

MidCoast Election 2017

GROUP C Response to “MCWAG questions”

by [Nawal Maharaj](#), a candidate from Group C

1. What strategies would you pursue to reduce reliance on fossil fuels and promote the use of alternative energy sources in the Mid North Coast?

I believe that section 8A (2) (d) of the *Local Government Act 1993* which says, “[Councils should consider the principles of ecologically sustainable development](#)” is a useful and authoritative reference for this question.

The Climate Council, which is a people powered phoenix risen out of the ashes of the federal [Climate Commission \(abolished by the Coalition Government in 2013\)](#), is promoting [Cities Power Partnership](#). This is “a free national program that exists to celebrate and accelerate the emission reduction and clean energy successes of Australian towns and cities. It’s a coalition of the willing – made up of mayors, councillors and communities who are committed to a sustainable, non-polluting energy future”.

Apparently, thirty five local councils “from around Australia representing over 3 million people and over 200 towns and cities” are in this program. I believe that there is scope for our Council to join such a strategy and it could start with:

- a) Assessing the viability of Council property to host alternative energy collection and storage through solar panels, vertical axis (low noise) wind turbines and batteries.
 - Maximum usage of Council rooftops for solar energy collection.
 - Where viable, the installation of vertical axis (low noise) wind turbines on council property and rural landholdings with incentives for the landowner.
 - Related alternative energy storage infrastructure.
- b) The promotion and improvement of public transport networks within the region noting that public transport is not just a State Government responsibility but also a Local Government one. There needs to be an urgent discussion about public transport with a view to
 - providing for travel to and from work, not only between major centres and their satellites, but also between the satellites themselves

- connecting convenient access to various public facilities in the various centres such as the public hospital, railway station, council chambers, the court house, local police station, major shopping complexes and cultural and recreational centres, and
- encouraging and subsidising public transport for seasonal and occasional cultural recreational or other leisure events or programs on weekends and after hours.

2. *What is your position on mining in the water catchments of the Mid North Coast in particular the proposed expansion of the Rocky Hill Coal Project at Gloucester?*

I am fully committed to our Group C statement of objectives which was lodged with the Electoral Commission as an attachment to NSW Electoral Commission Form FD.721:

“PROTECTING OUR COMMUNITIES AND WATER CATCHMENT FROM INVASIVE MINING

Advocating for the community and our precious water catchment against the possible threats posed by invasive mining, such as [those identified by MidCoast Water \(September 2016\)](#).”

3. *Will your group be promoting funding for the scientific function of the Water Services business unit of MidCoast Council (formerly MidCoast Water)?*

MidCoast Water as a discrete county council was dissolved on 1 July 2017 and its operations and functions were “subsumed by Mid-Coast Council” - see [the proclamation in the NSW Government Gazette](#).

The Local Government Minister’s decision followed from a recommendation by MidCoast Council’s Administrator, John Turner, last December. The MidCoast Water paper that informed the Administrator’s recommendation had noted that: “Science functions might not be considered ‘core business’ ” if the operations and functions of MidCoast Water were to be merged with local council (http://www.midcoastwater.com.au/client_images/1871485.pdf - see PDF numbered page 35).

Our Group is opposed to any downsizing of scientific assessment and reporting capacity that might occur if the water science function is marginalised in the new arrangements. However councillor vigilance about this may be a hard ask if the downsizing is an effect of operational rearrangements of staff or staffing

resources because elected councillors are barred from operational involvement in council matters.

On the other hand, elected councillors as a body can hold the General Manager to account to ensure that the high standard of independent, objective advice and reports, evidenced during the NSW Parliament's Coal Seam Gas Inquiry in 2011 when [MidCoast Water made a science based submission](#) and also presented at the Taree session of the inquiry and the recent public submission process on the Rocky Hill Coal Project proposal when again, [MidCoast Water made a science based submission](#), continues.

Elected council's pursuance of such a standard could be effected by its capacity to influence any decision

- around budget approvals for the Water Services business unit, and
- to develop and ratify a Water Security Strategy (policy) for the local government area.

4. What strategies would you implement to address the impacts of climate change on the Mid North Coast?

For those of us who believe that humans contribute measurably to climate change, lowering carbon emissions through greater reliance on non-fossil fuel energy sources is a critical starting point. Therefore I refer to my response to question 1. However to obtain the necessary majority decision of councillors to promote such strategies requires foresight by the electors to ensure they elect not only representatives who are appreciative and knowledgeable of the issues but who also have a capacity and a passion to engage with each other to persuade, share and promote the program. The needs to be a combination of knowledge and people skills and a team ethos.



*The MidCoast Council election features GROUP C comprising former Gloucester Shire Mayor, [John Rosenbaum](#), former Greater Taree City Councillor [Robyn Jenkins](#) and community activist [Nawal Maharaj](#). Group C can only be voted for **BELOW THE LINE**.*