

Eulogy Cr Beatrice Joy Mathews

As we say our thanks today for the life of Joy, my task is to endeavour to encapsulate the essence of Councillor Joy Mathews from the perspective of her elected, public life, or, if you like, Joy the public person.

In a purely dispassionate, statistical and historical context it is simple enough to outline Cr Mathew's exceedingly active years in the public arena.

However her immense, selfless, and often deeply personal contribution to her beloved community, and the manner in which she engaged and loved the people she worked so tirelessly to effectively represent, is exceedingly difficult to do justice. I am fortunate to have been an elected colleague of Joy's for longer than any other councillor, and over those years, to have witnessed at close quarters, her absolute, unwavering people commitment.

Councillor Beatrice Joy Mathews commenced elected life by romping in as a Councillor of Maclean Shire at the September 1991 local council election. Her popularity with the electors was very evident, popularity she retained in the next three elections she contested. She topped the poll in 1995, almost did it again in 2000 and achieved the third highest primary vote to secure election to the first ever Clarence Valley Council in March of last year.

Joy was Mayor and leader of Maclean Shire council for two years from 1995 to 1997 and the first female to lead the Council. In 1998 she had an unsuccessful tilt as the Labor candidate for the Federal seat of Page. Joy was a Councillor to North Coast Water for 8.5 years and spent many hours, at endless meetings, planning for the regional water supply and Shannon Creek dam which tragically she will not see to fruition.

She served 4 years as Maclean Shire Deputy Mayor from 2000 to the council amalgamations in 2004 and was also, in this period, the Chairperson for a time of the peak Northern Rivers local government body known as NOROC. Until her passing, Joy served the first Clarence Valley Council as the inaugural Chairperson of Council's peak Environment and Planning Committee.

Joy always seemed to have boundless energy, was a fighter for her beliefs, and was absolutely committed to doing the very best for the people, who honoured her with public office. She served tirelessly on a

myriad of committees and had a special passion and concern for her local environment, for sustainability, for broader environmental issues and challenges, for coast care, for coastal and estuary management, waste management and amongst many, many committees and community groups, her beloved 'paws and claws' committee. One of her grand scale dreams was the Great Eastern Coastal Walking Track which, with political muscle, could still become a lasting tribute to Joy.

As we know, male representation has traditionally dominated in all levels of Australian politics. Joy, as a woman, brought special qualities to the Councils upon which she served, including a sharp focus on the social perspectives and impacts of council decision-making. She also brought balance, compassion and caring and thereby, a greater connectivity with her community.

Joy was so passionate about the need for, and importance of, greater female representation in local government. She was equally committed to, and a strong advocate for women-specific issues. Over her time in public life, women looked to Joy for leadership, for strength, for support, and as an important role model.

It was Joy's initiative which saw introduction of aboriginal and youth mentoring programs at Maclean Council meetings. It was her dream to assist in skilling these groups, to one day become elected representatives. She very recently reactivated the aboriginal mentoring program at Clarence Valley Council and had volunteered to act as the Councillor mentor.

A special insight into the huge workload that Joy undertook as a councillor was obtained when, shortly after she first became ill in late 2003, Councillors asked for details of the committees upon which Joy served, so that we could share some of her representative commitments. We were staggered to learn that Joy was attempting to service well over thirty Committees and community groups – a Herculean effort and commitment. But that was Joy – absolutely full on – taking her role so very seriously – something she did stoically until the very end when others would have not maintained that special courage and tenacity she possessed.

Joy was a person with her ear to the ground, who had a real, acute sense of how the public were feeling about current issues. She was a committed believer in extensive community consultation and engagement.

Many people have said to me that what they admired most about Joy the Councillor, was that she would be pleasant, jovial and speak to everyone with whom she came in contact. Joy had many friends and admirers, who will greatly miss her kaleidoscope of colour, her chats, her effervescent bubbly presence. You knew that Joy was your friend, that she was honest, that she really cared.

Her Clarence Valley Council colleagues marvelled at how Joy was so determined to continue to contribute in those last months, even though she was suffering and had substantial immobility and other problems. She was very brave, a great example to us all and showed us in this difficult period, so much about her strength of character and her great caring for the people and her Clarence Valley.

In the past year I came to know Joy, the person, much more, as we drove continuously to and from Clarence Valley Council commitments. It was during this special time that Joy shared her quite personal, intimate thoughts, hopes and fears. She spoke of her childhood; about her difficulty coming to terms with losing her parents in her teenage years; about her love and pride in Sally and Angus; about her concerns as to what would become of Robin after she was gone and how he would cope. She spoke with warmth and obvious love about how she met ship's doctor Robin on the "Love Boat" and her immense happiness when they cruised together one more time last November.

Joy spoke about; her life as councillor; how much being elected to work for the people meant to her; how privileged she had been, how she hated to miss meetings; her passion for the natural environment of the Clarence; the critical importance of sustainability; how the built environment should always be in harmony with the natural world.

More than anything else Joy questioned herself repeatedly about whether her life, and specifically her public life had made a difference; about whether what she had tried to achieve had been really worthwhile.

Make no mistake Joy, in your passionate commitment to your public role over almost 15 years you made a huge difference.

Her premature, untimely passing is a tragic loss for her family, her many friends, for the Clarence Valley, for the many people who came to rely on Councillor Joy to represent them and their issues and concerns.

We would all wish that there were more people in public life like Joy: people of her calibre, her integrity, her dogged persistence, her magnetic warmth, her great caring, her open, friendly nature.

Undoubtedly Councillor Mathew's greatest issue and cause in public life was the environment. How fitting it is that we say our farewell to her today on what is World Environment Day.

You will be greatly missed Joy. Long may you be remembered in our thoughts and prayers and may the Lord have mercy on your immortal soul.

Ian Tiley
Mayor - Clarence Valley Council.
5th June 2006