

## MONDAY AGENDA



LISTEN AND LEARN: Community consultation was one of the critical elements of good planning in Noosa. It has been suggested this model could be followed to shape the future of the region.

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# Learning from Noosa

## It's all in the 'art' of planning says expert



**MONDAY AGENDA**  
with Bill Hoffman

**T**HE Sunshine Coast could plan for the future it wanted but the task would be made much more difficult if the state government insisted on arbitrary numbers for growth.

That is the assessment of Paul Summers, the planner who drove the outcomes for which Noosa is so admired across the country.

Sunshine Coast Council in its submission to the draft SEQ regional plan has asked the government to drop the arbitrary requirement to cater for 93,000 new dwellings here by 2031.

Council wants its population to be determined by a thorough assessment of the Coast's carrying capacity which acknowledges the need to preserve and enhance a range of environmental, economic and social values.

Summers, who was Noosa's planner from 1987 until 2002, said all was definitely not lost across the rest of the Coast which still retained great character.

He said there was an art and science to good planning.

"Producing the good results in planning relies on good science," Summers said. "But final production of the plan itself was a piece of art. It's been the art that's been missing from planning in Queensland."

He said if the commitments were made under the planning scheme it would be possible to

see radical change in the way the future unfolded.

And he argues that while the clock can't be wound back fully, changes could be made to land designations without exposing council and the community to compensation.

Mr Summers said in 1990 then premier Wayne Goss claimed South-east Queensland could grow by a million people and the region could still retain its character.

That mistake had been perpetuated by successive governments that saw planning as being primarily about accommodating exponential growth.

"The two don't naturally go together," he said. "We have to ask if that is the desirable outcome. Ultimately we need a national population debate. The policy is not to talk about it and let us be raped. The debate should not be about population size, it should be about distribution and whether we should have large volumes of people moving out of Sydney and Melbourne."

"Growth was about whether someone could sell a house in Sydney or Melbourne and then come up here and buy a house, a boat and stick money in the bank."

"It was cheap here because there was no infrastructure, there was no tax sharing and we developed a booming growth economy to the point where nothing coped."

Mr Summers said good planning relied on good data sets and really was simple stuff.

He said in essence it was the measurement of three things.

They were the biophysical



LIFESTYLE: Council has made a submission to the draft SEQ regional plan.

capacity for the land to support development, what infrastructure should be provided, whether the community could afford to pay for it and when, and thorough community consultation to determine what it wanted as an outcome.

Measuring the biophysical capacity which included measurement of slope, soil studies, biodiversity and ecological and vegetation values to determine what needed to be preserved as well as measuring the capacity to dispose of sewage, bushfire hazards and flooding delivered a primary data set.

That in turn informed what infrastructure could be delivered without compromising those values.

But the real strength of the Noosa Plan was the quality of the community consultation that was undertaken. While a lot of consultation was done because it had to

be done rather than because of a desire to get a genuine understanding of what primary stakeholders actually wanted, the consultation that drove the Noosa Plan took a different approach.

It broke the project down to 11 separate exercises targeting individual places across the then shire.

Those consultations resulted in locality statements for each area which then became part of the overall vision.

Cooran, for example, didn't want a pub. It had a recreation club which it ran itself, retained the profits from and set the rules for. It saw itself as a family town.

As a consequence it became Noosa's no-pub town.

The process produced the 11 simply worded two-page locality statements which were built into a readable document.

"The community ran with it,"

Mr Summers said. "It liked what it saw because it reflected what it wanted."

A clear appreciation of biophysical constraints and values, the infrastructure needed and ability to be delivered and strong consultation were all pivotal to getting the planning right.

There is a strong relationship between consultation and infrastructure analysis.

In Pomona council engineers had plans for kerb and channelling to fix drainage problems.

The community didn't want it, seeing grassed verges as critical to the town's character.

The engineers re-addressed the issue, achieved the drainage solutions that it sought with a better environmental outcome and at a cheaper price to the satisfaction of the community it was meant to serve.

Similar cheap, deliberate processes delivered green road edges to the entrances of each of Noosa's towns that remain to this day critical to the character of the place.

Summers said consultation could tell you what people wanted but only if you listened hard could you get the understanding of what was needed to be built into the planning outcome.

A lot of data is already available to help Sunshine Coast Council follow a similar path.

Summers believes there are also consultants in a range of disciplines who would want to become part of council's push to become an Australian model for regional sustainability and that, as in Noosa, a lot of the work could be done in house.