

A great cultural plan

The winner of the Local Government Cultural Award for Policy and Planning says cultural planning is easy ... Huh?

by ANNE MARSHALL & PENNY BONNELL

When Eurobodalla Shire Council was announced as the sole winner of the Local Government Cultural Award in the Cultural Policy and Planning category for 2007 it was probably Penny Bonnell, Cultural Development Officer for the Regional Arts Board for the South East (SEAR) who had the most to be proud of. SEAR was contracted by the council to consult, research, develop and produce the winning plan, and it was Penny who largely drove the process.

What's the secret of her success?

The review of the Eurobodalla Shire Council's first Social Plan and the development of the first Cultural Plan went hand in hand. The Cultural Plan was integrated fully into the Social Plan, with both plans being adopted by Council in a similar time frame. The Cultural Plan was written in exactly the same format as the Council's Management Plan in order to make the integration of the two plans a relatively painless exercise.

"Eurobodalla Shire appreciates the significance of the culture of community and sees this as integral to planning, alongside economic, social and ecological factors," says the Council's Senior Strategic Planner, Allen Grimwood.

The integrated approach was not only mandated by the Council but also by the local community. Key issues were identified in extensive community consultations covering a broad range of topics. Focussed research and discussion pinpointed cultural issues in relation to infrastructure; community identity and wellbeing; tourism; and economic and sustainable development.

In particular, the twenty five members of the Cultural Planning Reference Group identified the importance of culture in successful

community development and environmental sustainability. The Reference Group also identified the need for leadership from the Council in its role as key advocate for community cultural development as well as the need for partnerships between Council, its community and other government sectors in the implementation of the plan.

A key driver of the other relevant Council Plans (eg., the Local Environment Plan and the Structure Plans for the three main towns in the Shire), the new Cultural Plan now also informs the development of specific Building Design Codes that reflect local cultures, heritage as well as the built and natural environment. So, in just over twelve months, the Cultural Plan has had a significant impact on Council's planning functions.

"Cultural Planning is easy," says Penny Bonnell, "if you listen to your communities and start with an integrated approach."

"In my estimation, other factors in the success of the Eurobodalla Cultural Plan include its forward looking and strategic focus and specific, practical and achievable actions. The Plan has already influenced the development of best practice public art policy and process, cultural venue and program development and the establishment of a new Community Arts Officer position. These early runs on the board and the winning of the Cultural Award puts the Shire in the leading role for cultural development in the South East region."

Other Councils in the South East are at different stages along the road. SEAR will be actively involved in assisting the remaining Councils to reach their goals of finalising their Cultural Plans within the next twelve to eighteen months.



Penny Bonnell and Chris Kowal, Eurobodalla Shire Councillor and member of the SEAR Board, accepting their award at the ceremony in Sydney on 5 May.

The Eurobodalla Shire Council Cultural Plan 2006–2010 is available online at www.esc.nsw.gov.au. Apart from being a beautifully designed document, it is clear that the degree of community consultation and direct input into the plan was exceptional. It is also clear that the Eurobodalla Council values its community and that community development is a joint exercise. ■

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October

20 October

Applause Festival Busking musicians, performing artists and other disciplines showcasing their talent on the pavement.

ALBURY Tel 02 6021 7775

20 – 28 October

Festival of the Miner's Ghost Market stalls, clowns, kite making, an entertaining outback festival, giant slide and jumping castles and a rock and roll night **COBAR**

Tel 02 6836 1452

24 October

Bangers and Mash A hilarious comedy with a splash of melodrama, sitcom, slapstick, horror, and comedy.

COONABARABRAN Tel 02 6842 2712

25 – 28 October

Coffs Coast Food and Wine Festival Local restaurants, produce growers and wine makers from the Coffs Coast region. Live entertainment and activities for children. Park Beach Reserve **COFFS HARBOUR**

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