

# **A. R. BLUETT MEMORIAL AWARD 2004/2005**

## **SHIRES ASSOCIATION – GWYDIR SHIRE COUNCIL**

**MAYOR:** COUNCILLOR MARK COULTON  
**GENERAL MANAGER:** MAX EASTCOTT

### **CITATION:**

Gwydir Shire Council was formed in March 2004 by the voluntary merger of Bingara and Yallaroi Shires with 40% of the former Barraba Shire. The new Council came into operation on 1 July 2004 and the first elections were held in September 2004. The progressive achievements of this new local authority have been most meritorious and fully deserving of the Award.

The striking aspects of this entry are the mature and cooperative approach the former councils took to the union, the efforts made to communicate with stakeholders over a vast 9000 square kilometre area and the responsible leadership taken by the former Administrator, Council management and the new Council. This important groundwork, coupled with a series of crucial pre-merger agreements, made the task of the new Gwydir Shire Council much easier.

Some of the highlights of this most impressive submission are:

- Convening community meetings and establishing a network of community contact people across the new Shire as a conduit between distant local communities and Council.
- Adoption of a Management Plan based on Council's Sustainability Plan.
- Implementation of a new salary system and information technology system for the combined Council.
- Adoption of an equitable rating system encompassing the new Shire.
- Implementation of a high speed "Government Wideband Internet Protocol" to interconnect all of Council's separate locations and its people.
- Expansion of the Gwydir Learning Region to address learning needs of residents and Council staff, and as a way of promoting social cohesion, revitalisation and economic development.
- Community service initiatives such as a One Stop Shop, a Mobile Pre School service and expanded Youth Week celebrations.
- Economic development initiatives in Bingara and Warialda to promote tourism and residential development.
- Completion of important landcare projects involving riparian zone protection, salinity reduction and increasing landholder awareness of noxious weeds control and biodiversity conservation.
- \$450,000 program to upgrade five community halls, parks and community facilities.
- New Rural Fire Service and SES buildings
- New water supply and sewerage augmentation works at Warialda and Gravesend.
- \$4.6 million roads, bridges, drainage and footpath works.

It was noted that the Council incurred a significant financial deficit in the first year of operation as a result of extraordinary establishment costs and other unforeseeable costs. The Council rose to the challenges of structural reform despite the limitations of marginal financial resources and a large geographically remote area. It has many challenges in the future but is to be commended for providing an impressive range of essential local services for its residents through this period of change.

The Trustees congratulate the Mayor, Cr Mark Coulton, General Manager, Max Eastcott, councillors and staff of the Gwydir Shire Council on a well-deserved A.R. Bluett Memorial Award.

