



SUPPLEMENTARY BUSINESS PAPER

ORDINARY MEETING OF COUNCIL

To be held on

Wednesday, 27 January 2021  
4pm

at

Armidale Council Chambers

**Members**

Councillor Ian Tiley (Mayor)  
Councillor Debra O'Brien (Deputy Mayor)  
Councillor Peter Bailey  
Councillor Jon Galletly  
Councillor Andrew Murat  
Councillor Margaret O'Connor  
Councillor Dorothy Robinson

SUPPLEMENTARY AGENDA

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<b>Item:</b>	<b>7.2</b>	<b>Ref: AINT/2021/01211</b>
<b>Title:</b>	<b>Mayoral Minute: Write off of balance of long-term water account debt - Armidale Rams Rugby League Club</b>	<b>Container: ARC16/0025</b>
<b>Responsible Officer</b>	<b>Mayor</b>	
<b>Author:</b>	<b>Ian Tiley, Mayor</b>	
<b>Attachments:</b>	<b>Nil</b>	

### **1. Purpose**

To exercise compassion and fairness and relieve the balance of a long-term water account debt of the Armidale Rams Rugby League Club to the Council. The information contained in this report was provided to me in 2018 and subsequently by the Club President Mrs Jess Smith who has stoically led efforts to reduce the debt since becoming Club President in 2017.

### **2. RECOMMENDATION:**

**That Council:**

- a. Waive the outstanding sum of \$25,925.51 and being balance of water usage account by Armidale Rams Rugby League Club.**
  
- b. Resolve that no future debts of the Club will be written off.**

### **2. Background**

The account relates to water usage at Rugby League Park at 175 Dumaresq Street Armidale. The account originated in 2009 and 2010 and at its peak in May 2018, the water debt to Council was \$42,831 and had been accumulating interest of more than \$8000, which Council waived in 2018. At 31 October 2020 the account balance was \$25,925.51. Since June 2018 the Club states that it has made payments of \$13,471 in monthly amounts of \$709. It has also paid all current usage charges for each period in addition to the \$709 per month payments. During Covid 19, when the Club had no fixtures and thus no income, the Council has given an exemption from payments.

The primary reason for the growth in size of the water account was a water leak, which remained undetected for a long period of time until around 2013. It was eventually ascertained that the leak was underneath the clubhouse located on the eastern boundary and the exit point was into Harris Park which is Council land. The leak was eventually detected by a Council employee when mowing Harris Park. The Club is of the view that the increase in the Club water bill debt was primarily attributable to this leak, of which members had no knowledge for several years.

### **3. Issues**

The ground has been run and managed by the Armidale Rugby League for several decades with very little Council support.

The Club supports the junior league which operates from and relies on the ground. There are over 100 registered junior players. It is the only junior rugby league club in Armidale and therefore fosters the future players of both Rams seniors and Narwan Club. The Club strongly promotes junior football and wishes to do more in that regard. However, it is restricted because of its ongoing long-term debt to Council. I am advised by the Club President that if the senior Club is unable to survive and prosper then the juniors may not have a home ground.

The Club is of the view that a financially healthy Rugby League Club is a vital part of the Armidale and region's social fabric. I am informed that the ground is in use most weekends which is a significant economic driver for the community.

Rugby league has large social and economic benefits to the Armidale community. Players including from lower socioeconomic backgrounds playing rugby league leads to better lifestyles, meaning less crime and further enhancing the local community, as well as teaching them valuable skills they can all use in their everyday lives. The Club advises that people travel from across north western NSW and the greater New England region to participate or be spectators at Rams games. They spend money in town whilst they are here, thus supporting local businesses. The Rams use local suppliers for the canteen and field maintenance, further supporting local businesses.

The current facilities at Rugby League Park are in poor condition, outdated and inadequate to cater for the needs of senior and junior male and female rugby league competitions and the many other sporting activities conducted at the ground.

The Club is desirous of making improvements to the ground and in late 2020 applied unsuccessfully for funding under the NSW Government's Office of Responsible Gambling Infrastructure Grants Program. A Development Application (DA-108-2020) was approved for the project by Council. The Club intends to pursue other grant funding opportunities. If the balance of debt is relieved the Club has indicated that it will have greater capacity and will commit to making gradual ground improvements.

There are good reasons for the Council to write off the balance of the debt using the Council Water Account Adjustment Management Policy which allows adjustment of water accounts for undetectable leaks, the primary cause of this long-term unmanageable debt to Council.

In July 2010, Armidale Dumaresq Council wrote off \$19396.90 from the NARWAN Rugby League Club sundry debtor account for work Council undertook for the 2010 Koori knockout which Narwan Club hosted. This was because of the inability of that Club to pay the account. The RAMS Club considers, with respect, that this precedent is justification for Council to also assist RAMS Club with its debt write off request.

I understand that previous Councils have not written off any account for Rams although it is acknowledged that interest on the debt approximating \$8000 has previously been waived. The write off of the Narwan account has perhaps confused this issue. The recommendation includes, at the request of Council's Financial Controller, that Council not write off any future debts of the Club.

Mr Rayner also requested provision of a table as provided in the protocols and same follows.

<b>Budget Area:</b>	Water Services						
<b>Funding Source:</b>	Water Fund Reserve						
<b>Budget Ref (Project Number)</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Approved Budget</b>	<b>Actual</b>	<b>Committed</b>	<b>Proposed</b>	<b>Total Forecast Expenditure</b>	<b>Remaining Budget</b>
280010.2.3310.165.1250	Water User Charges Revenue	(\$8,100,000)	(\$3,376,488)		\$25,925	(\$3,350,563)	(4,749,437)

This is a Water Fund debt and therefore the write off would have no effect on the General Fund of Council.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The RAMS Club is desirous to make a fresh start so that it can better support junior and senior rugby league players and competitions and to provide improved facilities and grow the sport of rugby league for the benefit of the Armidale regional community. I appeal to Council to support this request.

Cr Tiley  
Mayor  
7 January 2021

#### Addendum to Mayoral Minute

Council has previously been approached by the RAMS Rugby League Club to have consideration of a reduction of the water debt and this was considered by Council at a meeting in March 2018. The Club put forward a range of reasons in support of their submission. Council did not agree to write off any debt at that time but resolved to allow the club to pay off the amount outstanding over 4 years with no interest penalty. A reason for this is that a number of reasons put forward by the Club were investigated by Council officers but found to have no basis. This was detailed in the confidential report considered by Council in March 2018. The Club has maintained the presence of a water leak as being responsible for higher water usage but this was not able to be verified from their water usage patterns. Council officers have requested that the Club supply evidence of the water leak after meeting with them in March 2019 on this matter but no response has been received to this request.

Council has provided support to the Club by way of waiving interest on the water debt and allowing the Club additional time to make payments, beyond what would normally be accepted. In addition, Council waived DA fees 25/11/2020 in the amount of \$6,730.86 to assist the Club in their plans to develop their land.

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<b>Item:</b>	<b>7.7</b>	<b>Ref: AINT/2021/02107</b>
<b>Title:</b>	<b>Mayoral Minute: Retiree Tours to Armidale Region ARC16/0025</b>	<b>Container:</b>
<b>Responsible Officer</b>	<b>Mayor</b>	
<b>Author:</b>	<b>Ian Tiley, Mayor</b>	
<b>Attachments:</b>	<b>Nil</b>	

## **1. Purpose**

This Minute arises from a suggested proposal from Cr Murat for which I thank him. His proposal is to promote retiree tours out of Sydney by rail travel with a couple of days sightseeing in Armidale and surrounds.

## **2. OFFICERS' RECOMMENDATION:**

**That Council support and endorse development and promotion of Retiree Tours to Armidale and Region.**

Many retirees residing in Sydney and elsewhere are in receipt of pensions and thus have access to cheap rail travel. I understand that a pensioner can travel from Sydney to Muswellbrook one way for \$2.50 and that they can use four free rail trips per annum within NSW each year. They could therefore travel by rail to Armidale and return at minimal cost. The use of rail travel was the suggestion of Mr Bob Ryan. The renovated Armidale railway station would be an immediate attraction for the visitors.

Edwards Coaches could transport them in Armidale and perhaps use idle school buses during school hours. Volunteers could lead the tours. The visitors could be accommodated in the several accommodation places available in the City, from those establishments wishing to participate.

We are all familiar with the many attractions in our City and region. Tours could be tailored to provide visits to Saumarez Homestead, NERAM, UNE (Booloominbah), and the UNE museum, the Gorge, Armidale Folk Museum, Mall, breweries, wineries, Aboriginal Cultural Centre and Keeping Place etc and eventually to the Transport Museum!

This minute does not propose additional expenditure but that our tourism staff from existing budget allocations prepare and distribute suitable programs and advertise electronically to the Sydney (and beyond) market. However, it would be appropriate to approach Hon Adam Marshall for some funding support.

Cr Tiley  
Mayor  
24 January 2021