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Vital role of local government under spotlight

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COOKTOWN

An official enquiry into the financial sustainability of local government has validated Cook Shire Mayor Peter Scott's concerns about the increasing demands placed on local government.

Following a recent Queensland Audit Office report, the Planning and Natural Resources Committee has launched an inquiry into the long term financial sustainability of local government. The committee held a hearing in Cooktown in May, with representatives from Cook Shire Council putting forward the key issues facing the organisation. "The committee acknowledged the struggles that we face with a huge geographic area, huge range of responsibilities and our inability to meet the associated rising costs," Cr Scott said.

"We have a strong reliance on State and Federal government funding and the cross section of responsibility that we have is very different to the run of the mill suburban local government. Cook Shire Council has an almost holistic stewardship of the area, we deal not just with the economic side of things, but also social, environmental and cultural aspects of our region and we are not funded to do that. We are also still maintaining roads across a massive area which has been changed from rateable property to national parks or reserves."

Key figures tabled at the hearing included Council's deficit of \$2.6 million in water, sewage and garbage costs, as well as a \$8.7 million revenue before grants, and an \$18 million operating deficit. "These are not just figures on a piece of paper, this is the day to day reality of managing the Shire, these numbers relate to real lives on the ground. It affects whether Council can continue to maintain the service level that we currently provide, which has a flow on effect to the whole community across all sectors," he said.

The committee also heard from Wujal Wujal council representatives at the hearing, which was hosted by Cook Shire Council on May 31. "We trust the committee is now better informed on issues in our region, and we look forward to a positive outcome and solutions to our ongoing challenges," Cr Scott said.

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