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**MEDIA RELEASE**  
**NSW GOVERNMENT FUNDING CUT HITS RIVER HEALTH,  
SAFETY, OLYMPIC ROWING TRAINING.**

The Chairman of the Hawkesbury River County Council (HRCC), Hawkesbury City Councillor Nathan Zamprogno, today expressed his concern about a State Government funding cut which will have consequences for aquatic weed control on the Hawkesbury-Nepean River.

The HRCC was established in 1948 and covers the Penrith City, Blacktown City, Hills Shire and Hawkesbury City Council areas. Representing over 830,000 Sydneysiders and spanning over 3,800 square kilometers, its remit is waterway health, environmental protection, landowner education, and weed control (both terrestrial and aquatic) along the Hawkesbury-Nepean River and many of its feed-rivers and tributaries. Each of the four member Councils send delegates to HRCC to sit as its Board.

Clr. Zamprogno said “HRCC has traditionally been the lead agency for weed control on the river, with significant specialized equipment – in the form of the giant ‘Weedosaurus’ harvester, and scientific knowledge about weed control.”

“It was therefore very concerning when we learned in late November that the NSW State Agriculture Minister, Adam Marshall, had abruptly withdrawn \$238,000 of funding for the remainder of the F.Y. This means we will be losing front-line capacity, losing staff, and possibly facing the sale of our unique capital assets, just after they were repaired at some cost. I believe the funding allocation mechanism, through mid-level bureaucrats at Local

Land Services (LLS), has failed. Worse, the announcement was made in the lead up to Christmas which really is the time when our harvester, and the weeds, are most active.”

In January 2020, the ‘Weedosaur’ harvester pulled its mooring and sank near Penrith Weir in a flood.

Clr. Zamprogno said “We were grateful to gain \$130,000 in Federal funding to salvage, repair and recommission the harvester, and were preparing to resume on-water operations – especially as there are rowers training on the river at Penrith in preparation for the Tokyo Olympics. They are relying on us to keep the river clear.”

Councillor Zamprogno said the Board is concerned about rower and community safety. “Recently we received a report of a schoolgirl rowing crew capsize their boats last month at Penrith as they caught their oars in the weed and rolled the boat. Some expensive electronics and kit was lost.”

“The excessive weed could also prevent safety boats from accessing the river, as they also get caught in the weed.”

“There is a real risk to our multiple world champion and Paralympian, Erik Horrie capsizing. Due to his impairment and boat class, he is strapped into the boat and if he capsized it would really be difficult to get him out of the boat and water.”

“There are several areas along with riverbank where young children swim – these areas are now becoming clogged with weed in which they could become entangled.”

Clr. Zamprogno explained that the community gets excellent value from organisations like HRCC.

“Research shows that shared service models that operate across Council areas enjoy economies of scale and deliver excellent value for money. And the River doesn’t care whose jurisdiction it flows through ... it’s just the River, and is best managed at a regional level.”

“The harvester itself was funded by the Commonwealth Government. Operational funding was shared between the Hawkesbury River County Council and Local Land Services (LLS). The ratepayer burden for HRCC’s operation was only around 50% of its total costs – the reliability of, and co-operation between these State and Federal grants are critical for us to plan over the long term for service delivery.”

“We've had State Government funding for about 10 years. That's operational funding, which means funding to actually pay staff to drive the harvester. Now that's gone. We feel that it makes a mockery of the Federal Government providing such generous funding if the State Government then drops the ball so that those activities can't take place.”

Clr. Zamprogno predicted a complete river shutdown, like what happened in 2004, was almost inevitable if the weeds were allowed to run wild.

“It probably won't happen this year, but it definitely will happen - it's like any natural event. It's just a matter of time,” he said.

“And without the pre-emptive management which we were doing, it's almost guaranteed to happen again in the future.”

Clr. Zamprogno said representations have been made to local State Members Robyn Preston MP, Stuart Ayres MP, Federal parliamentarians Melissa McIntosh MP and Senator Marise Payne, as well the State Agriculture Minister Adam Marshall, seeking a review.

### **Resources:**

A recent Hawkesbury Radio interview where the HRCC Chairman explains the situation: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5bxd6yZtkjE&t=601s>

Stock footage and earlier media coverage of the Weedasaurus in action:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yX\\_o3U7mJtU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yX_o3U7mJtU)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WaszelnTWwA>

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