



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### Contacting staff or councillors

When asked if they had had occasion to contact Council staff in Council offices in the last few years (Question 6a), 64% said they had. Whilst two-thirds claim to have contacted Council staff in the last few years only 24% had contacted a councillor (Question 6b).

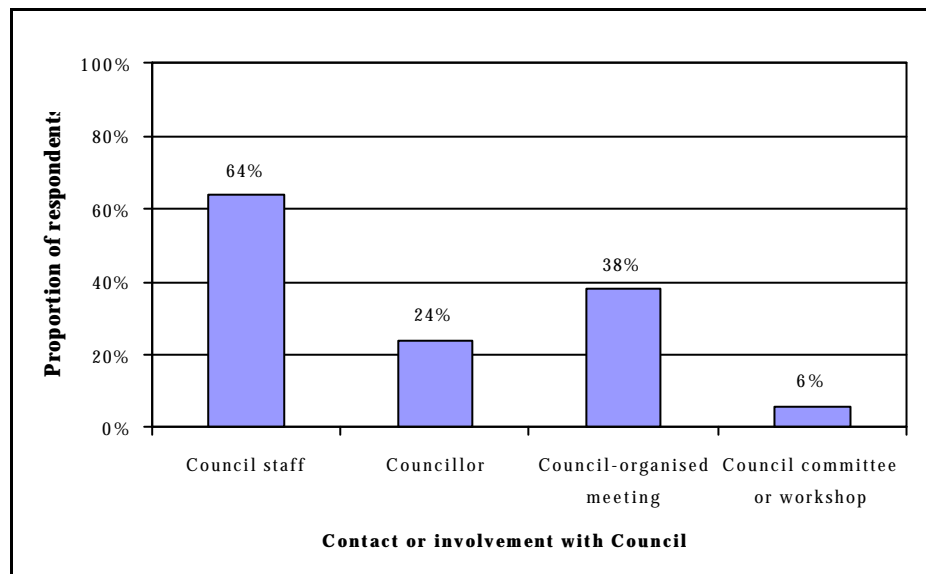
TABLE 10 Contacting Council staff or councillors.

Response	Proportion of respondents
Contacted Council staff	64%
Contacted a councillor	24%

### Extent of involvement with Council and councillors

Nearly 40% of respondents claim to have attended a Council meeting or a public or a site inspection meeting organised by Council (Question 6c). Very few claim to have served on a Council committee or attended a planning workshop (Question 6d)—only 6%. This would indicate that the latter form of consultation is particularly unrepresentative of the wider population. The graph below paints a comparative picture of the various forms of involvement.

FIGURE 7 Contact or involvement with Council.



Following the previous question, respondents were asked to consider who they would go to first if they had a problem and this was made concrete by referring to a possible problem with their road or a nearby development (Question 6e). Overwhelmingly Council staff members are their preferred first point of contact—with more than two-thirds going to staff first. Very few would contact a councillor though this appears to have increased slightly since 1995.

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TABLE 11 First point of contact to resolve a Council problem.

<b>Response</b>	<b>Proportion of respondents (1995)</b>	<b>Proportion of respondents (2000)</b>
Staff	65%	68%
Councillors	11%	18%
Other	N/A	7%
Don't know/blank	N/A	7%

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## Classification

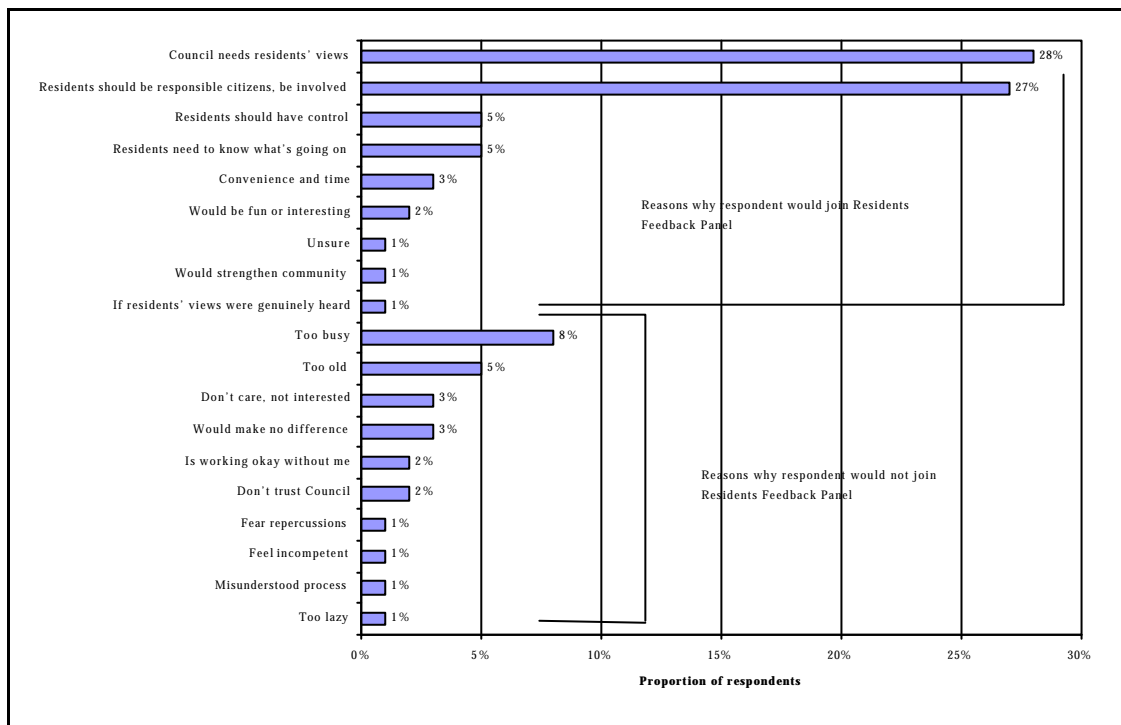
Given different circumstances, what would residents wish for? What issues would they like to be consulted about? What are their reasons for wanting to be consulted? The reasons for the latter can be uncovered by examining Question 7h. Though the question related to respondents' reasons for wanting (or not wanting) to join a Residents Feedback Panel they are equally relevant to the broader theme of consultation.

### Reasons for wanting consultation

All comments in response to the question—*why would (or would not) you want to join a Residents Feedback Panel (RFP)?*—are reproduced in **Appendix 4**. The following graph shows the proportion of respondents and their reasons.

It is clear that apathy, cynicism or distrust are not the chief motivators for non-involvement. Being busy and thinking of oneself as too old are the most frequent responses. This contradicts the 10 excuses used by decision makers for not consulting (see **Background**).

FIGURE 8 Proportion of responses about joining or not joining RFP.



The comments give an indication of residents' general views about being consulted by their Council as well as their reasons for joining, or not joining, a Residents Feedback Panel so therefore their comments are doubly illuminating. A cross section of comments follow (Table 12) and have been categorised to reflect the themes that emerged.

Respondents' motivations for joining a Residents Feedback Panel are striking. Primarily the motivation is that Council needs to hear their views. Of equal importance is their responsibility as a citizen who should

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control their own future. Only then is the motivation a need to know what Council is doing. Considering the range and proportion of responses, involvement is more important to residents than simply being informed.

TABLE 12 Overview of comments about reasons for joining or not joining RFP—N=167.

Category Why you would...	Proportion of respondent s	Category Why you would not...	Proportion of respondent s
Council needs residents' views: eg <i>Council needs feedback—questionnaire good way to go; just so Council could get feelings of community members; local government can be too autocratic—it's to our benefit to have some input</i>	28%	Too busy: eg <i>busy; no time; haven't the time; home and work commitments</i>	8%
Residents should be responsible citizens, be involved: eg <i>I think if I want a change or I'm not happy I have to be prepared to solve the problem; nice to know what's going on in your local area &amp; help out; because it's my duty as a citizen;</i>	27%	Too old: eg <i>I am getting too old now</i>	5%
Residents should have control: eg <i>needs to be more personal involvement by residents—to let Council know what we want done; to be involved in decision making</i>	5%	Would make no difference: eg <i>waste of time—they have their minds made up before they start; not notice is taken of what you say anyway; wouldn't make any difference</i>	3%
Residents need to know what's going on: eg <i>I don't think residents get enough feedback from Council—not involved with us; because I feel a lot of councillors are out of touch—don't really know</i>	5%	Don't care: eg <i>don't want to be involved;</i>	3%
Convenience and time: eg <i>I could be involved from home; to have opportunity to give my views without too much time</i>	3%	Misunderstood process [panel is not a committee]: eg <i>don't like committees;</i>	1%
Would be fun or interesting: eg <i>who wouldn't want to be? if asked I think it would be great</i>	2%	Don't trust Council: eg <i>I don't have any trust at all</i>	2%
Would strengthen community: eg <i>sometime to feel that I am part of this community on major issues; want to be a part of a community—that's why I moved to Lismore</i>	1%	Is working okay without me: eg <i>seems to be going alright without me; I elect 12 people and expect them to do their job</i>	2%
If residents' views were genuinely heard: eg <i>if I knew it was going to be of any use, yes I would</i>	1%	Too lazy eg <i>too lazy</i>	1%
		Feel incompetent: eg <i>wouldn't feel up to the task; don't know enough to contribute</i>	1%
Unsure	1%	Fear repercussions: eg <i>frightened they might find out who it is</i>	1%

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TOTAL	73%		27%
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Particular issues for consultation

Respondents were asked in Question 7f—*are there any particular issues you'd like to be consulted about?*—and 120 (or 71%) chose to respond. Some mentioned more than one issue (there were 179 responses in all). One could assume that the issues with low numbers indicate a general level of satisfaction with current levels of consultation, eg health, water and sewerage, parks and gardens, sports facilities, airport. The higher number of responses could indicate that more effective consultation is necessary, particularly with: roads, traffic, roundabouts, rates, major developments, items of major expenditure (eg the swimming pool), environmental issues, safety or crime.

Responses to these questions were unprompted. Being offered a list of options would have resulted in an expression of different priorities. Lukes has pointed out that the absence of issues from the political agenda does not indicate indifference to them—rather, grievances can be “denied entry into the political process” (Lukes, 1979:24). Preferences can be shaped in subtle ways and the interests of those in power can define the political agenda in ways that bear little relationship to constituents’ own priorities. Residents would need to be involved in a much more deliberative process to uncover such concerns.

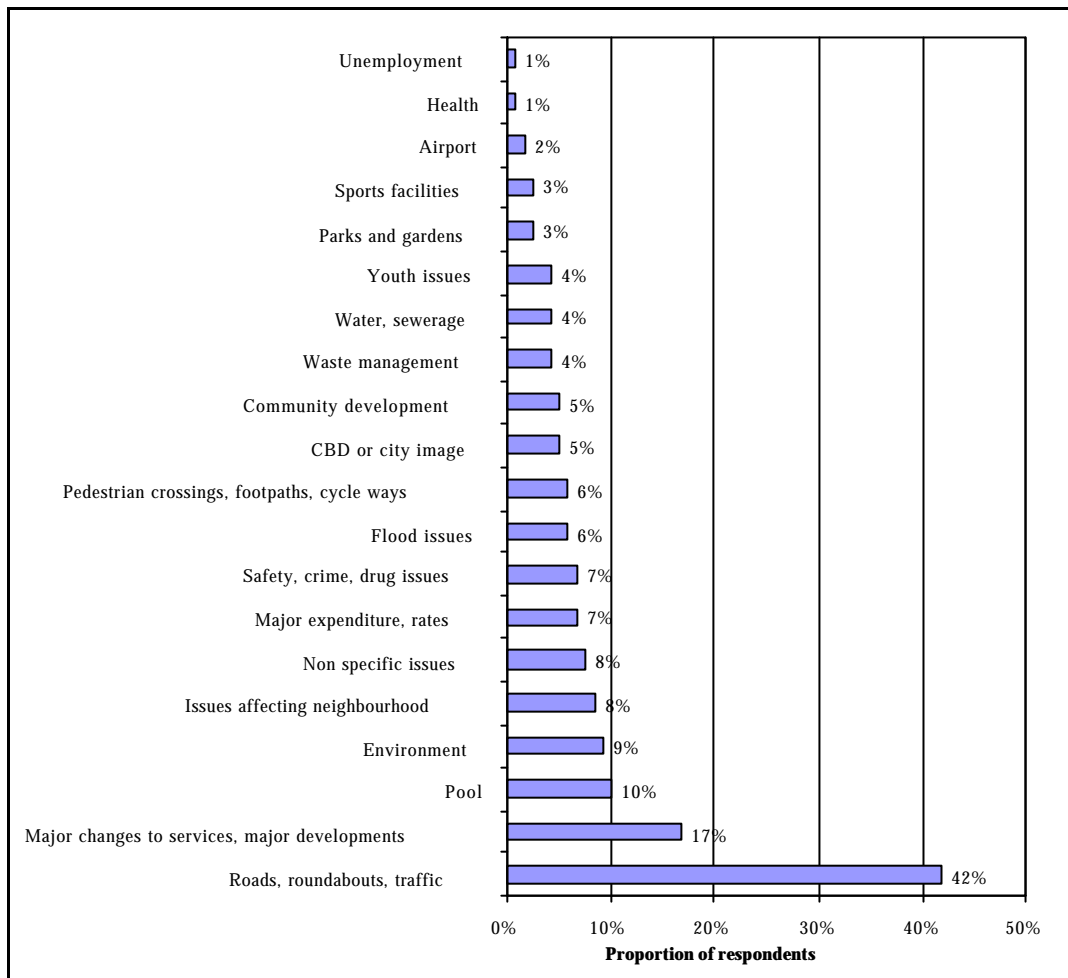
With this proviso, those issues that were identified can be compared over an eight-year period. In a tiny survey conducted in 1992 by a group of Southern Cross University students (Smidt, Shewell & Scheucher, 1992), 20.5% of respondents named roads as an issue that affected the respondent. In the 2000 survey, of the 120 who offered an unprompted response to the above question, 40.7% indicated they wanted to be consulted on roads, traffic, and roundabouts. Level of concern on this issue had doubled.

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FIGURE 9 Particular issues that residents would like to be consulted about. Data from 120 respondents who answered this question, with 179 responses.



### Being active in community

How do residents define community activity? Respondents' definitions (Question 8b). are broader than the sort of activity that could be described as active engagement with institutions of the state. Though political activity could encompass the types of voluntary activity that was described by respondents—the researcher has sifted out these responses to focus on those that relate to local government (the subject of this research project).

All comments have been reproduced as **Appendix 5**. Responses have been categorised according to the degree of activism or commitment that would be required of someone described as politically active in the community, in relation to local government. It will be evident to the reader of **Appendix 5** that voluntary, non-political activity was frequently mentioned. However, this question was designed to create a hierarchy of activity in local political institutions and this provides the basis for further research.

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Narrowing the responses to only those that relate to local government allows the researcher to place them within a consultation hierarchy—eg Sherry Arnstein’s *Ladder of Citizen Participation* which suggested that residents can move up a ladder of participation, from Manipulation to Citizen Control (Arnstein, 1969). With this survey, political activity has been categorised according to the likely influence on Council’s decision making and falls well short of Arnstein’s top rung (Carson, 1996).

Table 13 Engagement with local government

Highly active, motivated or committed	Very active or motivated	Irregularly active	Well-informed, less active
Forming action group or lobby group	Attended Council meetings	Wrote letter to editor of local paper	Kept an eye on notice boards
Office bearer of action group	Attended local action group meetings	Talked to councillor/s	Read about local issues in news section of newspaper
Been a councillor or candidate for election	Attended Council workshops	Attended public meeting/s	Complained to Council staff
Served on Council committee	Collected signatures for a petition	Took part in a rally	Discussed Council issues with friends, neighbours
	Helped with leafleting or letter-box drop		Rung radio station about Council issues
			Read about proposed developments, ie Council notices

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## Limitations

In conducting and reporting on a telephone survey of this scale it is crucial to note any limitations. It would be a foolhardy researcher who claimed complete accuracy, validity, reliability or objectivity. Of more importance is transparency—an admission of any shortcomings or assumptions.

The researcher is a former councillor with Lismore City Council with a particular interest in citizen participation in local government decision making. For that reason, survey questions focused on consultation that is meaningful (as defined by the researcher), and this involves consultation about future decisions. Consultation that is simply public relations or communicating with residents about Council's achievements is defined by the researcher as 'informing' or even 'marketing'. All respondents would not necessarily share this definition of consultation.

The researcher conducted none of the telephone interviews. Three interviewers were employed and these interviewers were based in the Lismore area in separate locations. During the time of the interviews they discussed the project with each other—to ensure consistency. Interviewers were instructed to ask for the person in the household whose birthday was closest to the date of the phone call; on occasions interviewers did not ask this question, depending upon the initial conversation with the person who answered the phone. The first exchange is crucial for a telephone interview and it is not surprising that diligence in relation to this question was not always maintained. This may have compromised the randomness of participants since sections of the population might be less likely to answer the household phone, eg young people.

Due to a miscommunication by the researcher, interviewers neglected to note always whether the caller was male or female. For this reason sex identification has been omitted from the data. However, of those completed questionnaires on which the sex of the respondent was noted, the proportions matched closely the wider community.

Not everyone who was contacted agreed to complete the telephone survey—indeed 65% refused. Though 35% may seem a low rate to those unfamiliar with opinion surveys it is regarded as a good response rate and compares favourably with market research response rates in general (pers. comm. Sol Newspoll, 26 May, 2000). Those who refused to complete the survey did so for their own reasons and were not asked to provide any explanation. One could speculate that residents have grown weary of surveys and invasions of privacy; one could even assume that the refusals denote a high ignorance rate in relation to Council matters—it would all be speculative. However, with a sample size of 174, selected at random, there is a 95% confidence that the answers for the Lismore population as a whole would have been within less than 4% of the results that have been analysed.

No matter how closely these responses can be matched statistically to those that would have been derived from the entire Lismore population a further limitation exists with opinion surveys. It is not only difficult, it may well be inappropriate to extract a range of responses, then to present these responses as an aggregation of the whole group. It is impossible to speak of "the public mind".

*...mass beliefs of a disparate collection of individuals are hard to measure or determine, so we all accept that public opinion in this sense is a kind of artifact or hypothesis. But we think of it as something objective and factual, and are encouraged to do so by the margin-of-error figures and other trappings of numerical accuracy utilized by the pollsters (Walton, 1999:21).*

To speak of respondents under one generic descriptor—respondents—is to apply a singularity that is misleading. Those people who agreed to participate were not standardised units. (The same comment could be made in relation to any references to councillors or staff members under a single label.) There is a tendency in conducting research and also planning exercises, for citizens to be seen as abstract—with "no gender, no tastes, no history, no values, no opinions or original ideas, no traditions, and no distinctive

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personalities to contribute to the enterprise” (Scott, 1998:346). It is hoped that, by reproducing individual comments, a flavour of the respondents’ diversity has been retained. For this reason, this analysis would be incomplete without a full reading of respondents’ individual comments (see **Appendix 3, 4, 5 & 6**).

Linked to this reminder of uniqueness is a further failing of opinion polling and that is the way in which respondents are asked to speak from a position of self interest not from a sense of community interest (Barber, 1992). Respondents are asked ‘what do *you* want?’, instead of being asked to consider ‘in your role as citizen, what do you want for the community?’. Very different responses can result and this provides a strong argument for more deliberative forms of consultation to enable citizens to interact and deliberate before expressing thoughtful and considered judgements. Though opinion surveys can be extremely representative they can also be superficial or simplistic and can lead to reactive and inappropriate decision making. They should be seen as a means for finding out what citizens think right now, without the benefit of discussion and additional information. An awareness of this limitation need not detract from the obvious benefits and significance of an immediate survey—given an appropriate context.

Context is all important. A survey is conducted at a particular time in a particular place. Without fully appreciating these circumstances responses can provide only a ‘one-dimensional snapshot’ (Walton, 1999:23). This is particularly the case when an opinion is sought. A lack of ‘dimension’ is less relevant when knowledge is being tested or information about political behaviour is being extracted. For example with questions that were designed to find out just how much respondents knew about certain matters (eg their Council area or councillors’ names), the lack of dimension is acceptable. When citizens are asked about the consequences of being consulted about issues that affect their street or neighbourhood, then respondents can only offer offhand views and have little time to consider consequences or feasibility etc. In this survey these views were thought to be sufficient to establish at least an initial reaction to the idea of being consulted—in other words, public *opinion* not public *judgement* was being sought. Also respondents were being asked to define terms such as ‘active’ for use in a later survey on local political activity so spontaneous comments were entirely appropriate.

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## Findings

The analysis that accompanies each question offers a complete coverage of the survey's findings. These discussion sections have been summarised and the most meaningful conclusions extracted and reproduced as the **Summary** at the beginning of this report. This **Summary** should be referred to at this point if the reader has not done so already. Some additional conclusions follow.

The myth of the mandate has been dealt with elsewhere (in relation to Question 2) but it should be noted that the findings from this survey further undermine any claim that a mandate exists for any specific issue as a result of the 1999 election in Lismore. To claim otherwise is a misrepresentation of the facts. Rather than persisting with a false notion about the *existence* of an electoral mandate, elected representatives would do well to think about how to *build* a mandate. A mandate can be established on a particular issue through genuine consultation. Residents are simply waiting to be asked. Instead of being dismissed as unreasonably demanding (a charge that was heard during a number of discussions amongst councillors who opposed further consultation), residents' views need to be elevated to the opinions of experts because they are—residents know more than any professional expert about most issues affecting their street or neighbourhood. Public opinion

*is not merely a second-rate reflection of expert opinion. Each form of opinion—expert and public—has its own excellencies and its own failings, but public opinion is not, as is generally assumed, simply less well-informed expert opinion (Yankelovich, 1991, cited in Walton, 1999:124).*

Councillors were heard to say during the meetings that preceded this survey, that residents would demand things that could not be delivered (and this accords with the 10 excuses for not consulting outlined in **Background**). On the contrary, residents' responses indicated a high degree of responsibility—they commented on their role as citizens and Council's need to hear their views. Indeed it has been said that the failure of many grand schemes can be attributed to a disregard of the wisdom and competence of the scheme's intended beneficiaries—"how little confidence they repose in the skills, intelligence, and experience of ordinary people" (Scott, 1998:346).

To discern the needs and to tap into the expertise of typical residents, two principles are important in consultation—representativeness and deliberation.

*In a deliberation, as the participants discuss an issue or problem to be resolved, they consider various alternatives and bring forward arguments to the effect that such-and-such a proposed course of action would be a good idea or not. As the dialogue proceeds, the commitments the participants began with are clarified and articulated through the course of the argumentation, and as the arguments of the opponents test out these commitments and pose objections to their weak points (Walton, 1999:23).*

It is not enough to use opinion polling, LCC would need to provide a deliberative environment to facilitate the resolution of complex issues. Such an environment is missing from both surveys and the Council Chamber.

Mowbray considers that claims that councillors reflect community desires are as "trite" as they are "ubiquitous" and are "patently falsifiable" (Mowbray, 1997:249). This opinion survey supports Mowbray's claim. One clear example can be gathered from Question 7g. When asked if they would like to join a Residents Feedback Panel nearly 70% said yes. When councillors voted on establishing this method, there were no financial considerations (because it was fully funded by the University of Sydney); therefore their vote could be interpreted as an attitudinal response—just as it was for the residents in this opinion survey. In the Council Chamber, 70% of councillors voted *against* the RFP, knowing that 70% of residents *supported* the idea. Councillors clearly were not reflecting community desires.

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## Further Research

The original research had set out to establish and monitor a Residents Feedback Panel in Lismore. The specific research question to be answered was 'are non-mobilised (politically inactive) residents attracted to RFPs?'. The hypothesis was that people who would be unlikely to attend public meetings or join Council committees, would be more likely to join a RFP. This question remains unanswered but will be addressed elsewhere. A Residents Feedback Panel has recently been established in another local government area and randomly-selected Panel members will be interviewed in-depth—to answer the original research question.

Given that this survey replicates a number of questions asked in 1995, it would be appropriate to repeat this survey on a regular basis. If there is no reason to repeat it before 2005 this would be an ideal time to gauge the changes in the life of Lismore residents in terms of their relationship with their Council. This will provide three sets of data, each five-years apart. The coming years will inevitably provide opportunities to extract some useful longitudinal data. Given the legislative requirements to consult (eg Local Government Act 1993) such surveys are necessary and relevant.

When the next survey is conducted it would be an opportunity to tease out some of the issues that dwell in the growing divide between the two roles of residents: (1) as consumers or clients of their Council, and (2) as citizens with an interest in democratic local governance. How do residents define themselves—as customers or citizens? The roles are distinctively different and are the basis for considerable debate in local government circles as council staff, in particular, negotiate their way through the tangled contradictions of managerialism and local democracy. Agendas are imposed by state and federal governments. Resources do not match the requirements for more accountability and greater consultation (Aulich, 1999:13). Yet staff must satisfy the external demands of residents whilst satisfying other spheres of government. Of course the seemingly divergent roles (of customer and citizen) are not mutually exclusive when one considers the role of citizens in local decision making. A thriving business knows its customers and satisfies their needs—this involves consultation. A vibrant democratic system engages with its citizens and ensures that they have a say in decisions that affect them. Further research could uncover residents' awareness and views in relation to this tension.

A number of further questions arise: What do residents consider is the purpose of elected representatives? If unelected administrators can guarantee that roads are maintained and garbage is collected, what role do councillors perform? Residents of Lismore rarely contact them and would not do so if they had a problem and do not know their names. Would the majority of residents care if elections were eliminated at the local government level? What would be the impact on citizenship if this occurred (as it did, for example, in Victoria recently)? If councillors do not engage meaningfully with their residents when legislation advises them to do so what should be the consequences if they desist? Are four-yearly elections an adequate form of accountability? What other forms of accountability are possible? Further research could begin to answer these questions.

Local government has long been considered the poor cousin to state and federal governments. There is a growing debate about its future and some theorists speculate that the future for local government could be very bright—assuming it can be strengthened and revitalised (Mowbray, 2000:215). In a globalised world, citizens are distanced from decision making (which is as corporate as it is global). In reaction it is envisaged that the "current process of internalization of the economy may...lead to the renaissance of the local state, as an alternative to the functionally powerless and institutionally bureaucratized nation states" (Castells, 1991:352 cited in Mowbray, 2000:215). How do citizens see their future in a globalised world? What potential does local government have in "broader scale social reform" (Mowbray, 2000:215)? Or is to remain a conservative arm of other governments? How might citizens participate in effecting change, should conservatism no longer match their needs? Is local government a site for such experimentation?

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## Recommendations

This survey exposes a high level of interest in and knowledge of local affairs and indicates an accompanying frustration about exclusion from local government decision making. The following general recommendations are made:

- That a survey be conducted on a regular basis in the Lismore LGA to assess levels of satisfaction in relation to Lismore City Council's ability to consult its residents and its effectiveness in delivering services.
- Being mindful of residents' joint roles as clients and citizens, that Lismore City Council formulate a democracy plan (Williams, 1998) in the same way that it formulates a management plan. This should be done in collaboration with its residents and will build on the current high level of satisfaction with Council's ability to consult. Particular focus should be on those areas that interest residents the most—their local neighbourhoods as well as major developments in the Lismore LGA.
- That Lismore City Council reconsider the establishment of a Residents Feedback Panel (or Quick Response Citizen Panel) given the extremely high level of interest amongst respondents, its suitability as a consultation method for busy residents and the previously-identified usefulness of it by relevant Council staff. This consultation method can be used both as a management tool to determine customer satisfaction as well as an adjunct to planning or decision-making processes.
- That this analysis be circulated to all staff members who currently routinely consult with residents as well as those who might or should consult in the future. This analysis, in particular, should be circulated to staff members responsible for those issues with major levels of resident dissatisfaction—roads, traffic, roundabouts, rates, major developments, items of major expenditure (eg the swimming pool), environmental issues, safety or crime.
- That Lismore City Council take an active role in promoting participatory practices as a precaution against even higher levels of dissatisfaction with local government and in anticipation of the changing nature of local government. Involving residents in decision making and planning will develop skills needed to improve community care. Encouraging involvement in Council activities would also provide a training ground for future elected representatives—an important task to ensure quality candidates in local government elections.
- That Lismore City Council foster the sharing of ideas within its community—many respondents believed they had a responsibility to contribute and many believed they could make an important contribution. There are many tested methods for creating a repository for residents' bright ideas and these methods could be explored by LCC.

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## Appendix 1: Questionnaire

### Question 1

***Did you vote in the last council election?***

Open-ended question, coded as follows:

Yes/No/Don't know/Blank

### Question 2

**Were there any local issues that influenced your vote in the last council election – any issues that influenced you to vote for a particular candidate?**

*Open-ended questions, coded as follows:*

*Candidates qualities/Roads/Flooding/Pool/Other/Nothing Specific*

*Yes/No/Don't know/Blank*

### Question 3

**I don't wish to know who you voted for but I'm interested to know if you can recall who you voted for? So the question is: can you remember who you voted for in the last council election?**

Open-ended question, coded as follows:

Yes/No/Blank

### Question 4

***Which council looks after the area you live in?***

Open-ended question, coded as follows:

Lismore /Other/Blank

### Question 5 (a)

**Do you know the names of any elected representatives\* of your local council? Would you try to name for me as many councillors as you can?**

Open-ended question—see coding\*

### Question 5 (b)

***Can you name the current mayor for the local government area in which you live?***

Open-ended question, coded as follows:

No/Bob Gates/Else/Blank

### Question 6

**I'm interested to know whether you've been involved in council matters at all so I'll ask you a few quick questions on that –**

### Question 6 (a)

**Have you had occasion to contact Council staff in Council offices in the last few years either by letter or phone?**

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Open-ended question, coded as follows:  
Yes/No/Blank

Question 6 (b)

**Have you had occasion to contact a councillor in the last few years or encouraged someone else to do so?**

Open-ended question, coded as follows:  
Yes/No/Blank

Question 6 (c)

**Have you ever attended a Council meeting or a public meeting or a site inspection that was organised by Council?**

Open-ended question, coded as follows:  
Yes/No/Blank

Question 6 (d)

**Have you ever served on a Council committee or attended a planning workshop over the last few years?**

Open-ended question, coded as follows:  
Yes/No/Blank

Question 6 (e)

**If you had a problem which involved council, say with your road or a development nearby, who would you contact to ask for help?**

*Open-ended question; coded as follows:  
Staff/Councillors/Other/Don't know/Blank*

Question 7

**I want to continue to ask you some questions about community consultation, ie about Council asking what residents think about Council decisions or council services –**

Question 7 (a)

**How much would you wish to be involved yourself in making decisions which affected your street?**

*Offered following choices:  
Totally involved/Involved on major issues only/Not involved/Don't know/Blank*

Question 7 (b)

**How much would you wish to be involved yourself in making decisions which affected your neighbourhood?**

*Offered following choices:  
Totally involved/Involved in major issues only/Not involved/Don't know/Blank*

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Question 7 (c)

**How much would you wish to be involved yourself in making decisions which affected the whole local government area?**

*Offered following choices:*

*Totally involved/Involved in major issues only/Not involved/Don't know/Blank*

Question 7 (d)

**How would you rate your local Council in terms of its ability to consult with residents?**

*Offered following choices:*

*Excellent/Very good/Good/Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory/Don't know/Blank*

Question 7 (e)

**Would you like to be consulted more often than you are now?**

*Open-ended question, coded as follows:*

*Yes/No/Don't know/unclear/Blank*

Question 7 (f)

**Are there any particular issues you'd like to be consulted about?**

*Comments noted*

Question 7 (g)

**If you were asked if you'd like to join a residents feedback panel and told that this would require that you respond to an occasional telephone survey like this one or a written questionnaire from time to time, so that you could give feedback to your local Council, would you want to be part of such a panel?**

*Offered following choices:*

*Definitely/Yes, I think so/I'm not sure/Not interested at all/Don't know/Blank*

Question 7 (h)

**Can you tell me why you would/would not?**

*Comments noted*

Question 8

**I want to continue with a few final questions about community involvement –**

Question 8 (a)

**Would you describe yourself as being very active in your local community?**

*Open-ended question, coded as follows:*

*Yes /No/Blank*

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Question 8 (b)

**What sorts of things does someone do who is active in the community, ie someone who you would describe as being active in the community?**

*Comments noted*

Question 9

**What is the name of your State or Federal representative\*\*?**

*Open-ended question, coded as follows:*

*State correct/Federal correct/Both correct/Neither correct/Don't know/Blank*

Question 10

**That's all the questions I have...are there any other comments you'd like to make about these matters that you've not yet had a chance to say?**

*Comments noted*

---

\* Question 5 (a)—correct answers, coded as follows:

Council 1—Bob GATES (Mayor)

Council 2—Ros IRWIN

Council 3—John CROWTHER

Council 4—Ken GALLEN

Council 5—Frank SWIENTEK

Council 6—Diana ROBERTS

Council 7—Merv KING

Council 8—John CHANT

Council 9—David TOMLINSON

Council 10—John HAMPTON

Council 11—Reg BAXTER

Council 12—Brian SUFFOLK

Council 13—Other

Council 14—None

\* Question 9—correct answers, coded as follows:

State—Thomas George

Federal—Ian Causley

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## Appendix 2: What is a Residents Feedback Panel?

### What is a Residents Feedback Panel?

A Residents Feedback Panel, as the name suggests, is a panel of residents that is created in order to give feedback to a local government authority<sup>1</sup> about the services it provides. The term<sup>2</sup>, panel, may be misleading because it suggests that a group comes together--this is not the case. It is not a committee and members may never meet. It is a pool of thoughtful, willing citizens<sup>3</sup> who can be used according to a council's needs and to the extent that these citizens remain willing to be involved. Most often this pool of participants--or panellists--will make themselves available to council staff to answer written questionnaires or respond to short telephone surveys. On occasions panellists can be called upon to participate in a focus group or a planning workshop. Panellists can be involved in providing feedback about existing services, about proposed developments or can contribute ideas to help a council provide better services. The agenda is set by the council itself.

### Isn't this what councillors were elected to do?

Councillors are elected to make decisions. Constituents expect that these decisions will consider their interests. In New South Wales this expectation is translated into a legislative requirement to consult (eg, Local Government Act [1993]; Environmental Planning and Assessment Act [1979]). Most councils are already consulting with their residents and will be required to continue to do this. However, councillors are responsible for making final decisions and this remains unchanged with an RFP. A Residents Feedback Panel is a cost-effective, productive method of consultation that has been used overseas and in Australia--a method that complements the roles of elected representatives and council staff--a method that allows a council to draw on a wider cross-section of its community.

### Will this mean *more* consultation?

No, an RFP is a *different* way of consulting--a different way of doing what is already being done. It will not lead to more consultation. This method is a speedier way of finding out what residents think. It should save time. It should result in better-informed participants and therefore less dissatisfaction resulting from ignorance. Overseas evaluations have demonstrated that the image of a council improves following the establishment and implementation of an RFP.

### How does it work?

Panellists most often receive about five questionnaires a year, depending upon a council's needs. They are offered a freepost envelope to return the completed questionnaire. Occasionally panellists are called on to do a short telephone survey or to be part of a discussion (focus) group should the need arise. Panellists are under no obligation to participate but experience has shown that enthusiasm remains at a high level. This continued interest can be encouraged by providing panellists with regular information regarding the findings of surveys as well as letting them know how their feedback is being used. Information is gathered in an anonymous form and panellists' details are never disclosed to a third party. The database is held by the council and access is limited to essential staff only.

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<sup>1</sup> A Residents Feedback Panel can be convened by any authority, of course, and at any level of government. The information provided here was prepared specifically to assist local government in Australia. There are some excellent examples of panels being used by national government or quasi-government organisations.

<sup>2</sup> Residents Feedback Panels are also known as citizen panels, people's panels, community feedback panel, quick response panels or are sometimes known by a general project description eg, (Brisbane's) Your City, Your Say; Kirklees Talkback; Talk About York.

<sup>3</sup> Citizens are ratepayers and non-ratepayers alike, since all contribute to a town's wellbeing--and, of course, non-ratepayers are voters who indirectly pay rates via their rental payments.

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In areas with many people from non-English speaking backgrounds it is possible to identify in the initial stage those panellists who require questionnaires in their first language. It is also possible to identify those that require a particular format eg, large print.

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### **When would a council use a Residents Feedback Panel?**

- The recycling service is not being used and a council wants to know why. Ask the RFP.
- Access and mobility for seniors has been identified as a problem. Conduct a phone survey with the older panellists to work out how best to address the problem.
- Need to evaluate road safety projects to qualify for state government funding? Use the RFP to conduct a general survey or narrow down the group to those drivers at-risk.
- Completing a plan of management for the local park? Consult the panellists who live nearby and invite them to participate in a discussion group with the relevant staff.
- A rural village needs to resolve its sewerage treatment problems. Have an ongoing conversation in the form of a working party with local residents who are randomly selected from the panel.

And, of course, every time that a council hires an outside consultant to conduct a community consultation, it can complete the task in-house, more economically, by calling on the RFP.

### **How are panellists selected?**

There are various ways this has been done. The three most common methods are:

#### *Option A*

Residents can be sent an invitation to join the panel via a mail out, eg, rate notice. This can be supplemented with a letterbox drop, newspaper insert, publicity etc. All who return a completed form can be accepted. This is the method used by Brisbane City Council.

#### *Option B*

Residents can be sent an invitation to join the panel via a mail out, eg, rate notice. This can be supplemented with a letterbox drop, newspaper insert, publicity etc. Residents are told that their names will go into a lottery and a specific number will be drawn. This adds an element of randomness. Those who are not selected are placed on a reserve list, to replace those who might drop out. The panel is regularly rotated (say, every two years). This is the method used by Kirklees Council in the United Kingdom.

#### *Option C*

Residents are randomly selected from an existing database, eg an electoral roll (in the UK it is a postal register kept by the postal service). These residents are invited to participate. The panel is regularly rotated. This is the method used by the UK Government.

It is also possible to offer further incentives to join a Panel, eg entering respondents in a small cash prize draw (Kirklees, for example, offers one hundred pounds to the winner).

### **What details are collected about panellists?**

The extent of the initial collection of socio-demographic data varies from one commissioning organisation to another. The information should not be gratuitously gathered. It should relate to a council's needs. For example, with Lismore City Council a workshop was conducted with council staff members prior to the preparation of the questionnaire. One Road Safety Officer had a particular need to know if panellists held a current driver's licence and this, linked with age, would enable her to identify high-risk groups. A council might want to identify those residents with a particular interest in sports or the arts. It may also be relevant to know if panellists own a business and so on.

At a minimum, the initial survey provides an opportunity to seek details such as name, address, sex, age, and occupation. At this early stage, it is useful to find out if there are any factors which might preclude future participation in discussion groups or workshops, eg, child care needs, transport difficulties, physical disabilities.

Some councils ask for very little information in the first round; this was the case with Brisbane City Council. The logic of this approach is that panellists are not put off by a lengthy, probing questionnaire. It is

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important to establish trust between the council and residents, particularly when trust is in short supply. Using this staged approach, additional data can be collected at a later date. The gathering of detailed data will be important if an occasion arises when a stratified sample is needed (see below).

#### **If people self-nominate, how will the panel be representative?**

A Residents Feedback Panel attracts a wider cross section of the community than would normally be attracted to the most common methods of consultation, eg, committees or public meetings. This allows councils to hear the views of a larger, more diverse group of residents. On occasions when the views of a cross section of the community need to be known, councils can draw upon a stratified sample from the Panel. For example, a smaller group can be drawn from the larger pool of panellists. This smaller group can be randomly selected to match the community's profile so that, for example, an appropriate proportion of male/female, urban/rural, young/old can be consulted.

It is not always necessary to have a representative or stratified sample, of course. Sometimes a council will be trying to extract information--not necessarily wanting to know what the entire community thinks--eg, why isn't the recycling service being used, how might a local park be improved. These sorts of questions are gathering ideas or eliciting general information. The entire pool of panellists can be consulted for this purpose.

#### **How will marginalised groups be included?**

In the same way as a stratified sample can be drawn (see above), the data collected allows for marginalised groups to be separated from the larger pool. For example, if a council wants to consult with youth it can do so. Consulting with only farmers, or drivers, or users of cultural services etc. becomes easy. However, some marginalised groups will not be attracted to this method of consultation. For example, indigenous Australians will probably require consultation that is more suited to their cultural needs. Young people may be transient as panellists so might also need supplementary consultation.

#### **How to publicise?**

Councils can call on the media to promote a 'good news' story such as the establishment of an RFP. Councillors can use their presence at public gatherings to encourage people to join. The existence of an RFP can be included in rate notices or other council material. Information about the RFP can be part of the recorded on-hold message that residents hear when contacting council. And council newsletters can provide on-going information about the results of any surveys or discussion groups.

#### **What issues doesn't it suit?**

It cannot be used in every situation but should be suitable for most situations that require community consultation. Sometimes a committee is the most suitable forum, particularly when specific expertise is required. One example might be an economic development forum or establishing a new waste management system. Management of a community facility such as a day care or a sporting facility might require an ongoing committee. An RFP is extremely useful for collecting information, canvassing residents for ideas, and evaluating a council's existing services.

#### **How does it function within an organisation?**

There would usually be one staff member responsible for maintaining the database. This is not an onerous task once the RFP is established. The responsible person would usually be located in the information technology section. Ideally a council would also have a person who is familiar with survey design, implementation and analysis. This person can assist colleagues to determine whether or not the RFP should be used to solve their consultation problem and can also help to design and analyse the survey. Again, this would be a person who is already employed in a similar capacity, eg public relations or communication. Some professional development in research methodology would be easy to provide and could be extremely useful. The responsible staff member is then able to share this knowledge with colleagues.

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### Appendix 3: Question 7 (f) Comments

Question 7 (f)

**I want to continue to ask you some questions about community consultation, ie about Council asking what residents think about Council decisions or council services –  
Are there any particular issues you'd like to be consulted about?**

#### Comments:

- "Newsletters – not too bad – we often get Council newsletters." (001)
- "The baths." (003)
- "Yes, major things, the pool." (005)
- "Any main development changes to our services (and) changes to environmental policy." (006)
- "What affects my local neighbourhood - facilities in town. Interested in Wilson River project." (007)
- "If they decide they want to spend a lot of money after they have been elected they should ask residents." (008)
- "Placement of roads, crossings and roundabouts." (009)
- "Major community issues – pool taken away from the people and the ongoing issues concerning roads." (010)
- "Safety of the people where they live – we had to sign a petition to get security guards – that's Government isn't it?" (012)
- "Roads, how will residents have access?" (014)
- "Pool, recycling, roads." (015)
- "Health, roads, sewerage, Council rates." (018)
- "Roads." (019)
- "No, but when consulted, I'd like the Council to do something with the input." (020)
- "The development across the road is an ongoing issue." (021)
- "Street lighting, street violence, break-ins." (022)
- "Priorities wrong – too many roundabouts and bad roads." (023)
- "No – local media let people know what's going on. We can choose to take action if we want." (024)
- "Expenditure – rates and money." (025)
- "Roads in my area. Development of city as a whole. How Council promotes and improves Lismore as a city." (026)
- "Criminal issues." (027)
- "Pleased Council changed decision on swimming pool – any big developments." (028)
- "What plans are being made for teenagers?" (029)
- "Big developments, eg swimming pool." (032)
- "Generally what ever big decisions (are being made)." (033)
- "Planning for future development." (034)
- "Road issues." (035)
- "Where and how funds are spent – which developments (re-lease of land, change of zoning)." (036)
- "Community/cultural issues. Youth programs." (037)
- "Waste of money on roundabouts." (039)
- "Waste issues and roads." (040)
- "Anything (involving) my locality." (041)
- "Roads, waste disposal in outer rural area." (042)
- "Community issue, major developments and parks and gardens." (044)
- "Roads in local area." (045)
- "Future development." (046)

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"Overpass and swimming pool." (047)  
 "The Property Search Council should advise of a major road through property – they didn't." (051)  
 "Roads and flooding. Anything to do with the kids school." (052)  
 "Roads more of a priority (too much money spent on other things)." (055)  
 "Green issues." (058)  
 "Levy, major developments in rural areas, cutting down lots of trees." (059)  
 "Only the swimming pool." (060)  
 "Flood levy, getting water away from flooding areas." (061)  
 "General spending." (062)  
 "Council dumped a truck load of soil on my front lawn a few years ago, eventually built a footpath, and since then the grass has grown very high and isn't looked after." (065)  
 "Not consulted, maybe they need more money – especially for roads and resealing all of them." (066)  
 "Maybe about expenditure (eg stop wasting money on glossy handouts)." (067)  
 "Road works." (068)  
 "Roads." (069)  
 "Spending on things not necessary, eg roundabouts." (070)  
 "Community development." (071)  
 "Anything that affects me or the town." (072)  
 "Goonellabah services – eg shopping centre." (073)  
 "Growing genetically modified crops, clearing of forests, use of chemicals." (074)  
 "Streets, street kids, crime prevention, drugs." (075)  
 "Wasting money on roundabouts not spending on quality of roads." (076)  
 "The swimming pool and the flood level issue." (081)  
 "Maintenance of roads and rates." (082)  
 "Would like to be consulted if things are going to be changed eg environment, radio towers." (083)  
 "Roads and roundabouts." (085)  
 "All issues." (087)  
 "Flood mitigation and other major issues." (088)  
 "Roads mainly." (089)  
 "Sports development. Magellan St has been blocked by residents. Money for basketball arena. Roads funding." (093)  
 "Roads – planning." (095)  
 "Full spectrum of issues in front of Council." (097)  
 "Development in CBD." (098)  
 "People not getting permission to add to/alter property." (099)  
 "Not at present – maybe on swimming pool and airport." (100)  
 "Septic tank installation, roads and crime." (101)  
 "Likes to know what's happening – covered in press fairly well." (102)  
 "Need to know what is being done in the town – CBD." (103)  
 "Roads." (105)  
 "Youth programs and roads." (106)  
 "Neighbourhood." (107)  
 "Roads." (109)  
 "Roads." (110)  
 "Toxic waste – waste disposal. Capacity to generate ideas to raise revenue to account for deficits. (111)  
 "Police, kids on the streets. Major changes to roadways and the environment, major developments." (112)  
 "Environmental" (113)  
 "Traffic in local streets (semi-trailers)" (115)  
 "Planning and maintenance on roads." (116)  
 "Rates and roads." (117)  
 "Flood levee, airport, unemployment, ugliness of this city. People don't have loads of time and need concise consultation." (118)  
 "Roads – I disagree with roundabouts and the priority of work. The council doesn't take a lot of notice." (119)

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“Not at the moment – only if issues emerged.” (120)

“Yes – swimming pool.” (121)

“Just issues as they come up.” (122)

“Roads (are) always an issue. Libraries – closing down to fund roads. (I) would like to know what’s happening.” (124)

“Yes – baths, any changes to street or zoning and major works (eg new chambers).” (126)

“Neighbourhood – dwellings.” (127)

“Probably – we have been working with Council on a project in our area.” (128)

“Yes – roads.” (130)

“No they have put out pamphlets.” (131)

“Crime happening around here.” (132)

“Environmental issues.” (133)

“Yes – not really anything specific.” (134)

“Well probably. We have a new sort of waste collection at the moment and they have a better system. Sporting facilities we are interested in. Roads and streets and footpaths.” (135)

“Yes – one of the things I and a voluntary organisation...” [comment illegible] (136)

“I’d like to be consulted about footpaths. I don’t like driving in the car at night.” (137)

“Yes – levy, banks & North Lismore county roads” (140)

“Regarding recreational amenities, spending of money on new premises – should take more notice of old people where they spend on major developments.” (141)

“Waste disposal.” (142)

“No, just major issues.” (143)

“One of the gripes in some of the things they do is closing streets one way without thought for the neighbourhood.” (144)

“Not at my age. They do what they like to do and that’s it.” (145)

“Crime in our area and roads.” (146)

“Special road work and footpaths, environmental issues.” (147)

“No, only general issues concerning welfare of people.” (148)

“Roads, insurance and litigation are raised by Council. Residents should do something for themselves.” (149)

“Everything – all important, all little things make up big things.” (155)

“Major issues only.” (159)

“New main road.” (163)

“Yes – road maintenance, sporting fields – managers should do the job or don’t have them; don’t pay consultants.” (164)

“Road works.” (166)

“Shopping centres, more parks and cycle ways.” (167)

“Yes, main CBD, eg planning roundabouts.” (168)

“Issues that directly affect us, eg garbage – putting out two bins instead – once a fortnight is not enough; policy on change over of gas – fix up work Council had done” (170)

“Environmental development – problems come up.” (171)

“pay rises, traffic conditions around the school.” (172)

“I think we could do with a different engineer – needs someone with more get up and go.”

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## Appendix 4: Question 7 (h) Comments

Following on from Question 7 (g):

**If you were asked if you'd like to join a residents feedback panel and told that this would require that you respond to an occasional telephone survey like this one or a written questionnaire from time to time, so that you could give feedback to your local Council, would you want to be part of such a panel?**

Question 7 (h):

**Can you tell me why you would/would not?**

### Comments:

#### Why you would...

- "(Because) then if something happens and you have a say you can have a part of it." (001 - would)
- "I think as a ratepayer with lots of experience, Council needs that consultation." (003 - would)
- I don't think residents get enough feedback from Council; (they're) not involved with us." (004 - would)
- "To become a bit more involved in some of our local issues." (005 - would)
- "So I have some control over what happens to me in our daily life - we had a road consultation - they do what they want anyway. I don't have any trust at all." (006 - would)
- "Then I know what is going on and can participate in information. I felt it is important to participate in local government issues." (007 - would)
- "So you can have opportunity to express your point of view and let them know whether they should go ahead or not." (008 - would)
- "I'd feel I have some input into where I'm living." (009 - would)
- "I think it is really important changing waste management and a wide range of community views, not just people who have time and energy to be involved." (010 - would)
- "(I'd) like to know what is going on in my city and where the tax payers' money is going and all the safe places and who looks after the environment." (012 - would)
- "At least (I'd) have my say." (014 - probably would)
- "Good to have your say when you can." (016 - would)
- "Because (you) need to get involved and have your say." (018 - would)
- "Would be of great value." (020 - would)
- "No objections if Council wants feedback as long as it doesn't take too long." (024 - would)
- "Because of family constraints (I) can't do a lot but a survey would help get message out and information back." (026 - would)
- "Some decisions made are stupid and (I) would like input." (029 - would)
- "If it meant better services (and) reduction in rates." (030 - would)
- "Feel I am taking part in decision making." (033 - would)
- "Community is important and (I) need to give my input." (034 - would)
- "(I'd) like to know what's going on and have my say on relevant issues." (035 - would)
- "To have more input and to give Council (an) idea of what people think." (036 - would)
- "Being involved may bring changes - can't attend meetings but would give input." (037 - would)
- "To give some input and keep a finger on the pulse." (038 - would)
- "Everyone should be involved in all levels of government to give any input." (039 - would)
- "We voted Councillors and I pay rates so I need to voice my opinions and have it listened to." (041 - would)
- "(I) feel strongly - ratepayers are not getting anything for (their) money." (042 - would)
- "To give my opinion - Council needs feedback." (043 - would)
- "To put something back into community - can't rely on bureaucrats!" (044 - would)
- "To give a broader base of community to Council." (046 - would)
- "Need to have an interest and give ideas to Council." (047 - would)

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“To have a say and hopefully change things.” (048 – would)  
 “Want to be a part of a community – that’s why I moved to Lismore.” (050 – would)  
 “I don’t believe they do enough for community – they feather their own pockets.” (051 – would)  
 “No use whingeing if you don’t take the opportunity to have a say.” (052 – would)  
 “Important.” (058 – would)  
 “(To) keep up with what they’re doing.” (059 – would)  
 “Encourage people to take more of an interest instead of just whingeing.” (060 - would)  
 “Helps for people to be aware of what’s going on.” (063 – would)  
 “Some changes that need to happen, Council needs to be aware.” (066 – would)  
 “Take the opportunity to give the Council feedback.” (067 – would)  
 “Because I’m the average citizen and I pay taxes.” (068 – would)  
 “Good to know what’s going on. It’s our responsibility to know what rate money goes to, but sometimes it’s like hitting your head against a brick wall.” (069 – would)  
 “No good complaining if not prepared to get involved.” (070 – would)  
 “Communication between Council and community – I’d be happy to represent (the community).” (071 – would)  
 “(To) know what’s going on.” (075 – would)  
 “So rate payers have a say – not just councillors.” (076 – would)  
 “Depending on how much time.” (077 – would)  
 “Always want to speak your mind.” (078 – would)  
 “Very important for people to be involved – personal interest.” (079 – would)  
 “Have your say.” (080 – would)  
 “Important for people to understand it takes all to contribute – good to get a range of ideas heard.” (081 - would)  
 “To keep finger in pie” (082 – would)  
 “I could be involved from home.” (083 – would)  
 “To give a voice.” (084 - would)  
 “To get things done in town rather than Council doing what they want.” (085 – would)  
 “To be more informed and be involved.” (087 – would)  
 “To give some input to Council as I am too busy to get too involved.” (089 – would)  
 “To have a say and advise Council.” (090 – would)  
 “To see what they’re up to.” (091 – would)  
 “To help Council – to put in my 2 bobs worth.” (092 - would)  
 “Voice my opinions and have them heard.” (093 - would)  
 “To have a say in matters and to give Council my opinion.” (095 – would)  
 “Important to give feedback to Council – ideas to improve things.” (096 - would)  
 “If a positive exercise – I want to be a responsible objective person.” (097 – would)  
 “I would feel I had a say – give my views on some issues.” (098 – would)  
 “If I thought strongly on it I’d like to provide feedback.” (100 – would)  
 “To be involved in decision making.” (101 – would)  
 “To be informed and to give feedback to Council and let them know if they are not communicating—so man in street understands policy (102—would)  
 “To let Council know my feelings.” (104 – would)  
 “To let Council know my opinions.” (106 – would)  
 “As a ratepayer – interest in area itself.” (108 – would)  
 “So I’d be able to have input.” (109 – would)  
 “(I am) now retired and I feel things can be improved and there is a need to advise Council.” (110 – would)  
 “Need to give Council ideas of the community – in co-operative goal setting environment.” (111 – would)  
 “To have an opportunity to give my views without too much time.” (112 – would)  
 “Council needs feedback – a questionnaire is a good way to do so.” (113 – would)  
 “I’m a resident and care for what happens.” (115 – would)  
 “Needs to be more personal involvement by residents – to let Council know what we want done.” (116 – would)  
 “I believe Lismore needs positive input – morale is low. Council needs advice.” (118 – would)

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“To let Council know my views and problems.” (119 – would)  
 “Like to have finger in the pie but couldn’t be bothered ‘belonging’ to them all/being really involved.” (120 – would)  
 “We get the government we deserve.” (121 – would)  
 “Wrong decisions made often – more residents having their say might help.” (122 – would)  
 “Local government can become too autocratic. It’s to our benefit to have some input.” (124 – would)  
 “Think it’s up to all of us to take an interest; Australians need to be involved.” (125 – would)  
 “Because it’s my duty as a citizen. While they represent groups they don’t know what the majority of the people want.” (126 – would)  
 “Being a ratepayer and issues concerning the neighbourhood.” (128 – would)  
 “To have input into what’s occurring in the neighbourhood.” (130 – would)  
 “To have an opportunity to provide feedback but if I’m not being consulted in the first place then why?” (133 – would)  
 “I do Land Use Planning at Uni and have a fair bit to do with planning.” (134 – would)  
 “Don’t drive a car – old, don’t want to get too involved having to attend meetings.” (135 – would)  
 “The feedback would be to get some sort of message back to the Council.” (136 – would)  
 “(Would) like to know what’s going on – this Council they do what they like.” (137 – would)  
 “If I knew it was going to be of any use yes I would.” (138 – would)  
 “I’d just like to have my opinion.” (140 – would)  
 “I think if I want a change or I’m not happy I have to be prepared to solve the problem.” (141 – would)  
 “I am a long-term resident and I’d like to see the local area progress.” (143 – would)  
 “Because I feel a lot of councillors are out of touch and don’t really know.” (144 – would)  
 “It concerns where I live and the situation I would be involved in.” (146 – would)  
 “I feel the issues would be relevant to the progress and service the Council owes to its people.” (148 – would)  
 “I believe it is important for us to know what is going on and good for them to get feedback from residents.” (150 – would)  
 “To keep in touch with what is going on you would then know before it is made public.” (151 – would)  
 “So it would help improve things.” (152 – would)  
 “We don’t go out of our mile to do something – but if asked I think it would be great.” (153 – would)  
 “Keep up with what is going on.” (154 – would)  
 “You can sit back and say nothing but you can let people walk all over you – when you are paying rates you are entitled to have your say, step outside the conventional way to get things done.” (155 – would)  
 “Some time to feel that I am part of this community on major issues.” (157 – would)  
 “Just so Council could get feelings of community members.” (159 – would)  
 “Nice to know what’s going on in your local area and help out.” (161 – would)  
 “Who wouldn’t want to be?” (163 – would)  
 “I’ve been on a few sub-committees over the years so I have more time to put work in.” (164 – would)  
 “I think everyone likes to know if they are doing a good job – let them know if they are doing a good job or not.” (165 – would)  
 “Care enough that I would put my opinion forward about the way the city is going.” (167 – would)  
 “I think that residents and ratepayers should have their say not leave it to 12 councillors.” (168 – would)  
 “Gives you a chance to get things done how you would like them to be.” (169 – would)  
 “This is where we live and decisions they make affect us eg Coleman’s Bridge.” (170 – would)

### **Why you would not...**

“Too lazy.” (011 – would not)  
 “Busy.” (015 – would not)  
 “Busy; seems to be going alright without me.” (017 – would not)  
 “No time.” (019 – would not)  
 “Because no notice is taken of what you say anyway.” (Was on a ‘workshop’ once and nothing was done about suggestions.) (021 – would not)

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"Don't want to be (involved)." (022 – would not)  
 "Too old!" (023 – probably not)  
 "No time." (025 – would not.)  
 "Because it wouldn't make any difference." (027 – would not)  
 "I elect 12 people and expect them to do their job." (031 – would not)  
 "Feel I am getting to old now." (032 – would not)  
 "Haven't the time." (045 – would not)  
 "Very involved with Bowling Club." (053 – would not)  
 "Mainly because of retirement – leisure interests." (054 – would not)  
 "Too busy – prefer others who have more time to get involved." (055 – would not.)  
 "Lots of people get involved to get up hierarchy, I'm happier to sit in background." (057 – would not)  
 "Don't like committees." (064 – would not)  
 "No time, too old, not interested." (065 – would not)  
 "Time." (073 – would not)  
 "Aged and past committee business – would like a quiet life." (086 – would not)  
 "Wouldn't feel up to the task." (088 – would not)  
 "Too many clowns get involved." (094 – would not)  
 "Too elderly." (099 – would not)  
 "Not able to be involved. Feel they don't take notice." (103 – would not)  
 "A lot of other activities." (114 – would not)  
 "They only do what they please." (117 – would not)  
 "Too much bugging around." (129 – would not)  
 "Waste of time– they have their minds made up before they start." (131 – would not)  
 "88 years old, sore knee, hearing problems, no good education for public life, in and out of hospital." (139 – would not)  
 "Too old to catch a bus – can hardly walk." (145 – would not)  
 "Don't know. Frightened they might find out who it is – too many things in the roundabouts." (156 – would not)  
 "We had a survey about the bus service and I was glad to participate in that." (160 – unsure)  
 "Basically it is not so much a matter of being apathetic--basically I am content about the way the world runs – my realm of influence is limited to individuality – interested from a distance." (162 – would not)  
 "In my case I am retired – if I had my days earlier I would be, would like a bit of time, would like to see younger ones make decisions." (166 – would not)  
 "Too old." (172 – would not)

### **Not sure...**

"Just depends on issues that are involved – whether any media is involved." (013 – not sure)  
 "(I have) no strong feelings - I'm only renting a property." (028 – not sure)  
 "Would like the information but not to be part of a panel." (056 – not sure)  
 "Would like to be, but have work and study commitments." (072 – unsure)  
 "Depends on what they'd do with the feedback." (074 – unsure)  
 "Home and work commitments." (107 – unsure)  
 "Don't know enough to contribute." (123 – unsure)  
 "Difficult at the moment because of commitments (baby work)." (127 – unsure)  
 "Usually I go to Uni – would be too busy – it would be a good idea (though)." (132 – unsure)  
 "Dig in where there are committees – have to get new faces." (149 – unsure)  
 "I tend not to answer questionnaires – depend on the frequency of responses – the subject matter and the aim of it." (171 – unsure)

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### **Consultation in the Lismore Local Government Area**

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## Appendix 5: Questions 8 (b) Comments

Follows Question 8 (a):

**I want to continue with a few final questions about community involvement –  
Would you describe yourself as being very active in your local community?**

Question 8 (b):

**What sorts of things does someone do who is active in the community, ie someone who you would describe as being active in the community?**

### Comments:

- “Help out with Aged Voluntary Garden.” (001)  
“People who do fund raising – they do a good job.” (002)  
“Attending to a lot of volunteer organisations which are mostly not part of Council. Basically a lot of them are unsung heroes.” (003)  
“Goes to local Council meetings has an input into local Council and organises things.” (004)  
“Attend meetings, go on committees etc.” (005)  
“Read the paper, writing letters to the editor, talking to local councillors.” (006)  
“Go to Council meetings, keep an eye on notice boards, pass information about Council on to other local groups – public speaking time before Council starts – being there for that.” (007)  
“They would be involved in putting forward complaints and perhaps form action groups, call meetings, form lobby groups.” (008)  
“Go to Council meetings – write letters to newspaper, phone the media and complain bitterly.” (009)  
“Attend more Council meetings, keep more in tune and up to date with the issues – pretty visual high profile.” (010)  
“Keep up with what’s going on – operate in all the community groups.” (011)  
“Making sure waterways are clean and not polluted, looking after the environment and roads. Ensuring no building is damaged, signs and cameras for protection and security. Reconciliation – part Maori and Aboriginal relatives.” (012)  
“In local clubs like Rotary Lions, Disabled Services Club, voluntary work.” (013)  
“Someone who goes to Council meetings and tries to change things.” (014)  
“Community groups, read the Northern Star.” (015)  
“Runs for Council and fights for issues.” (016)  
“Business men are active – putting time into community.” (017)  
“Getting recognition for speaking out about disadvantaged groups, and promoted change.” (018)  
“Participates in panels etc.” (019)  
“Write lots of letters, go to a lot of meetings, constantly at Council office.” (020)  
“Some are busy bodies. Don’t know what else.” (021)  
“Go to meetings, community meetings, senior citizens.” (022)  
“Don’t like the mayor – he’s not active. Community buses are good. St Vincent’s Hospital is good at picking up people.” (023)  
“2 ways; 1) great sense of community belief, 2) someone who likes to stick their nose in other people’s business.” (024)  
“On a lot of committees.” (025)  
“Involved in pre-schools, community events, markets, involvement with businesses.” (026)  
“Church activities, service organisations & community organisations.” (027)  
“Involved in local issues – Meals on Wheels /Hospital – any voluntary.” (028)  
“Volunteering in various interest areas (palliative, aged care).” (029)  
“On community committees.” (031)  
“Helping charities – Red Cross, Meals on Wheels, Breast Cancer support.” (032)

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"Committees in local area – attend functions – be seen and heard." (033)  
 "Precinct community, Landcare, pre-schools and schools." (034)  
 "Involved in Council issues – keep up to date with what's on." (035)  
 "Involved in community organisations and events eg 'Beef Week', Business Awards, shopping in the Lismore area." (036)  
 "Aboriginal people, deaf/disabled/aged, Home Care." (037)  
 "Chair progress associations, raise money for charities." (038)  
 "Being on committees. Put their own views and do things majority want." (039)  
 "Volunteering in various areas. Attend Council meetings." (040)  
 "Write letters to Council, surveys, consult with neighbours – network, pass on to relevant people." (041)  
 "Work on Fire Brigade, school canteens, Roads movement." (042)  
 "Business Enterprise Group, beautification of city, aged services, disabled organisations." (043)  
 "Service organisations, interest in Council matters." (044)  
 "Getting parks organised by getting on committees." (047)  
 "Attend Council, representative on committees." (048)  
 "On committees and boards." (050)  
 "Someone who gets involved in everything eg sporting bodies." (051)  
 "Becoming aware of local issues and having a say in them, involved in rallies." (052)  
 "Caring, like to look after the area." (053)  
 "Community committees." (054)  
 "Involved in sport, groups, young people who have more time." (055)  
 "Fights for better standards on issues they are concerned about eg children's crossing." (056)  
 "Like the current Mayor, he is very involved in local issues; more so than any previous." (057)  
 "Someone on Council/Chamber of Commerce, business figure, politician." (058)  
 "Someone who you'd call a 'pain in the bum' but you know they are passionate about it. Have interest of area at heart." (059)  
 "Attend Council meetings, join committees." (060)  
 "Look after the kids." (061)  
 "Responsible." (062)  
 "Volunteer work, Meals on Wheels, aged care homes etc." (063)  
 "Write letters to the paper, goes to meetings, involved in charities." (064)  
 "An old community around here, no one gets very involved." (065)  
 "Attend Council meeting, lobby." (066)  
 "Involved in local groups eg Church, fundraising, goes to meetings." (067)  
 "Follow things up with the Council." (068)  
 "Contact with school eg P&C, local services." (069)  
 "Community: working for 'Friends of St. Vincent's', Greenies who do planting along the riverfront, PCYC, help pensioner groups, Meals on Wheels." (070)  
 "Teach and work at neighbourhood centre." (071)  
 "Issues around town, Council meetings, go to protests, write letters to editor, committees, Rotary groups." (072)  
 "Goes to committee meetings." (073)  
 "Participate in local Council, or take steps to initiate local Council action, lobby local Council." (074)  
 "Council meetings." (075)  
 "Appear in local paper, protest, lobby councillors." (076)  
 "Personally: local community radio station, teach dancing locally." (077)  
 "Admirable, respectable, need time and effort." (079)  
 "Attend meetings, telephone calls, talk to others about ideas and write letters." (081)  
 "Being in everything that's on. Council, sporting, clubs." (082)  
 "Involved with street kids and issues against crime." (083)  
 "Youth activities, listening and being informed through papers." (084)  
 "Hospitals, Church volunteering." (086)  
 "Neighbourhood Watch, environmental committees, taking part in various service organisations and volunteering." (087)

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"Sporting activities, gathering petitions." (088)  
 "Neighbourhood Watch, leaflet dropping." (089)  
 "Letters to papers, petitions, go to Council." (090)  
 "Volunteer firemen/helicopter, cleaning up streets." (091)  
 "Volunteering and protesting." (093)  
 "Dedicated in what they do." (094)  
 "Voluntary work, op-shops, old people – housebound, service clubs." (095)  
 "Letters to paper, rallying, conducting surveys, Council meetings." (096)  
 "Service clubs, Meals on Wheels, mental health workers, on Council, volunteering for charity." (097)  
 "Community groups, youth, aged care, town planning, sporting." (098)  
 "Help with senior citizens, be on Council, voluntary work." (099)  
 "Petition on issues and letters to paper." (100)  
 "Sit on committees and advisory panels." (101)  
 "Fund raising, letters to editor, attend Council meetings, join committees." (102)  
 "Community work – volunteering." (103)  
 "Give feedback to Council meetings." (104)  
 "Councillor – never in a local action group." (105)  
 "Part of Council, volunteer hours for various services, Clean up Australia." (106)  
 "Meal on Wheels, Church activities, Nursing Mothers, service clubs." (107)  
 "In different organisations." (108)  
 "People involved in service organisations, Reserve Helicopters, RSL/Workers clubs." (110)  
 "Attend public meetings, read information from Council regarding developments, watch TV news services." (111)  
 "Belong to progress associations and other organisations, Landcare, environmental/service organisations, go to occasional Council meetings, write letters to papers, participate in community based organisations eg Neighbourhood Watch." (112)  
 "Participation in community events." (113)  
 "Volunteer work eg Red Cross, Home Care, Church." (116)  
 "Participate in rallies, letters of complaint." (117)  
 "Be in cultural events, service clubs, organising youth." (118)  
 "Someone trying to help in welfare, elderly, Home Care, volunteering." (119)  
 "They join local environment groups, committees for roads etc." (120)  
 "Chamber of Commerce, HWNS – Alstonville, town affairs, businesses, video cameras in CBD." (121)  
 "Doing volunteer work eg Meals on Wheels, being involved with the community." (124)  
 "Someone who has strong ideas they want to get across, volunteers – up to all of us to do a bit. There are good things to get involved with in the community." (125)  
 "Do charitable works, attend Church, public meetings." (126)  
 "Making yourself known. Doing things for community – especially young people eg sports." (127)  
 "Be a member of a service club activity, involved in projects, sporting activities." (128)  
 "Attends workshops for Council, Red Cross and Meals on Wheels." (130)  
 "Go to all the committee meetings – doing it for their own betterment." (131)  
 "Attend local meetings at Workers Club, discuss road matters, crime, fees for services, collection of bins." (132)  
 "Active member of Landcare groups, active in schools, also in local environmental centre, a member of community based projects – not limited to its Council." (133)  
 "Get involved in Clean up Australia Day that the community as a whole might be receiving." (134)  
 "A friend who visits hospital, works for Church, challenge foundation, does anything asked." (135)  
 "Those who specialise in the field are very active eg wildlife carers." (136)  
 "Two or three have been active on the grandstand." (137)  
 "They attend meetings." (138)  
 "Take part in community activities, aged care or children outside their own home, belong to Rotary or something like that." (141)  
 "Play sports, in business, social life, have work." (142)  
 "Join service clubs, join charity work, keep an eye on local issues - Federal and State politics." (143)

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“Do volunteer work, listen to people, find out what they want, try to liaise (144)  
“Not interested – doesn’t worry me.” (145)  
“Go to a lot of committee meetings.” (146)  
“Belong to Landcare or local community care.” (147)  
“Not many I can mention, disgusted with Council more – interested in themselves.” (148)  
“More involved in local government and local activities – I stick to myself.” (149)  
“Don’t know – public rallies, protests go to Council meetings.” (150)  
“Helping in voluntary way, fund raisers, life line helicopter, St. Vincent de Paul.” (151)  
“Someone who doesn’t work, retired, who doesn’t have much else on in their life.” (152)  
“Involved with a lot of local committees – someone who is involved with access for disabled.” (153)  
“We have a committee that keeps it tidy – they do it on a voluntary basis.” (154)  
“A lot better than me – they attend meetings, have got knowledge of local areas, don’t do things for money or praise – do things for the community. They are assertive and go to meetings.” (155)  
“Probably take an interest in daily ongoing interests in the community.” (157)  
“I’m treasurer of community development association, secretary of local community club – attend local forums.” (159)  
“People that get involved with visiting old peoples’ homes, try and help disadvantaged, fund raising ventures.” (160)  
“Volunteer work definitely.” (161)  
“They organise and go to meetings of the community on as wide a range as possible.” (162)  
“Probably they try and get on local Council.” (163)  
“On committees, organise sporting bodies for children, Meals on Wheels, Red Cross, Australia Day celebrations.” (164)  
“Member of sporting clubs, a lot more social than I am – do more community things.” (165)  
“Attending a lot of functions, opening of things, quite a lot of things to be involved in.” (166)  
“Go to meetings and be involved like that.” (167)  
“Get involved with charity/volunteer work.” (169)  
“Here during the week – take part in different community organisations. I am only here at weekends – Neighbourhood Watch pool safety.” (170)  
“They interrelate with a lot of people during everyday activities – who sees and knows a lot of people.” (171)  
“Two twins sell tickets for helicopter – they do work hard.” (172)  
“Fund raising, sporting activities, clean up activities.” (173)  
“I belong to Friends of St. Vincents Base hospital Civilian Widows. 83 years old. Engineering department does a rotten job – I know what funding is the Olympics etc., country not getting a fair deal.” (174)

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## Appendix 6: Question 10 Comments

### Question 10

**That's all the questions I have...are there any other comments you'd like to make about these matters that you've not yet had a chance to say?**

#### Comments:

1. "There should be more public participation in all levels of government." (006)
2. "I think this covered a good range of views – they weren't too difficult for people to answer." (007)
3. "Our area is not as safe as it should be." (012)
4. "Can we have a change of government? And more funding for health!" (018)
5. "Council needs to be seen out in the community more so we can relate to them – they should be real." (026)
6. "Don't have a high opinion of local government – governed by forces outside eg when this swimming pool was voted in by Council." (027)
7. "Would like to be involved in the Federal government ideas." (029)
8. "We need more deregulation into country towns to help the Council" (031)
9. "We suffer from lack of footpaths. Believe children should have involvement with Council – elect their own representative through ballot system." (034)
10. "Lost a good Mayor in last elections – person who got most votes should have got in." (037)
11. "Half Council will have a short term only – as not involved in consultation – they are not needing communities." (041)
12. "Fix the roads." (042)
13. "Councils should be more sensitive to needs of community and environment. Development should be looked into carefully." (044)
14. "Lismore has a small town mentality!" (050)
15. "Before Council vote on things they should be put to the community." (051)
16. "If you have an issue, always go straight to Causley or George." (072)
17. "Contacted Council today about a street light at the end of a dead end street." (079)
18. "A good idea to go back to shire—money would then be shared equitably." (082)
19. "Tired of people whingeing (098)
20. "Main irritation about being required by law to consider our concerns –no legal protection for my views in community. If old Council building is replaced by theme park I can't do anything by law – only political action!" (112)
21. "It's a shame that more people don't get involved at grass roots level. We end up with some very ordinary politicians/councillors." (124)
22. "Lots of people would like to be involved but can't spare the time because of their other commitments." (127)
23. "We have been working with Progress Association. Council wants to put an activities park here and some contentions about that. Pool is contentious." (128)
24. "I don't have much faith in Councils or politics; not much trust." (138)
25. "A bit concerned about waste disposal – getting flies and grubs –I tie up and put in big bin." (142)
26. "I feel it is important to get the thoughts of people. Statement by John Crowther in today's paper is ridiculous." (144)
27. "I've read about Lyn's committee – too much funding for these--a gravy train it's a talk fest – I like to see action." (149)
28. "They don't educate the community enough about matters – don't hear a balanced view." (155)
29. "I feel local government does not heed the advice of their staff enough in making decisions." (159)
30. "Only thing I have of concern: I do think they should provide more money for road works – they are deteriorating badly." (166)

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31. I think feedback panel would be good – phone call or questionnaire would be good for people with children who cannot attend meetings.” (167)
32. “If we do have a problem with Council – no way to give feedback – no one has asked if it is better for us and we are still paying tax dollars and services are not as good as they were.” (170)
33. “I think it’s good you are doing a survey – if no one makes a statement that’s no good.” (174)

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