

## Media Release

# New England Weeds Authority board suspended over financial concerns

*Friday, 17 May 2024*

The Minister for Local Government has today suspended the board of the New England Weeds Authority (NEWA) and appointed an interim administrator due to serious concerns about the financial position and governance of the organisation.

NEWA is the registered trading name of the New England County Council and has a governing body made up of elected representatives from four constituent councils: Armidale Regional Council, Walcha Council, Uralla Shire Council and Glen Innes Severn Shire Council.

The organisation is a single-purpose county council that operates as a Local Control Authority for the management of priority and invasive weeds in the New England area.

This intervention comes after the Office of Local Government was made aware of financial irregularities at NEWA, including the inability of the Audit Office to issue an audit due to gaps in the organisation's financial records.

Further enquiries identified significant issues that could have implications for its partner councils.

The board will therefore be suspended for an initial period of three months.

Independent local government expert and former general manager Mr John Rayner has been appointed as interim administrator.

Mr Rayner will be responsible for looking into the county council's financial and operational concerns and report back to the Minister.

### **Quotes attributable to Minister for Local Government Ron Hoenig:**

"I was alarmed by reports about the financial mismanagement and governance issues at NEWA which is why I have taken this immediate action.

"The problems are of real concern, particularly given the potential impacts the financial instability of NEWA has for its four member councils which help fund its operations.

"Mr Rayner will help the Office of Local Government fully understand NEWA's financial position and the extent of the challenges they are facing.

"This is a necessary measure to give confidence to staff and restore proper and effective functioning to the organisation."

**MEDIA: Clare Dowswell | Minister Hoenig | 0448 540 073**