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TOM BOWS OUT WITH A TEAR

By Margo Zlotkowski

THE end of an era in Cairns's history was played out at City Hall yesterday when Australia's longest-serving local government figure, Mayor Tom Pyne, gave his final public speech.

Although he claimed he wouldn't, the tough political campaigner choked back a tear or two, his voice faltering as he thanked his "best mate" — his wife Marion — his councillors and his staff.

The speech came at the end of Cr Pyne's last meeting before he retires on March 25, 39 years after he entered local government as the fresh-faced 26-year-old representative of far-flung Division 1 in the former Mulgrave shire.

The only three surviving former Cairns mayors — Kevin Crathern, Ron Davis and Kevin Byrne — were in attendance yesterday, along with a packed gallery of former councillors of the old Cairns city and Mulgrave shire councils, members of Cr Pyne's family, including beaming young grand-daughter Katie, friends and political foes.

The nostalgic hour-long proceedings — which ended in a standing ovation for the Mayor — included speeches from long-time friend and tourism pioneer Sir Sydney Williams, Local Government Association of Queensland executive director Greg Hallam, the first woman councillor elected to Mulgrave shire Shirley Harwood, and a rare speech from Cairns's "first lady" Marion Pyne.

A taped speech from Local Government Minister Terry Mackenroth also was played to the gathering.

The gallery was treated to old newsreels of Cr Pyne dealing with issues as varied as rogue crocs encroaching on populated areas to the safety of nurses working late-shifts at Cairns Base Hospital.

The formalities ended with a montage of photos of Cr Pyne over the years as a recording of Frank Sinatra's I Did It My Way filled the chamber.

The meeting also was the final chapter for retiring councillors Angle Mustafa, a cane farmer from Division 1, who is bowing out after 12 years, and accountant Graham Brasch of Division 4, who has served nine years.

In his speech, Cr Pyne made special mention of the two as "wise comrades" who had provided invaluable community service.

"Graham's financial acumen is legendary, while Angle brings the down to earth practical knowledge of the man on the land," he said.

The meeting also could be the last for the eight councillors contesting their divisions.

And there will be at least one loser between Division 9 Cr Alan McPherson and Division 5 Cr Bob Burgess — both are running for Mayor.



SAYING goodbye to civic life: Cairns Mayor Tom Pyne and wife Marion. Picture: Jason O'Brien

Cr Pyne also was recognised yesterday for his 21 years with the Local Government Association of Queensland, 12 of them in a senior role, including the last term as president.

Mr Hallam said wherever Cr Pyne went on LGAQ business — whether in Spain, Scandinavia, Canberra or Boggabilla — his first daily task was to find out what was happening in his beloved Cairns.

"Cairns for Tom comes first, last and in the middle," he said.

Describing Cr Pyne as a good friend, excellent Mayor and great Australian, Mr Hallam said that if he was in China, at 65 he would be just

starting his political career.

"So if you get bored in retirement, Tom, we'll just send you to Beijing for a while," he said.

Mrs Pyne said she was looking forward to having her husband home for family occasions, pointing out that many had been cancelled in the past "when duty called".

"Men and women who devote

themselves to public life do so at a cost," she said, referring to the years her household had been woken by phone calls at 6am or earlier, or even after midnight.

Sir Sydney gave credit to Cr Pyne for being able to get on with everyone from the Prime Minister down.

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