

# Biosphere group tells our secretive council: Let there be light!

THE Noosa Biosphere Association has accused Sunshine Coast Council of "shutting down" the release of information used to guide major decision-making.

In a strongly-worded letter to CEO John Knaggs, the association challenges council to become more transparent.

Other Coast watchdog and lobby groups have echoed similar fears, with spokespeople from OSCAR and Friends of Noosa confirming plans to lodge their own complaints.

Noosa Biosphere Association members accuse the amalgamated council – a product of the forced merger of the three Coast councils – of failing to release addendum documents, additional reports, maps and diagrams used in the decision-making process.

They also cite a spike in confidential reports, while minutes and agendas published online were often impos-

By Nathan Evans

sible to understand due to missing information.

"The process has been gradual," said association spokeswoman Jo Ball. "However, there is now a significant gulf between the practice of the former Noosa Council and the Sunshine Coast Regional Council.

"Under the Noosa Council, some confidential items were released and posted to the web page after the relevant Committee or Council had recommended or decided the matter. No subsequent releases are being made today.

"The decisions of the Council are supposed to be clear and stand alone. However, many of the minutes arising from dealings with confidential items provide no cogent information at all."

# Council should be transparent

From page 1

"In other situations, sense cannot be made of the decision without reference to the confidential reports. As Council would be aware, in such circumstances the reports must be made available, yet they remain confidential and unavailable to the community."

Friends of Noosa spokesman Bob Ansett and OSCAR spokeswoman Johanne Wright said Council was undermining the community's right to guide decisions, because it was impossible to access information needed to form considered opinions.

"When we get the information too late we can only be critical after the event, rather than being helpful community members before the event through raising matters that are helpful for councillors in making their decisions," said Ms Wright.

"I do not think it is sufficient for the council to say it's too much hard work from a bureaucracy point of view or that we don't work like that."

Ms Wright said council budget reports were a prime example. OSCAR was still waiting for council to release missing attachments on budget items.

Mr Ansett said: "The transparency we've been accustomed to with Noosa Council is



Bob Ansett

no longer apparent and that is a great concern to the Noosa community. We will express those concerns to the CEO.

"The council uses the word 'harmonisation' when talking about the merge of the three regions. Well, this is one example where the whole Coast should be harmonised in regard to transparency."

Veteran local town planner Paul Summers told *The Noosa Journal* he suspected the information drought came down to the fact staff

were struggling with the administrative side of drawing up reports. Noosa, he said, mastered this process in the late 1980s as one of the first councils to embrace transparency.

"The simple message is that we are gradually losing the key things that made a difference in Noosa," he said. "Open reporting was a way in which the community could access information and therefore react and bring pressure to bear on the council."

Councillor Vivien Griffin has taken up the cause. She has lodged a request to have missing attachments and information posted online.

"The devil is often in the detail," she said. "I agree with those representations.

"We have to fix this up, and I'm sure it can be done."