

# Tyalgum Waste Transfer Station

## Community Conversation, Wednesday 15 January 2014



A 'Community Conversation' to discuss options for the potential closure of the Tyalgum Waste Transfer Station and the establishment of a scenic lookout on the site was hosted at Tyalgum Community Hall on Wednesday 15 January 2014, from 6.30pm.

Approximately 80 community members were in attendance.

The following Councillors were also present:

- Mayor of Tweed, Cr Barry Longland
- Cr Katie Milne
- Cr Gary Bagnall

**The following is a summary of the questions and comments received, and the responses provided by Council officers:**

1. Is Council going to undertake any soil testing on the site?

About 15 years ago, a number of soil tests were taken by EPA/DPI on the site's chemical constitution and were declared totally safe. All testing required as part of any future planning processes will be undertaken and results will be available to the public.

2. The scenic lookout is separate to the dump and should be treated accordingly.

Council officers have been asked to consider both the potential closure of the waste transfer station and the establishment of a scenic lookout on the site. Both matters will be addressed in a report to Council. Given both uses exist or are proposed on the same site, there is a degree of overlap that needs to be considered.

3. Where the sewerage treatment plant is, along Brays Creek Road, there is a site with low marshy areas, which could be turned into a more modest waste transfer site, as an alternative to the current site.

While this is an option, it does not address the cost issues associated with running the waste transfer station. A financial analysis of the current operations shows that around 95 per cent of costs are accounted for by wages and bin servicing. These costs would continue to apply to the operations on any new site that might be considered. Establishing the facility on a new site would also incur the additional costs of a land use approvals process and set up.

If Council were to establish a new waste transfer station at Tyalgum, it would open itself to similar requests from other villages.

4. My biggest concern is the increase in illegal dumping. What's the cost to Council to clean up illegal dumping?

In response to this question, Cr Bagnall said he had enquired with Council officers and found that illegal dumping currently costs Council about \$30,000 per annum.

It would appear that the issue of illegal dumping is not related to the existence of local waste transfer station. As recently as last week, Council was required to clean up a load of illegally dumped waste on Boxsell Road, adjacent to the cattle yards, in close proximity to the existing tip.



5. What's the value of the recycle bin at the tip?

Council does not receive any income from the processing of commingled recycling in the large bin at the Tyalgum Waste Transfer Station and pays for this to be processed when it is taken to the Chinderah Material Recovery Facility (MRF). The transfer cost per bin is \$444 per tonne.

6. Do you have financial information for the Stotts Creek facility?

Council officers did not have this information to hand at the Community Conversation, but it is available on request.

7. By what means does the Stotts Creek facility make a profit?

Stotts Creek makes a return on the overall operation of the facility.

8. How much profit does it (Stotts Creek) make?

Council officers did not have this information to hand at the Community Conversation, but it is available on request.

9. Can that money (generated by the Stotts Creek Waste Transfer Station) be used as an offset to help keep the Tyalgum facility open?

The allocation of budget expenditure is a matter to be determined by Council.

The majority of the profits made at the Stotts Creek waste facility are put in reserve to allow development of the future Eviron Road landfill which is being developed to replace the Stotts Creek landfill when it closes in the next couple years, and to cover the post closure costs.

10. Does Council make money on recycling?

No. The provision of recycling services costs Council \$444 per tonne for transfer and processing.

Council is paid the going rate for light gauge scrap when it is collected at the site approximately twice annually.

11. This meeting appears to be about cost cutting. Council's role is to provide a service. Why can't we use Council profits to support our service (at the Tyalgum Waste Transfer Station).

Under section 496 of the *Local Government Act*, Council **must** make and levy an annual charge for the provision of domestic waste management services for each parcel of rateable land for which the service is available.

If the provision of the Tyalgum Waste Transfer Station is deemed to be provided for the use of residents, its operations should be covered by the income derived from the site or from money levied against residents provided with the service.

If the Tyalgum Waste Transfer Station is deemed a commercial activity of Council, it is subject to analysis in the context of all Council's activities to ensure that monies collected in the general rate is spent in the most beneficial way for the residents of the shire.

The evaluation of the cost of operating the transfer station is part of Council's evaluation of operations.

12. There may be something wrong with the reporting (this comment was made in response to a suggestion by community members that more people used the Tyalgum Waste Transfer Station than was reported).

Council's figures are determined based on the money banked and the numbers of people using the site as recorded by the long-term operator at the site. The operator was present at the meeting and confirmed that these figures are accurate.

13. You've given an emphasis in your opening remarks on the scenic lookout, but Council resolutions refer to closure of the transfer station and the possible establishment of a scenic lookout. Therefore Council referred to the closure and the establishment of the lookout.

The opening comments provided a response to the comments and scepticism that has been expressed relating to Council's intentions in this process. It had been indicated on a number of occasions by the residents group and other respondents that the establishment of a scenic lookout was just a smoke screen that would be used to allow Council to close the Tyalgum Waste Transfer Station with the lookout unlikely to ever occur. This was refuted by the opening comments where Council's directions to officers were made clear to the group.

14. Whose idea was it (to establish a scenic lookout at the site)?

In both its September 2013 and November 2013 resolutions, Council asked its officers to investigate the establishment of a scenic lookout at the site currently accommodating the Tyalgum Waste Transfer.

Councillors and staff had received numerous requests over the preceding 10 years from the community and others requesting the establishment of a scenic lookout at the site.

15. Between April and July (2013) the tipping price nearly doubled. This tip is a minor part of the biggest business in the Tweed, that being Council. It seems to me that increasing costs is a simple way to drive customers away?

The price to dispose of waste at the Tyalgum Waste Transfer Station is comparable with charges at the Stotts Creek Resource Recovery Centre. There are minor differences in the application of charges as the weighbridge allows Council to weigh heavy loads at Stotts Creek, which cannot be done at Tyalgum. The trend of falling patronage and diminishing returns is based on a four year analysis of the site and has not changed of late.

16. (In response to the comment above) What were those price increases and why were they brought in?

Council's Coordinator Waste Services said he was unaware of the reasons behind the increase, but that fees at the Tyalgum Waste Transfer Station were in line with those charged at the Stotts Creek facility.

17. What I'm hearing is the idea that the tip and a lookout are incompatible. So we only have one choice: either a lookout or a transfer station?

This is a question for Council. The question of compatibility relates to whether you would want to send tourists to a lookout to take in the views of the valley which overlooked the transfer station operations.

Screening has been suggested by those in favour of both uses coexisting on one site, however if the toilets and amenities (which currently exist on the site) were to be made available to visitors, there would be no means of hiding the transfer station assets and operations.

18. What about the farmers at the end of Tyalgum Road? We don't have a bin collection service and it's too far to drag the bins to the end of the road pick up point.

Council is working with impacted residents to provide solutions to their service issues, wherever possible. There are towing hitches that will allow residents to take their bins down to communal drop off areas that have been set up to allow trucks to get as close as possible to properties and some properties are using trailers and the such to transport their bins. Affected property owners are encouraged to contact Council's Coordinator Waste Management on (02) 6670 2659.

19. It seems Council hasn't looked at options for efficiencies, other than closing the tip. There are options to be considered that haven't been considered yet.

Over 95 per cent of the current operating costs are related to servicing the bins and the wages of the one person supervising the site.

Further to questions raised by the community, enquiries have been made with Council's Workplace Health and Safety specialists as to whether it would be possible to provide an unmanned site. It has been indicated that the very high risks associated with such a move would be unacceptable to Council.

Following the meeting, Council officers contacted Scott Hunter of the EPA who advised the agency was not supportive of unmanned sites, as the likelihood of illegal dumping of hazardous waste would be much higher, placing both users of the site and the environment at risk. The EPA would also be concerned by the level of risk to the people charged with collecting waste from and maintaining an unmanned site.

20. If you do need to close down the tip, how about reinvesting the money in Tyalgum?

The allocation of budget expenditure is a matter to be determined by Council.

21. Before Council makes a decision to close the tip, Council should come to the Tyalgum community with the offer for the community to operate the facility for one year.

This proposal will be included in the report to Council.

The workings of such an arrangement would need to be determined. It is noted that all costs (other than wages, which would no longer apply) would still need to be met by someone and this currently amounts to 58 per cent of the operating costs at the site. The responsibility for the management of the site would fall on those undertaking the task as Council would not be able to accept responsibility for the activities of unsupervised volunteers. The proposed operators at the site would need to have the appropriate training and insurances.

22. Supposing you did have a smaller station, an extra \$120 in rates from the Tyalgum residents should cover the costs of the tip.

Based on the suggested \$120 per rate notice for 200 rate paying properties, such an arrangement would raise \$24,000, which is less than half the current cost of operating the site, net of wages.

If the total cost of \$70,000 were to be raised, that is sufficient to retain a supervisor at the site, from 200 rate paying properties, the cost of a special levy per property would be \$350. This figure would decrease with a larger number of properties included in the pool or increase if the pool was less than the 200.

23. A lot of people don't use the tip, so you'd be making people pay for a service they're not using. The tip is a user pays system. Council should be looking at and improving services, not taking them away.

Council has improved services over the preceding years with the introduction of waste and recycling services and the provision of the biannual bulk waste collection service. This has reduced demand at the Tyalgum Waste Transfer Station, as demonstrated by the figures.

24. Non-paid services are still services. You haven't accounted for free recycling and metals drop off users in your figures, which only accounts for the number of paid users of the tip.

The current users of the free recycling and metals drop off are commercial businesses. Commercial operators are able to engage recycling contractors with a number operating within the shire. Domestic ratepayers should not be subsidising the collection and processing of recyclables for commercial operators.

For residents seeking recycling services, every domestic property is provided with a 240 litre recycling bin, with options increase to a 360 litre bin or to order a subsidised second recycling bin for domestic properties where required.

25. Can you get a 60m<sup>3</sup> bin to replace the 40m<sup>3</sup> bin and empty it monthly instead of fortnightly, to reduce costs?

The charge for collection and processing of recycling is a per tonne rate and would not reduce with a larger bin. It would need to be determined whether site access would be impeded by a larger bin or whether the bin could be brought into the site.

26. If you get a recycle bin, are you compelled to get a regular (waste) bin, or not?

No. It is at residents' discretion as to whether or not they use the services provided to their property.

However, where a waste collection service is made available to a property, Council is obligated, under Section 496 of the *Local Government Act*, to charge for that service, whether or not it is used. The domestic service includes both waste and recycling collection and the charge includes both services.

27. Is this a case of the squeaky wheel getting grease? It seems only a small minority want the tip closed. If the tip is going to support Tyalgum community, how is it going to fund itself?

Council regularly examines its expenditure to ensure funds are spent appropriately. The closure of the Transfer Station is being evaluated by Council on the basis of patronage as well as viability and not at the request of residents.

28. Doesn't the rate increase cover the costs? Can we just have a vote now to decide (whether the community wants to close the tip).

The tip's income figures are still proportionately less than cost of its operations. The decision to continue operating the Transfer Station will be made by Council.

29. If you have a lookout will you have toilets? If so, will Council look at fixing the toilets here in town first?

There is currently a toilet on the site and, pending design, it is assumed that this would be maintained. The repairs of the town toilet in Tyalgum are listed on Council's list of tasks to be completed.

30. (From Cr Milne) Is there a possibility to have a special rate levy?

Council's Coordinator Waste Services said he was unaware of the working of special levies.

There followed discussion from other members of the audience who said they did not use the site and thought the raising of a special levy would be unreasonable given their lack of use.

*See Item 22 for further discussion in relation to this matter.*

31. Do you have written advice from the EPA or Workcover that says the site has to be manned?

Since the Community Conversation, advice has been sought and received from both Council's Workplace Health and Safety Coordinator and Scott Hunter of the EPA. Both advised that for various reasons the risk of operating the site as an unmanned site entailed an unacceptable level of risk.

*See Item 19 for further discussion in relation to this matter.*

32. Could you explain the cost of the six-monthly pick up?

The cost of the six-monthly collection has now been clarified at \$16.02 per property provided with a Council waste service per year. This provides for all costs for the two services provided.

33. Is there an option to stop one of those services and put the money into the Tyalgum tip?

While Council has the ability to negotiate variations to its contracts, separating the current six-monthly kerbside collection of bulky waste from the household waste and recycling collection (which currently forms a single contract) would be difficult. Attempting to do this for just a portion of the contract, that being the servicing of the Tyalgum area, would present further challenges.

If the full cost of the annual kerbside bulk waste collection was separated for 250 properties this would allow \$4,000 to be put toward the transfer station. Alternatively each of these properties is entitled to present a cubic metre of waste with each of the kerbside bulk waste services currently provided.

34. I'd like to commend Council for being so supportive of local businesses. Tourism would be good for business.

Noted and thank you.

35. Does the Council have to waste money on building a lookout where there's already a great lookout?

Council will consider the nature and extent of the lookout during any future design process. The community would be given opportunity to provide feedback during this process.

36. Item A2660 in the Council budget shows a negative dumping figure. What is this?

In Council's budget, income is shown in negative figures and expenditure is shown in positive figures. The negative dumping figure shows income from disposal charges.

37. I think we need to take an objective look at the whole waste management. If you worked hard at making it more effective and efficient, we could have both a lookout and a tip.

Council will consider this in formulating their decision. All waste services will be evaluated as part of an upcoming review of Council's Integrated Waste Strategy.

38. In Lismore, instead of a twice yearly pick up they have free drop off at the tip two weeks of the year.

The six-monthly kerbside collection offered in the Tweed is more accessible to all residents as it does not require access to a ute or trailer to use the service. Council will be considering options for providing the kerbside bulk waste service in the upcoming review of its Integrated Waste Strategy.

**The following feedback, not relating to the Tyalgum Waste Transfer Station or the possible scenic lookout, was also received:**

39. One gentleman raised concerns regarding the presence of McDonalds and KFC litter in the Tweed.
40. Another gentleman said there should be more services, generally, for country people. He indicated that he has to clean his own drains and commented on the poor state of rural roads, locally.