

MURRAY BRIDGE COUNCIL AWARD

Mr PEDERICK (Hammond) (15:21): Recently, one of the councils in my electorate received a very important award. At a gala dinner in front of 350 guests and dignitaries, the Rural City of Murray Bridge was presented with the Local Government Managers Australia Leadership and Management Excellence Award for its work focusing on engaging the community. This award, judged by an independent panel, is given by the Local Government Managers of South Australia and Northern Territory in recognition of excellent achievement by one of its member councils. This award acknowledges the endeavour of the Rural City of Murray Bridge and its success at building communication bridges, both with and among its community.

In presenting the award, LGMA President John Coombe, Chief Executive of neighbouring Alexandrina Council (itself an award winner in 2005 for excellence in council performance), said that the Murray Bridge council had undertaken major strategies to improve and extend its engagement with all sections of the community. Mr Coombe drew particular attention to the Murray Bridge council's aim to become the first refugee friendly city, which points to the ethnic diversity of the district's growing population. In accepting the award on behalf of the council, CEO David Altmann said that he did so on behalf of all staff and 'recognised the work undertaken by everyone for our community with the services, facilities and infrastructure provided'.

In crediting the whole team, Mr Altmann included not only the entire staff but also all elected members and the volunteers. He also acknowledged that the community itself is playing a part in the improved communication and participation with council.

I would like to pay particular tribute to the mayor, Allan Arbon. While I wholeheartedly agree with Mr Altmann's insistence that the award is the product of a team effort, I feel it must be said that any award alluding to leadership must also say something about the leadership of that team. Of course, many people are in direct leadership roles within the council, but, without strong and able leadership at the top, the rest of the team can only achieve so much.

Allan Arbon, whom I am proud to call a friend, has spent 31 years in local government across three councils, beginning with the old Karoonda council in 1969. He was elected mayor of the Rural City of Murray Bridge in 2000 at a time when the council was in need of firm but fair leadership. He has had numerous roles in local government at all levels, including local, regional and state bodies. The list of his community service activities and involvement, coupled with his commitment to personal development, would well and truly run me to the 'time expired' call. His pivotal role in RCMB's rapid progress since 2000 cannot be overstated.

To return to the award, I would like to detail some of the activities initiated by this council that have promoted and supported the engagement of its citizens and businesses, and that have centred largely around economic development. They include urban growth management strategies, riverfront development and improvement and a sensible and sensitive drought policy. They have also included a youth centre initiative known as Head Space, a skateboard park and a beach volleyball court.

Many of the council's economic development initiatives have resulted in new activities in the region. Working in tandem with industrial and manufacturing growth, they have provided new employment opportunities. Development in the region also includes such projects as the South Terrace retail precinct, the railway station precinct redevelopment, a major upgrade of the racing industry and the planned extension of the Mobilong Prison facility.

In saying this I must acknowledge, on behalf of the council, the support and contributions of the Minister for Transport and the Minister for State/Local Government Relations. Some of this activity attracted overseas migrants to the area, precipitating an influx of new residents. The response of the Rural City of Murray Bridge was to develop what Mr Altmann describes as a multicultural-friendly society. This, coupled with its good relationship and partnership with the indigenous Ngarrindjeri community, has given the district a strong multicultural and multinational presence.

It is apparent from the list of projects that the Rural City of Murray Bridge has sought to engage everyone in its community. It may well be that the Rural City of Murray Bridge becomes the reference point for other councils, regional and suburban, that wish to establish or develop their own community engagement programs, and I acknowledge David Altmann and Mayor Allan Arbon, who are here today.