



Muswellbrook Shire Council
2019/20 Special Variation
Consultation Report



muswellbrook
shire council

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Introduction

In early 2016, in the lead-up to the preparation of Muswellbrook Shire Council's suite of Integrated Planning and Reporting (IP&R) documents, Council commenced its most comprehensive program of community engagement to date. The program of engagement has been undertaken on a continuous basis and will be maintained as such into the future. The range of activities has been reflected in high levels of participation and engagement within the community.

As part of the community consultation required to assess community awareness of, and support for Council's application for the continuation of the Special Variation (SV) of 12.43% (plus rate peg) for 2019/20 to be retained permanently in the rate base, Council utilised its existing community engagement program in addition to other specific activities. This report provides information relating to those engagement activities and the results of the feedback provided by the community on the SV proposal.

Community and stakeholder engagement

Council commenced the process initially by reviewing its Community Engagement Strategy in 2016, which aims to ensure all residents and ratepayers are provided every opportunity to be asked for, and provide feedback to Council on the wide range of services and infrastructure it provides. The elected Council has also appointed a Councillor Spokesperson for Community Engagement, who oversees Council's community consultation activities and provides a direct connection between those initiatives and the elected Council. Council also has elected spokespersons for each of its principal activities with the responsibility to consult and engage directly with stakeholders on specific proposals and policy areas.

The Strategy allows for innovation and in 2017, Council established for the first time a Community Panel to directly inform Council's direction and to test a range of policy responses to community wishes captured in the Community Strategic Plan. The Community Panel was reconvened in 2018 with the specific purpose of considering the projects and programs subject to this Application.

Notwithstanding the broad community support for the projects included in the Delivery Program 2017-21 and Council's approved SV application to IPART for 2018/19, Council also undertook further consultation with the community to confirm that the Delivery Program priorities identified for funding in this application remained broadly supported and understood.

A number of specific direct communication and engagement methodologies were employed to ensure that the Shire's communities were both well aware of, and well informed about, the proposed SV application and associated projects. The community was provided a range of opportunities to express their opinions about the proposed application for the continuation of the Special Variation and the projects it is proposed to fund. These community engagement activities included:

- Community Panel
- Letter to ratepayers
- Telephone Survey
- Online Survey
- Traditional Media
- Social Media (Facebook posts)
- FAQ Document
- Public exhibition period of project plans

The community has made it clear they are proud to live in Muswellbrook but are concerned about future job opportunities. They believe that Muswellbrook should be the Regional Centre for the Upper Hunter with infrastructure that matches – such as a Regional Entertainment and Conference Centre, enhanced sporting facilities, improvements to the Shire’s stormwater draining infrastructure, and a children’s water park and a new exhibition and show facility.

Council has captured these community priorities within its Community Strategic Plan (CSP) and Delivery Program for the current term of the elected council and continues to work on funding and implementation strategies to ensure that the community’s desires are met as fully as possible.

From these activities and financial analysis of the projects together with consideration of the capacity of Council and an assessment of the community’s ability and willingness to pay, consideration of grant funding opportunities and success in obtaining external funding for community priorities, Council has refined its priorities for the purpose of its application for the continuation of the Special Variation.

Following the determination of those prioritised projects and programs, Council endorsed a process by which they would be subjected to further consultation whilst the initial preparations were put in place for Council to make application to IPART for the continuation of the Special Variation.



Feedback on the proposed application for the continuation of the Special Variation

Council developed a program of specific activities (some associated with existing community engagement activities) to gauge the support and awareness of the community for an increase in residential, business, mining and farming rates of 12.43% (plus rate peg) to fund initiatives to support those priorities identified through earlier rounds of community consultation.

The response captured in a Shire wide telephone survey conducted from 18th to 29th October 2018, indicated a high level of awareness (at 69%) and broad support among the community (of 45%) for the projects and programs the proposed SV continuation will support.

This document provides the specific details of the consultation undertaken including the means by which community engagement activities were promoted, the data collected as part of the consultations and an analysis thereof.

Community Panel

Council’s Operational Plan 2018/19 set an action to continue a Community Panel as an ongoing means to engage with the community. Council’s Community Engagement Strategy (attached as [Appendix 1](#)) which was endorsed in 2016, included a commitment to use a variety of community engagement methodologies, including a deliberative democracy approach in the form of a Community Panel.

The initial Muswellbrook Shire Community Panel was established in 2017/18 with a demographically representative membership invited from a list of 150 people who had indicated their interest to participate during the course of the 2017 Customer Satisfaction Survey. The Panel was convened on three occasions in 2017.

At the Ordinary Meeting of Council on 12 June 2018, Council authorised the General Manager to commence the preparation of an application to IPART for the continuation of the 2018/19 SV and allocated funds for an associated community engagement program.

The Muswellbrook Shire Community Panel was reconvened in 2018 initially by way of a direct invitation to previous participants, followed by an Expression of Interest process promoted via local media and on Council's Facebook page ([Appendices 6 and 7 respectively](#)). A demographically representative group of 35 community members was selected for the Panel, with meetings held on the 6th and 20th of October 2018.

The Panel received an update on the SV Projects, viewed presentations on Council's finances and services and were provided the opportunity to ask questions of the General Manager and senior management team (the agenda for both of the October meetings are included as [Appendix 2](#)).

On Saturday, 20th October 2018, the 22 Muswellbrook Shire Community Panel members present at the meeting were asked to indicate their support for, or opposition to the continuation of the 2018/2019 SV. The outcome was as follows:

- 16 Panel members voted in support of the continuation of the existing SV;
- 4 Panel members voted in support of a revised SV; and
- 2 voted in opposition to the continuation of the SV.

Following are the comments and recommendations delivered by the Panel (by table):

- *Group 1: the group approves of the SRV, only if the local community user group both for the entertainment centre and the Olympic park remaster plan, are consulted for their final decision on the design on the masterplan. Emphasis on, that the groups have priority of opinion of the final draft of the master plan.*
- *Group 2: most of the group approve with some concern to: the amount of continual use for the Entertainment Centre and the justification for it; the amount of information that has been given to make a more informed decision; and a recommendation to have a lower rate applied for the farming sector.*
- *Group 3: Member 1 – all for the projects, 30 year (loan) term too long; Member 2 – yes, builds foundation for the future to build on; Member 3 – Yes! Great future projects for the Town!*
- *Group 4: Members 1 to 4 – Reduce SRV by 2% to residential. Projects to focus on include stormwater, job creation and Olympic Park project; Member 5 – In favour of the proposed SRV.*
- *Group 5: Member 1 – looks to the future for kids, Olympic Park is an asset. Doubtful of benefits of Performance Centre; Member 2 – doubtful that Muswellbrook is a regional centre. Proposals are far too Muswellbrook centric; Member 3 – Take a punt for the future and do it!*
- *Group 6: We are in favour of the continuation of the SRV. The facilities proposed look to be an excellent investment in the future of the Shire. We would encourage comprehensive end user/stakeholder engagement during the process of evaluating the plans of the two major projects (RECC and Olympic Park) through the process of deciding on the final designs.*

A deliberative democracy process provided the opportunity for considered discussion by a representative community group that was informed by detailed and accurate information. Discussion and contrary views were encouraged. The participants were willing to talk and listen with civility and respect. The Panel was reminded that all views were to be considered sincerely on their merits, not by how they were made or who was making them. Many points of view held by significant portions of the population received attention.

Feedback from Panel members was constructive and has informed the decision making concerning the details of the proposal. Council will continue to use the format as part of its ongoing program of community consultation and engagement into the future.

It is noted that armed with all the information available to Council on the proposed SV and those projects and programs included within Council's application, members of the Community Panel not only supported the proposal but became advocates within the wider community for the proposal and associated projects.



Above: 2018/19 Muswellbrook Shire Community Panel



Above: 2017/18 Muswellbrook Shire Community Panel

Letters to ratepayers

Council wrote to all ratepayers in the Shire on 5th October 2018 prior to the commencement of the telephone and online survey, undertaken by Jetty Research to gauge the level of community support for the proposed continuation of the SV and associated projects. The letter provided ratepayers with notification of the forthcoming survey and outlined available options to support the proposed rate increase or to not support the proposed SV continuation.

A copy of the letter is included as [Appendix 3](#).

Surveys

Following on from a series of telephone surveys conducted in 2017 and 2016 to establish benchmarks against which to measure Council's future performance and to gauge support for Council's strategic direction, Jetty Research was commissioned to undertake a further telephone survey and parallel online survey on Council's behalf in 2018. The purpose of the survey was to gauge support for Council's proposal to submit an application to IPART for the continuation of the 2018/19 SV. A full report on the findings of the survey is included as [Appendix 4](#). Comments and direct feedback provided by those who participated in the telephone and online survey is included in [Confidential Appendix 1](#). Following is a summary of the methodology and the findings of the telephone and online survey.

Telephone Survey

In August 2018 Council commissioned Jetty Research to conduct a random and representative telephone survey of its adult residents, to understand community sentiment towards a proposed continuation of the existing 12.43% SV (plus rate peg). The random telephone survey was accompanied by an opt-in online survey, allowing all those interested in the subject an opportunity to have their say.

The random CATI (telephone) survey, of adult residents living in the 2328 and 2333 postcodes, was conducted from 18th to 29th October 2018, using a questionnaire devised by Jetty Research in conjunction with Council. Residents were not initially informed of the survey's subject matter, to avoid response/non-response bias.

Total sample size for the telephone survey was 509, with a random sampling error of +/- 4.3% at the 95% confidence level. Among the survey's major conclusions:

1. Awareness of the existing SV was high, with 69% of CATI respondents claiming knowledge.
2. Likewise, 62% of CATI respondents said they had heard (unprompted) about Council's latest proposal to continue the SV, and 68% recalled (once prompted) receiving a letter from Council explaining the rationale for the continuation.
3. **Among CATI respondents, support for and opposition to the proposed continuation of the SV was almost evenly split, with 45% supportive and 47% opposed (the balance being unsure).** Among those supportive, the main reasons were a belief that Muswellbrook needed better facilities (mentioned unprompted by 23% of all telephone respondents), and/or that the planned facilities would be good for the community and its future (12%). Among those opposed, the main reasons were a perception that they did not trust Council or that it was wasteful (14% of all telephone respondents), that rates were already too high (10%) and/or that they couldn't afford the increase (8%).

Online survey

Council commissioned Jetty Research to host a self-selecting online survey, in parallel with the telephone survey, to provide an additional avenue for community members to have their say on the proposed SV. The survey was live between 19th October and 5th November 2018, and was promoted on Council's website and Council's Facebook page.

Online survey questions mirrored the telephone survey. **Total sample size for the online survey was 395 completions** (from 1324 views of the survey and 620 survey commencements). Due to the self-selecting (i.e. "opt-in") nature of the online survey, and the fact that it was more likely to be completed by those with strong views and/or a high level of interest in the subject matter, random sampling error cannot be applied to the results, which in turn means that the online findings cannot be extrapolated to the wider Muswellbrook Shire adult population. **However, the high participation rate in the self-selecting online survey further confirms a high level of awareness of the proposed continuation of the SV.**

Online respondents were significantly more opposed to the continuation of the SV in all respects. Only 16% of those completing the online survey supported the SV being continued, while 72% opposed it (and the balance unsure). For these residents there was a much stronger belief that Council couldn't be trusted or was wasteful (27% of all online respondents), that rates were already too high (19%), and/or that they could not afford the increase (16%)

The attached report of the survey results provides details of the questions asked, independent analysis, details relating to the methodology of the survey and an explanation of the results ([Appendix 4](#)).

Traditional Media - Outputs

Council distributed media releases and held a media briefing with local media organisations to explain the rationale behind the proposed continuation of the 2018/19 SV, to outline the proposal and associated projects, and to provide answers to a number of frequently asked questions. Copies of media output material is included as [Appendix 5](#).

| Date | Distribution | Description |
|-----------|---|--|
| 27/08/18 | Muswellbrook Chronicle ABC Upper Hunter Radio 2NM | Media release: <i>Investing in the Future</i> (Appendix 5) |
| 3/10/2018 | Muswellbrook Chronicle ABC Upper Hunter Radio 2NM | Media briefing: Powerpoint presentation (Appendix 5) FAQ document: (Appendix 9) Sound grabs: General Manager |

Traditional Media - Coverage

News articles and stories relating to the proposed continuation of the SV were published in print and online versions of the *Muswellbrook Chronicle* and information was also distributed via online and broadcast versions of ABC Upper Hunter and Radio 2NM. Copies of the print news articles as well as screen shots and links to other media coverage is included as [Appendix 6](#).

| Date | Media | Description |
|-----------|-------------------------------|---|
| 27/08/18 | Muswellbrook Chronicle Online | News article: <i>Muswellbrook Shire Council inviting residents to join Community Consultation Panel</i> |
| 3/10/2018 | Muswellbrook Chronicle Online | News article: <i>Several upgrades are still in the pipeline as Muswellbrook Shire Council aims for further IPART approval</i> |
| 4/10/2018 | ABC Upper Hunter Broadcast | Radio interview: General Manager interviewed in relation to proposed continuation of Special Variation |
| 4/10/2018 | Radio 2NM Broadcast | Radio interview: General Manager interviewed in relation to proposed continuation of Special Variation |
| 12/10/18 | Muswellbrook Chronicle Online | News article: <i>Muswellbrook Shire Council unveils proposed Regional Entertainment and Conference Centre architectural submissions</i> |
| 12/10/18 | Muswellbrook Chronicle Print | News article: <i>Steady as she goes</i> |

Social Media Outputs

Details of Council's posts are included as [Appendix 7](#).

| Date | Post Analytics | Post Content |
|------------|--|---|
| 22/8/2018 | Reach: 1384 Engagement: 330 Comment: 4 Share: 2 | <i>Expressions of Interest for Community Consultation Panel</i> |
| 27/8/2018 | Reach: 719 Engagement: 43 Comment: 7 Share: 1 | <i>Invitation to join Community Consultation Panel</i> |
| 4/10/2018 | Reach: 1972 Engagement: 393 Comment: 1 Share: 8 | <i>Message from the General Manager</i> |
| 22/10/2018 | Reach: 5172 Engagement: 876 Comment: 17 Share: 32 | <i>Have your say on the proposed continuation of the Special Rate Variation</i> |
| 9/1/2019 | Reach: 555 Engagement: 5 Comment: 0 Share: 0 | <i>Public Exhibition Draft Delivery Program 2017-21</i> |

Social Media Coverage

A summary of social media coverage and public comments posted by community members on social media pages is included in [Appendix 8](#). Further details are included in [Confidential Appendix 1](#).

| Date | Facebook Page | Description |
|-----------|------------------------|---|
| 4/10/2018 | Radio 2NM Broadcast | <i>Muswellbrook Shire Council applying for continuation of Special Rate Variation</i> |
| 4/10/2018 | Muswellbrook Chronicle | <i>News article: Several upgrades are still in the pipeline as Muswellbrook Shire Council aims for further IPART approval</i> |

Other promotional activities

In addition to the use of social and traditional media and direct contact with ratepayers, Council also circulated the following information concerning the proposed rate increase and associated projects (copies of materials are attached as [Appendix 9](#)):

- Frequently Asked Questions information:** Council's *Fact Sheet: Proposed Continuation of Special Rate Variation* was distributed to the media and Community Panel and available to the community via Council's website and at Council's physical locations.
- Muswellbrook Shire Council Website:** Home page "tile" leading to Information on Proposed Application to IPART for Continuation of SRV from October 16th, 2018 to February 8th 2019 www.muswellbrook.nsw.gov.au
- Public exhibition of IP&R documents** (for a full details refer to Part B Section 6, addressing Criterion 4, of Council's application)
- Public exhibition of project plans and business cases:** Council endorsed project plans and business cases for each of the Olympic Park Sports Precinct Upgrades and RECC projects, which have been placed on exhibition for 28 days.

The five concept designs for the RECC were placed on Public Exhibition at Council's Administration Centre, Muswellbrook and Denman Libraries and on Council's website between 12 October and 8 November 2018 and a drop-in information stand was held at Campbells Corner from 8:00 am to 4:45 pm on 1 November 2018. Three written submissions were received and approximately 23 people advised their preference and/ or comments at the drop-in stand (details on public submissions are included in the Confidential Appendix 1).

Additionally, the following community consultation has been undertaken in relation to Olympic Park:

| Community Consultation for Olympic Park | |
|---|--|
| Date | Consultation Process |
| 16/12/16 30/02/17 | – Public Exhibition - Recreation Needs and Management Study |
| 03/01/17 03/02/17 | – 2017 SV Online survey from 3/1/17 – 3/2/17 |
| 17/01/17 24/01/17 | – 2017 SV Telephone survey of 550 residents conducted |
| 23/01/17 | 2017 SV Muswellbrook Community Forum |
| 24/01/17 | 2017 SV Denman Community Forum |
| 16/05/17 | Olympic Park User Group meeting, Muswellbrook Aquatic Centre |
| 16/08/17 | Olympic Park User Group meeting, Muswellbrook Aquatic Centre |
| 15/11/17 | Olympic Park User Group meeting, Muswellbrook Aquatic Centre |
| 20/11/17 18/12/17 | – Public Exhibition - Stage 1 Olympic Park Master Plan |
| 05/06/18 | Community Information Session – Upper Hunter Conservatorium of Music |
| 03/07/18 | Meeting with school representatives (Muswellbrook South Public School, Pacific Brook Christian School, St Joseph's High School) |
| 25/09/18 | Olympic Park User Group meeting, Muswellbrook Aquatic Centre |
| 25/10/18 29/10/18 | – Meetings with Muswellbrook Cycle Club, Muswellbrook Junior and Senior Rugby League, Muswellbrook Park Tennis, Muswellbrook Touch Football, and Olympic Park Tennis re development of design for Olympic Park Master Plan |
| 01/11/18 | Olympic Park User Group meeting, Muswellbrook Aquatic Centre |

Direct feedback

Council received feedback from ratepayers and other community stakeholders in the form of direct contact and submissions. Further details are included in [Confidential Appendix 1](#).

2018/19 Special Variation Community Consultation and Engagement

As Council's 2019/20 SV Application is for a continuation of the 2018/19 Special Variation, Council includes the report covering all community consultation and engagement conducted for Council's 2018/19 SV application as [Appendix 10](#), in support of this application. All feedback recorded during the course of the 2018/19 Special Variation Application community engagement process has also been included as [Confidential Appendix 2](#).

Appendices

| Appendix | Document Name |
|----------|---|
| 1 | Muswellbrook Community Engagement Strategy |
| 2 | Community Panel Agendas |
| 3 | Letter to ratepayers |
| 4 | Jetty Research report: <i>A survey of adult residents in the Muswellbrook Shire to measure awareness of and support for/opposition to the continuation of an existing 14.73% Special Rate Variation (including 2.3% rate peg)</i> |
| 5 | Media outputs |
| 6 | Media coverage |
| 7 | Social media outputs |
| 8 | Social media coverage and feedback |
| 9 | Other information and promotional materials: Website, FAQs, PE of projects |
| 10 | 2018/19 SV Consultation Report |

Confidential Appendices - included under separate cover

| Confidential Appendix | Document Name: Description |
|-----------------------|--|
| 1 | 2019/20 SV Consultation Report Confidential Appendices |
| 2 | 2018/19 SV Consultation Report Confidential Appendices |

APPENDIX 1 - Muswellbrook Community Engagement Strategy

Muswellbrook Shire Council Community Engagement Strategy 2016-2017

Muswellbrook Shire Council's Community Strategic Plan 2027 Community Engagement Strategy 2016-2017

Under NSW Integrated Planning & Reporting (IP&R) legislation, a newly elected Council is required to endorse its new 10-year Community Strategic Plan within six months of the local government election. The Muswellbrook Community Strategic Plan 2027 needs to be endorsed by the elected Council no later than March 2017. The Community Strategic Plan 2026 will be actioned through the Delivery Program and Operational Plan, these strategic planning documents are required to be implemented from 1 July 2017.

Council's strategic planning documents sit within the Integrated Planning Framework and include:

- The Community Strategic Plan 2027 (a 10 year horizon)
- Resourcing Strategy which is made up of the long term financial plan, workforce management plan and asset management plan
- Delivery program 2017-2020
- Operational Plan 2017-2018

Purpose of the Community Engagement Strategy

The community engagement strategy articulates how Council will engage with the community to ensure that the Community Strategic Plan is developed in line with the community's needs and reflects the community's vision for the future of the Muswellbrook Shire.

Objectives

- To identify the community's priorities and vision for the Muswellbrook Shire, its towns and villages over the next 10 years
- Develop a Delivery Program and Operational Plans to realise the community's vision and priorities
- Test the relevance of the pillars and themes of the draft 2027 Community Strategic Plan

Guiding principles

- Comply with 'The council charter' as per the NSW Local Government Act 1993 section 8
- Apply a deliberative democracy approach (see definition below) to community engagement
- Address social, environmental, economic and civic leadership issues in an

Muswellbrook Shire Council Community Engagement Strategy

2016-2017

integrated manner applying the 4 pillars of sustainability in the planning and reporting process.



Four pillars of the Community Strategic Plan 2027

2016-2017 Community Engagement Activities

- **Media releases**
Local radio and newspapers will be kept informed about the range of opportunities to provide feedback and "have your say"
- **Council newsletter**
Council's community newsletter will inform the community about the engagement process and how to get involved
- **Website feedback forum**
Council's website will include information about listening post sites; post it walls and a portal to lodge submissions and ideas
- **Listening Posts**
Council staff will collect community feedback at listening posts that will be set up at shopping centres
- **Post it walls and boxes**
Post it walls and feedback boxes will be provided at the libraries and swimming pools

Muswellbrook Shire Council Community Engagement Strategy

2016-2017

- **Submissions**

Local individuals and groups from across the Shire will be invited to make submissions for the consideration of the Community Panel

- **Community Panel**

Residents will be invited to join a group of 30 to 35 individuals that will meet regularly over a 2 to 3 month period to prepare a set of recommendations for Council on what the vision and priorities for Muswellbrook Shire should be. Individuals will be randomly invited to form a demographically representative Panel of residents drawn from across the Shire. The Panel use a 'deliberative democracy' approach. Once the Community Panel process is complete the Panel will present their views to the Council. The findings of the community panel and feedback collected from all the Community Engagement activities will inform the Community Strategic Plan 2027.

What is a deliberative democracy approach?

A deliberative democracy process provides the opportunity for considered discussion by a representative community group that is informed by detailed and accurate information. Discussion and contrary views are encouraged. The participants (community panel members) should be willing to talk and listen, with civility and respect. All views are to be considered sincerely on their merits, not by how they are made or who is making them. All points of view held by significant portions of the population should receive attention.

Following are the five characteristics of deliberative democracy that will be used in Council's Community Panel:

- *Information:* Accurate and relevant data is made available to all participants
- *Substantive balance:* Different positions are compared based on their supporting evidence
- *Diversity:* All major positions relevant to the matter are considered
- *Conscientiousness:* Participants sincerely weigh all arguments
- *Equal consideration:* Views are weighed based on evidence, not on who is advocating a particular view

Muswellbrook Shire Council Community Engagement Strategy
2016-2017

Time frame

| When | What |
|---------------------------|--|
| September 2016 | Local Government Election |
| October 2016 | Begin preparation of detailed documentation on councils plans and services for the Community Panel process |
| October 2016 | Council endorse a Community Engagement Strategy |
| October 2016 | Launch consultation activities; Listening posts, Media releases etc |
| November 2016 | Invitations sent to community members to participate in Community Panel |
| November 2016 | Community engagement activities |
| December 2016 | Community Panel Meets |
| 20 December to January 14 | Christmas Break |
| January and February 2017 | Community Panel Meets |
| March 2017 | Exhibit draft Community Strategic Plan 2027 |
| March 2017 | Community Strategic Plan 2026 is endorsed by Council |

APPENDIX 2 - Community Panel Agendas

AGENDA – Community Panel 1 - Saturday 6 October 2018 – Committee Rooms

Workshop focus: Introduction to Muswellbrook Shire Council – *setting the scene and where to from here.*

Workshop process: facilitated by General Manager, series of presentations, followed by group discussion and Q&A.

| Time | Content - Saturday 6 October 2018 | Speaker | Notes |
|--------------|--|-----------------|--|
| 9.30 | Introductions and Welcome | General Manager | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> welcome and thank the panel for participating; overview of structure for the day Housekeeping: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> emergency evacuation procedure; directions for onsite facilities; |
| 9.45 | Where to from here... | General Manager | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overview of IPART decision on Council's 2018 application for SV and what it means for the community Council's decision to reapply in 2019 for permanent SV |
| 10.00 | Presentation 1: Council's finances - income and expenditure | ██████████ | 45 mins – overview of Council's budget, revenue sources, expenditure and implications of SV (temporary vs permanent) + 15mins for Q&A |
| 11.00 | Morning Tea Break (30 mins) | | |
| 11.30 | Presentation 2: Special Variation Projects Update | ██████████ | 45 mins – update on: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> SV Projects - Olympic Park, Entertainment Centre; Aquatic Centre, Marketplace + 15mins Q&A |
| 12.30 | Lunch 45 min | | |
| 1.15 | Meet your Councillors | General Manager | 60 mins - No presentations – General Manager introduces the Councillors. Councillors visit each table in 5-10 minute intervals |
| 2:15 | Presentation 3: Muswellbrook Town Centre Masterplan Update | ██████████ | 45 mins – overview of Muswellbrook Town Centre Masterplan + 15mins Q&A |
| 3.15 | Presentation 4: Denman Town Centre Masterplan Update | ██████████ | 45 mins – overview of Denman Town Centre Masterplan + 15mins Q&A |
| 4.15 | Afternoon Tea and CLOSE at 4:30 | | |

AGENDA – Community Panel 2 - Saturday 20 October 2018 – Committee Rooms

| Time | Content - Saturday 20 October 2018 | Speaker | Notes |
|--------------|--|--------------------|--|
| 9.30 | Introductions and Welcome | General Manager | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • welcome • overview of structure for the day • Housekeeping: - 1 hr lunch for photo • emergency evacuation procedure; • directions for onsite facilities; |
| 9.45 | Overview of answers to questions | General Manager | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • review handout answers to questions |
| 10.00 | Additional information / questions: Q & A Panel | Council officers | [REDACTED] |
| 11.00 | Morning Tea Break (30 mins) | | |
| 11.30 | Additional information / questions: Q & A Panel continued | Council officers | Derek Finnigan; Carolyn O'Brien; Dennis Fernandes; Natalia Cowley. |
| 12.30 | Lunch 60 min | | |
| 1.30 | <i>Preparing the recommendation to Council</i> | General Manager | Panel discussions to determine recommendation |
| 2.30 | <i>Reaching consensus</i> | Group discussion | |
| 3.00 | Afternoon Tea during panel discussions | | |
| 3.30 | <i>Panel presentation</i> | Group Presentation | Panel presents findings to Councillors |
| 4.00 | CLOSE | | |

APPENDIX 3 - Letter to ratepayers

5 October 2018



017

Dear Ratepayer

MUSWELLBROOK SHIRE COUNCIL - PROPOSED CONTINUATION OF SPECIAL RATE VARIATION

Last year, Muswellbrook Shire Council applied for a permanent increase in rates across the Shire to fund a number of projects and programs identified as community priorities. The NSW Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) approved Council's application for one year and **IPART has invited Council to apply for the continuation of the Special Rate Variation (SRV) and to include it permanently in the rate base.**

Council is progressing with the program of works approved for funding by IPART. In order to see those projects through to completion, Council proposes to apply again to IPART to continue the SRV into the future.

Council is applying in line with the timetable set by the NSW Office of Local Government Guidelines. These Guidelines advise councils on how to seek a rate variation. We anticipate that updated guidelines will be released in December 2018 requiring applications to be submitted to IPART by early February 2019.

Council is now seeking your feedback on the continuation of the SRV. To better understand your thoughts on this matter, Council has commissioned Jetty Research to conduct a telephone survey of at least 500 residents to gauge the level of community awareness of the proposed continuation. **Calls will commence during the week beginning Monday 15 October 2018.**

You will be asked to indicate a preference between the following:

Option 1: A continuation of the Special Rate Variation – continuing permanently in the rate base IPART's approved one-off Special Rate Variation for 2018/19 of 14.73% (including 2.3% rate peg) and increasing the 2018/19 rate base for 2019/20 by IPART's 2.7% rate peg.

In return you will get:

- An additional allocation of \$300,000 per year for stormwater drainage and \$100,000 per year for roads and parks asset maintenance programs.
- Development of the Olympic Park Sports Precinct and the Regional Entertainment and Conference Centre with a combined value of \$26,010,000 made up of:
 - an SRV contribution of \$11,800,000;
 - grants of \$10,500,000;
 - voluntary planning agreements contributions of \$3,710,000; and
 - annual operational maintenance and net yearly operational contributions of \$700,000.

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Email: council@muswellbrook.nsw.gov.au • Web: www.muswellbrook.nsw.gov.au

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- Please note: if the above grants and voluntary planning agreements are not received or if the amounts received are less than the figures above, one or both projects may be suspended, reduced in size or cancelled and the Special Rate Variation will be revisited, and ratepayers informed of any material changes.
- An additional \$250,000 towards the Job Creation program and \$62,000 to offset a shortfall in rating revenues arising from a change in NSW Government policy with respect to biodiversity offsets.

Option 2: Discontinuation of the Special Rate Variation – the Special Rate Variation of 12.43% (excluding 2.3% rate peg from 2018/19) will not be continued in 2019/20 and your rates will return to the pre-SRV rating amount, which will be adjusted only by IPART's 2019/20 rate peg of 2.7%.

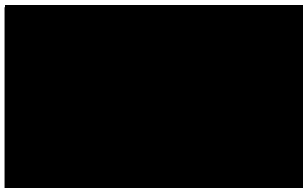
In return for this option:

- There will be no additional funds available for stormwater drainage, roads or parks.
- The development of the Olympic Park Sports Precinct and the Regional Entertainment and Conference Centre will not proceed.
- No additional funds for the Job Creation program and no recovery of rates for mining biodiversity offsets.

For more information about Council's proposed Special Rate Variation and associated projects, please visit Council's website at www.muswellbrook.nsw.gov.au

Council will review and include all community feedback in the Special Rate Variation application when it is submitted in February 2019.

Yours sincerely,



Fiona Plesman
General Manager

APPENDIX 4 - Jetty Research report: A survey of adult residents in the Muswellbrook Shire to measure awareness of and support or/opposition to the continuation of an existing 14.73% Special Rate Variation (including 2.3% rate peg)

Attached under separate cover.

APPENDIX 5 – Media outputs

August 27, 2018 - Media release



MEDIA RELEASE

Investing in the Future

The NSW Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal has determined Council's application for a special rate variation (SRV) and approved a 12 month temporary increase in rates.

Council is now seeking Expressions of Interest for a Community Consultation Panel to gauge community support for the continuation of that SRV beyond 2018/19.

Residents are invited to join a demographically representative panel of 35 individuals drawn from across the Shire to meet in October.

The panel will use a 'deliberative democracy' approach. Once the consultation process is complete the panel will present their views to the Council. Feedback from the community panel will inform the IPART application.

Participants will be required to attend both of the following sessions:

Saturday 6 October, 2018 9:30am to 4:00pm

Saturday 20 October, 2018 9.30am to 4.00pm

At: Council Administration Building, 157 Maitland Street, Muswellbrook.

An honorarium of \$200 per forum will be paid to each attending panel member. Full catering will be provided on the day, including morning and afternoon tea, lunch and tea/coffee facilities.

To record an Expression of Interest in joining the Community Consultation Panel, please complete the registration form on Council's web site www.muswellbrook.nsw.gov.au or call Nicole Argent on 6549 3752 by Monday, 3 September, 2018.

Special Rate Variation 2019

This year Muswellbrook Shire Council applied for a permanent increase in rates across the Shire to fund a number of projects and programs identified as community priorities



Why is Council applying again ?

- ✿ This year IPART approved Council's application **for one year** and
- ✿ **IPART Invited Council to apply in 2019 for the SRV to continue and be included permanently in the rate base.**
- ✿ Council is now preparing to apply in February 2019

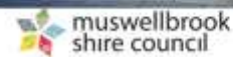


Why the need for SRV ?

- ✿ An additional allocation of \$300,000 per year for stormwater drainage and \$100,000 per year for roads and parks asset maintenance programs.
- ✿ Development of the Olympic Park Sports Precinct and the Regional Entertainment and Conference Centre with a combined value of \$26M



Entertainment Centre – design comp

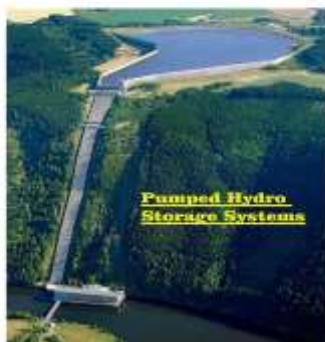


Olympic Park Precinct



Why the SRV ?

- ✿ \$62,000 to offset a shortfall in mine rating revenues from biodiversity offsets
- ✿ An additional \$250,000 towards the **Job Creation** program eg energy & tourism – opening up the Wollemi



Community consultation

- ✿ Community panel on **Saturday 6th and 20th October** – 30 randomly selected residents
- ✿ Telephone survey of at least 500 residents
- ✿ **Calls will commence during the week beginning Monday 15 October 2018.**



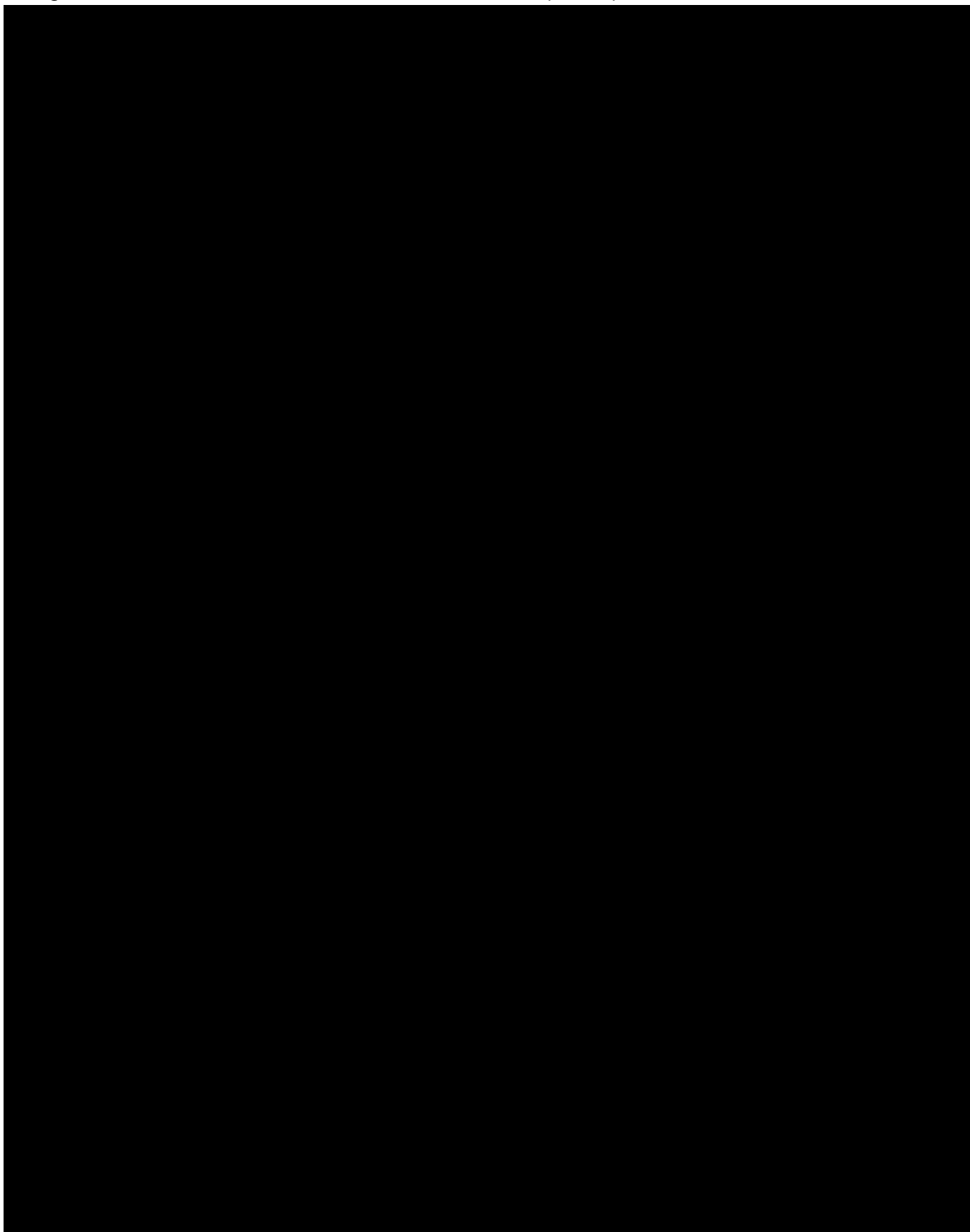
If SRV not approved in 2019

- ✿ The 12.43% increase won't continue in 2019/20 rates (excluding rate peg)
- ✿ Rates will return to the pre-SRV amount, except for the rate peg of 2.7%.
- ✿ No major projects



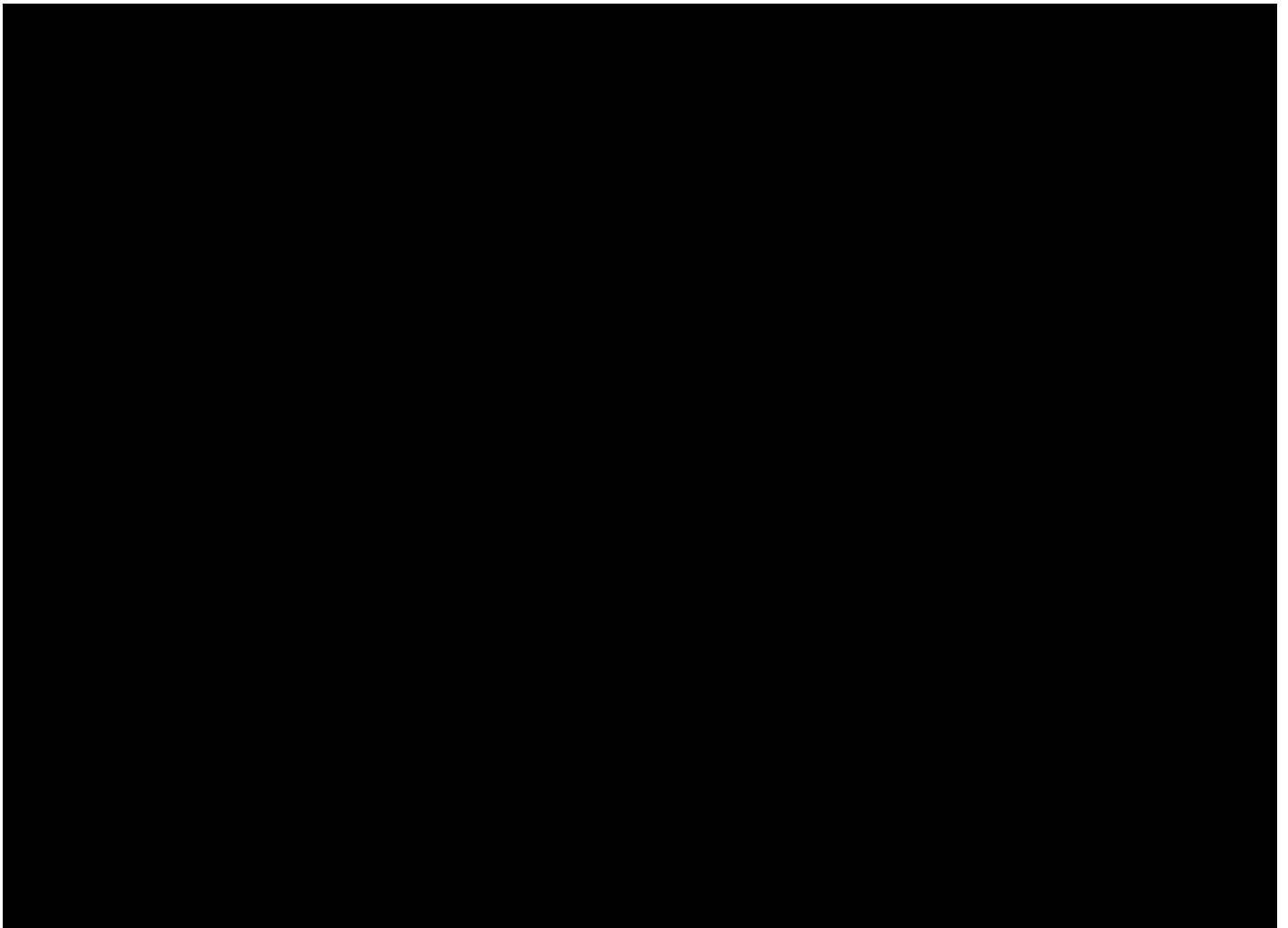
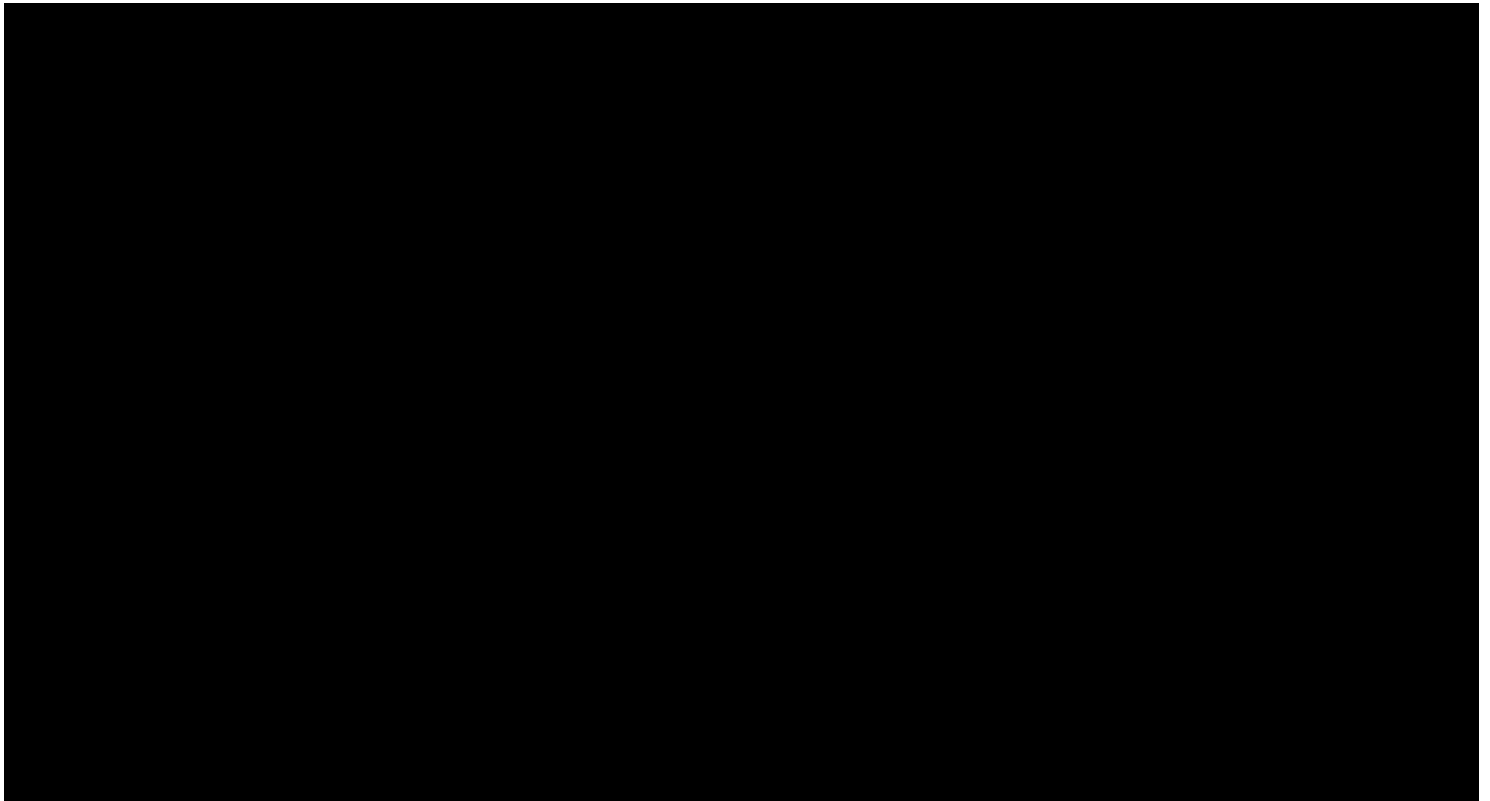
APPENDIX 6 – Media Coverage

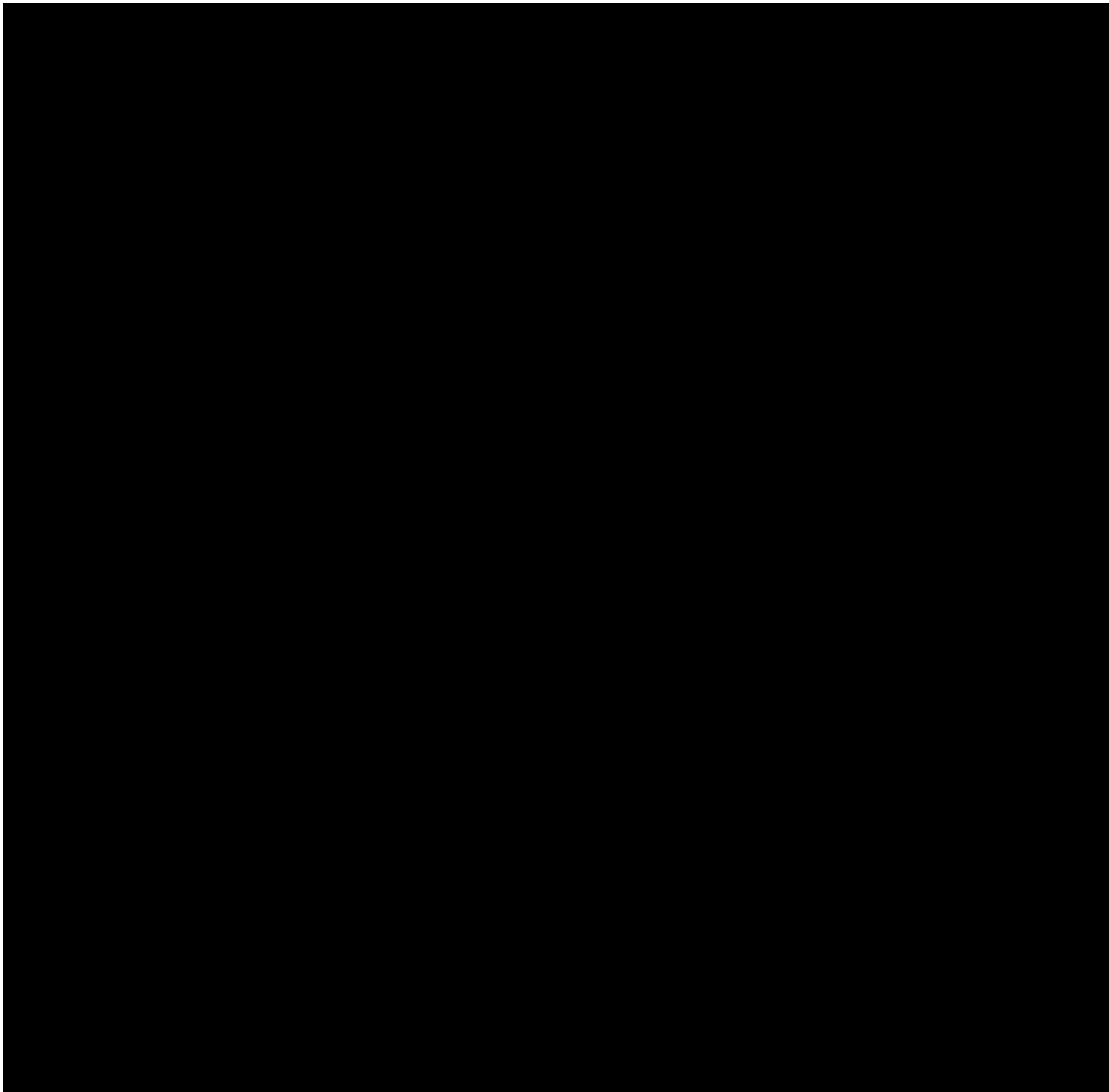
August 27, 2018: Source - *Muswellbrook Chronicle (online)*



October 3rd, 2018:

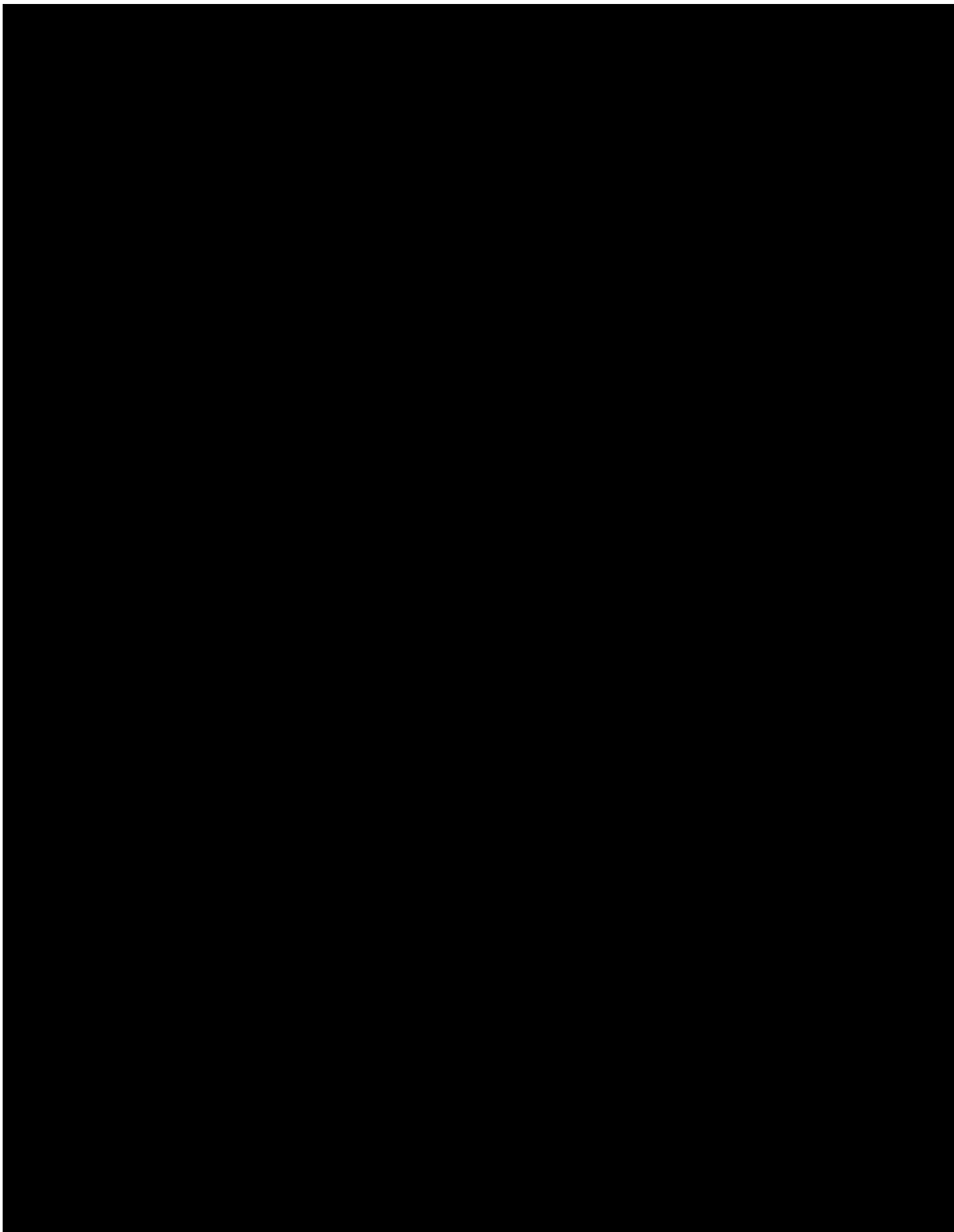
Source - *Radio 2NM (online)*





October 3, 2018:

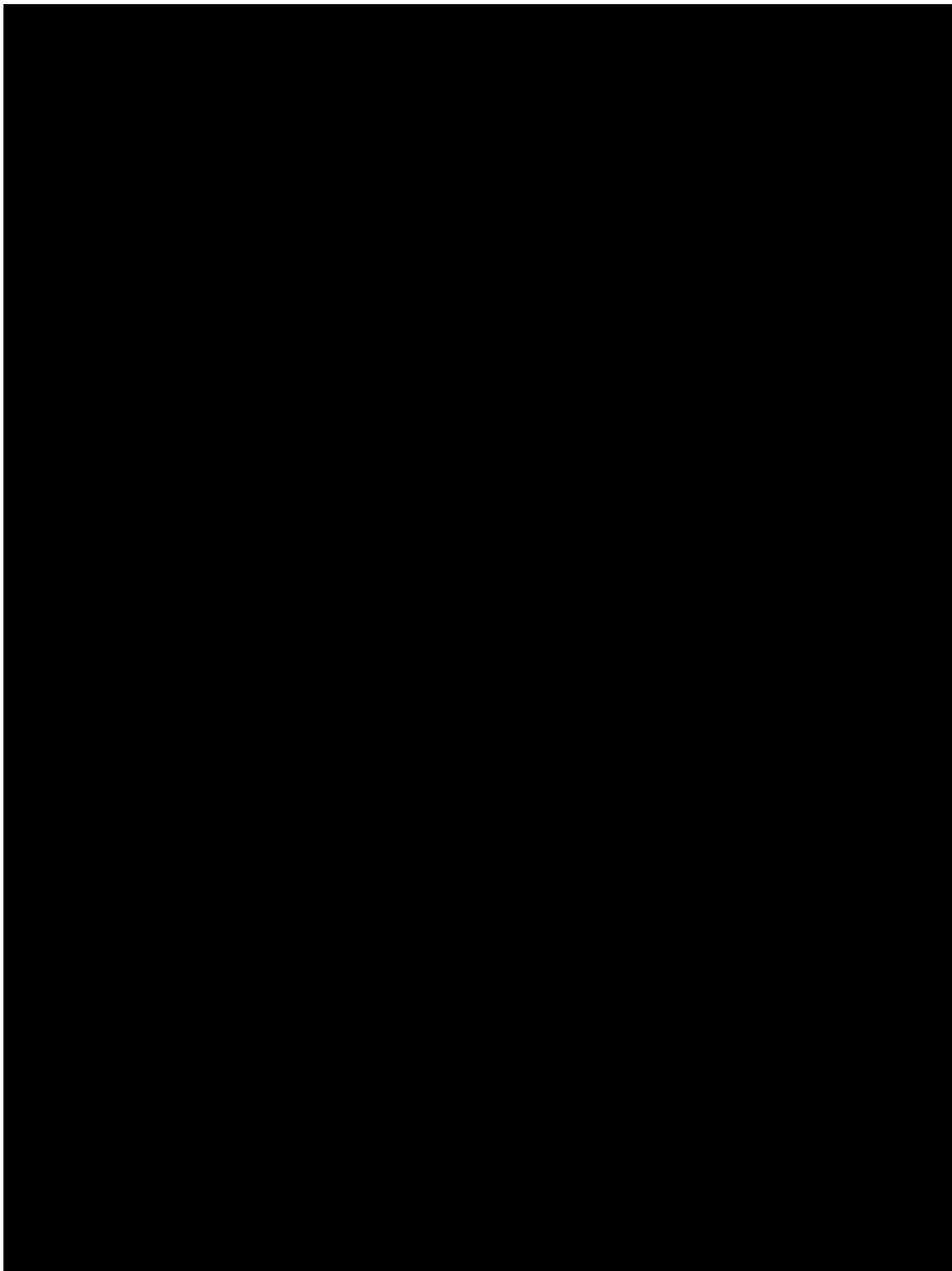
Source - *Muswellbrook Chronicle (online)*

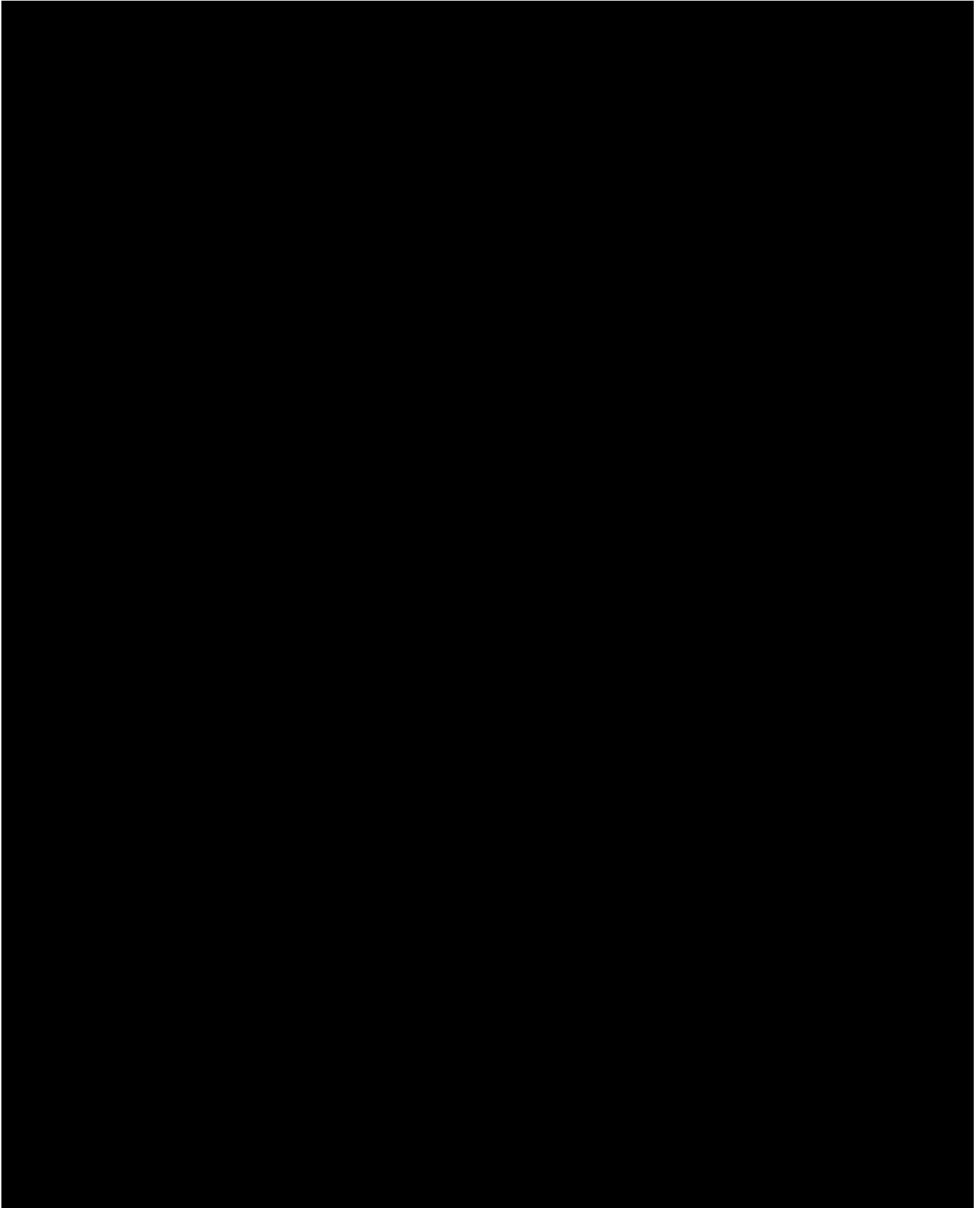


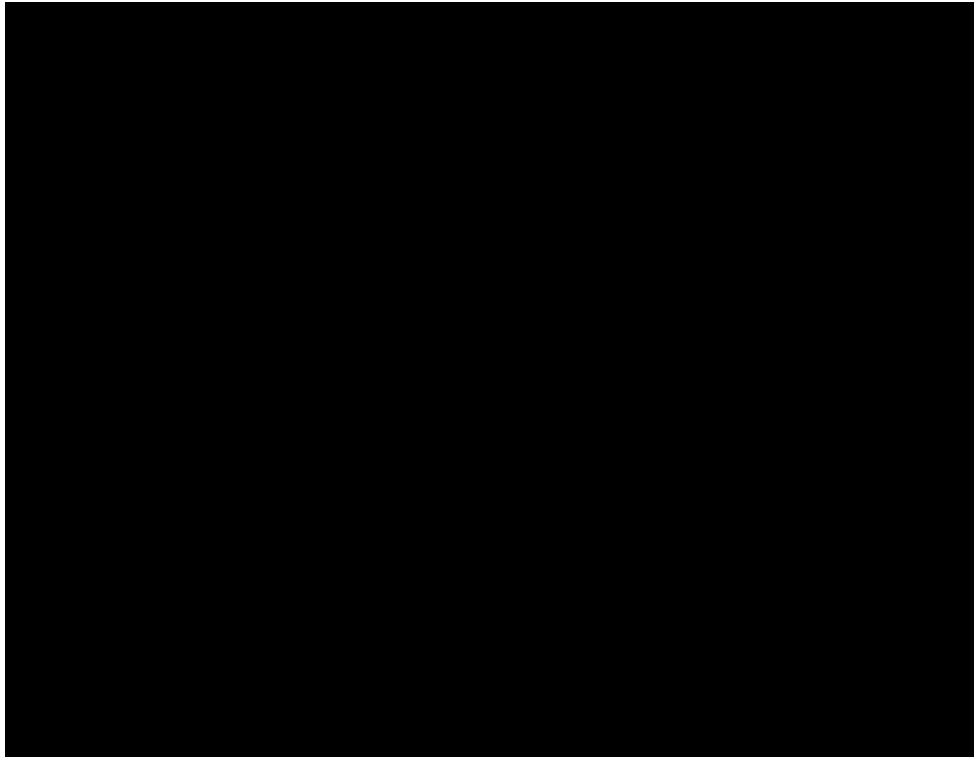


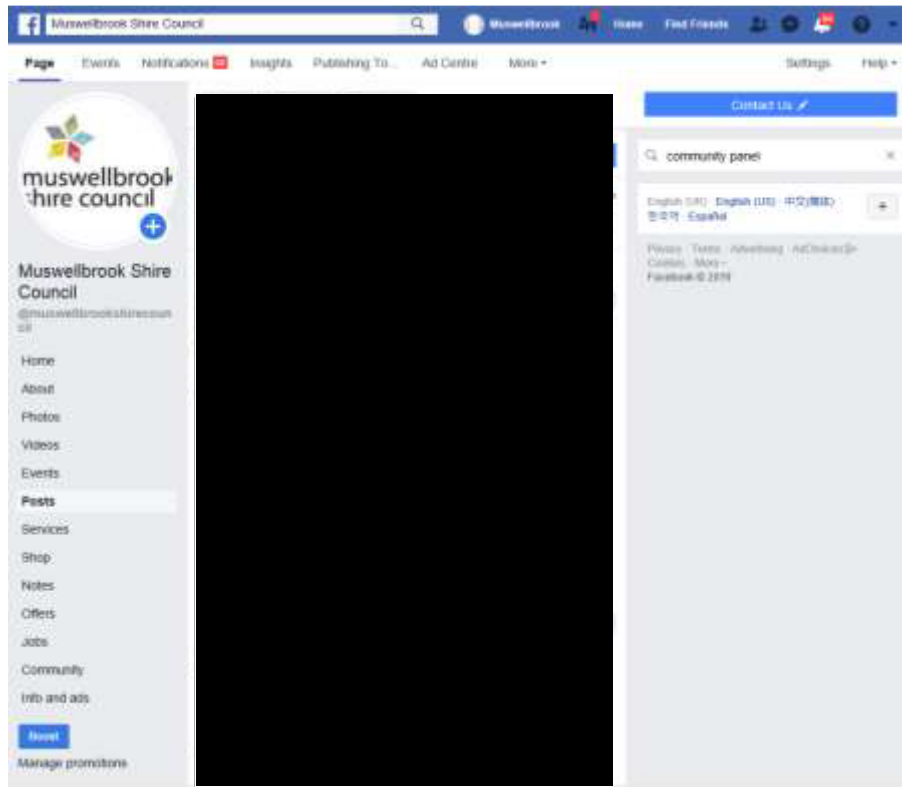
October 12, 2018:

Source - *Muswellbrook Chronicle (print)*

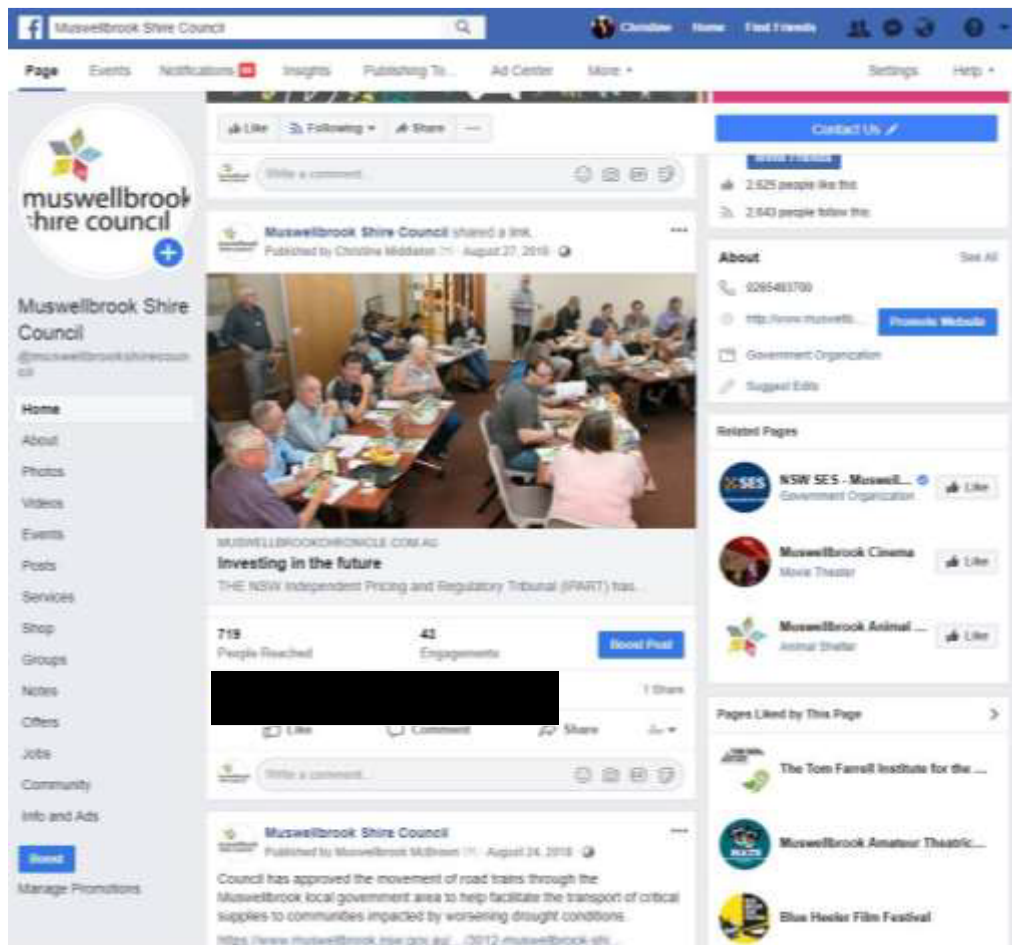








August 27th, 2018 Invitation to join Community Consultation Panel



October 4th, 2018 *Message from the General Manager*

The screenshot shows the Facebook page for Muswellbrook Shire Council. The main post, published by Muswellbrook McLeary on 4 October, addresses media reports and clarifies that the Council is not proposing new rate variations. It lists three points: 1. Council is not proposing a new special rate variation or rate increase; 2. The rate variation was not passed on to farmers or pensioners; 3. It was always the Council's intention for 2018/2019 rating levels to continue permanently. The post includes a photo of a woman and statistics showing 1,959 people reached and 353 engagements.

Muswellbrook Shire Council
Published by Muswellbrook McLeary · 4 October ·

In response to media reports yesterday there is need to clarify some issues raised in social media.
Council is not proposing any new rate variations or increases. This reporting related to the continuation of the special rate variation already approved by SPART for 2018/2019.

On behalf of Council, I would like to reassure the community that:

1. Council is not proposing to apply for a new special rate variation nor is council proposing to increase rates above the current level;
2. The rate variation was not passed on to farmers or pensioners;
3. It was always Council's intention for the 2018/2019 rating levels to continue permanently in order to deliver and maintain priority community projects and maintain ongoing additional levels of service.

Please forward your questions or feedback to Council by emailing council@muswellbrook.nsw.gov.au

1,959 People reached **353** Engagements [Boost Post](#)

Community [See all](#)

- 2,514 people like this
- 2,529 people follow this

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- Info and ads

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Manage promotions

Events

- Posts
- Services
- Shop
- Notes
- Offers
- Jobs
- Community
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Promote

Manage promotions

October 22nd, 2018 *Have your say on the proposed continuation of the Special Rate Variation*

Muswellbrook Shire Council

Like Follow Share

Muswellbrook Shire Council
Published by Christine Middleton (1) · 22 October at 15:49 · 🌐

Have your say on the proposed continuation of the Special Rate Variation
Community consultation and feedback is sought on Council's application to IPART for the proposed continuation of the Special Rate Variation.
Have Your Say by completing the online survey at <https://muswellbrook2018.questionpro.com...> See more

0 0 Boost Post

Contact Us

Our story
This is the official Facebook page for Muswellbrook Shire Council.
[See more](#)

Page tips [See all](#)

- Have friends who might like your Page?
Invite friends to like Muswellbrook Shire Council and help you connect with more people.
[See all Page tips](#)

2,460 likes +44 this week

2,483 follows

See Pages Feed
Posts from Pages that you've liked as your Page

Boost "The Indoo..." for \$28
This post is performing better than 70% of your posts. Boost it to reach up to 15,000...

15,630 post reach this week

Muswellbrook Shire Council

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Manage promotions

Muswellbrook Shire Council

Home Find Friends

APPENDIX 9 - Other information and promotional materials

October 3 – November 5, Frequently Asked Questions - distributed at media briefing and Community Panel and to the public upon request; accessible via Council's website



**muswellbrook
shire council**

FACT SHEET

Proposed Continuation of Special Rate Variation

Investing in the Future

Last year Muswellbrook Shire Council applied for a permanent rate increase across the Shire to fund a number of projects identified as community priorities. The NSW Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) approved Council's application for one year and invited Council to apply for a continuation of the rate increase and to include it permanently in the rate base.

What is Council seeking from the community?

The community has indicated its desire for a number of projects including:

- Improved stormwater infrastructure
- A Regional Entertainment and Conference Centre
- Upgrade to Olympic Park Sports Precinct
- Additional support for job creation across the Shire

Council also believes that these projects are worth funding as it will help with the transition of the Shire to a significant Regional Centre within the Upper Hunter – which the community has sought in survey responses and feedback. However Council cannot fund these projects with the funds presently available.

Residents will be asked to indicate a preference between:

| Option 1 | Option 2 |
|--|--|
| A continuation of the Special Rate Variation, permanently in the rate base of IPART's approved one-off Special Rate Variation for 2018/19 of 14.73% (including the 2.3% rate peg) and increasing the 2018/19 rate base for 2019/20 by IPART's 2.7% rate peg. | Discontinuation of the Special Rate Variation – the Special Rate Variation of 12.43% (excluding 2.3% rate peg from 2018/19) will not be continued in 2019/20 and rates will return to the pre-SRV rating amount which will be adjusted only by IPART's 2019/20 rate peg of 2.7%. |

How does Council get community feedback?

Residents and other stakeholders will be asked to provide feedback on their awareness of the proposed continuation of the SRV and to share views on the proposed rate increase and projects to be funded. Council has engaged Jetty Research to conduct a telephone survey of 500 residents – ensuring that those surveyed are representative of the Shire's population by age, gender and place of residence – to seek the views of the community.

Two day-long Community Panel sessions will be held and all residents can provide feedback by writing, emailing or calling Council. A self selecting online survey will run in parallel with the telephone survey - this will be accessed via Council's website. All community feedback will be reviewed and included in the SRV application when it is submitted in February 2019.

What if Council is not successful in it's application to IPART?

If the application for the continuation of the SRV is not successful, Council will not be in a position to fund a Regional Entertainment and Conference Centre or the upgrade to the Olympic Park Sports Precinct.

Has Council sought funding from the Government for these projects?

Council has applied for funding from the NSW Government to contribute to the upgrade of the Olympic Park Sports Precinct and the Regional Entertainment and Conference Centre, totaling \$10 million. Both funding applications are dependent on a continuation of the SRV being approved.

Entertainment and Conference Centre Concepts

Following the October Council meeting there will be available a one page public exhibition document for each design which will include a design statement, rendered image, floor plan, and elevation.



Conrad Gargett Concept



D/ND Concept



Francis Jones-Moreben Thorp Concept



Tankin Zulaikha Greer Concept



Brewster Hjorth Concept

EX/EC021

Muswellbrook Shire Council • ABN 96 964 180 044
PO Box 122, Muswellbrook NSW 2333 • 157 Maitland Street, Muswellbrook
Ph: 02 6549 3700 • www.muswellbrook.nsw.gov.au



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LATEST NEWS

MUSWELLBROOK & DENMAN

NSW Seniors Week Muswellbrook and Denman 13-24 February 2019

46th 2019 MUSWELLBROOK ART PRIZE

46th Muswellbrook Art Prize - Adjudicator and Finalists Announced

Public Exhibition Proposed Development Bloodwood Road Muswellbrook

muswellbrook regional arts centre

Upper Hunter Library Network

SUSTAINABLE COUNCIL

The Return of Muscle Creek Landcare

Night closures and detours on Denman Bridge, Denman on Saturday 9 February and Saturday 23 February

Aboriginal Oral History Project

Council Works Olympic Park Carpark, Cemetery and Victoria Park Upgrade

"We Live Here" Buy Local Gift Card Business Registration Form

Denman Town Centre Revitalisation

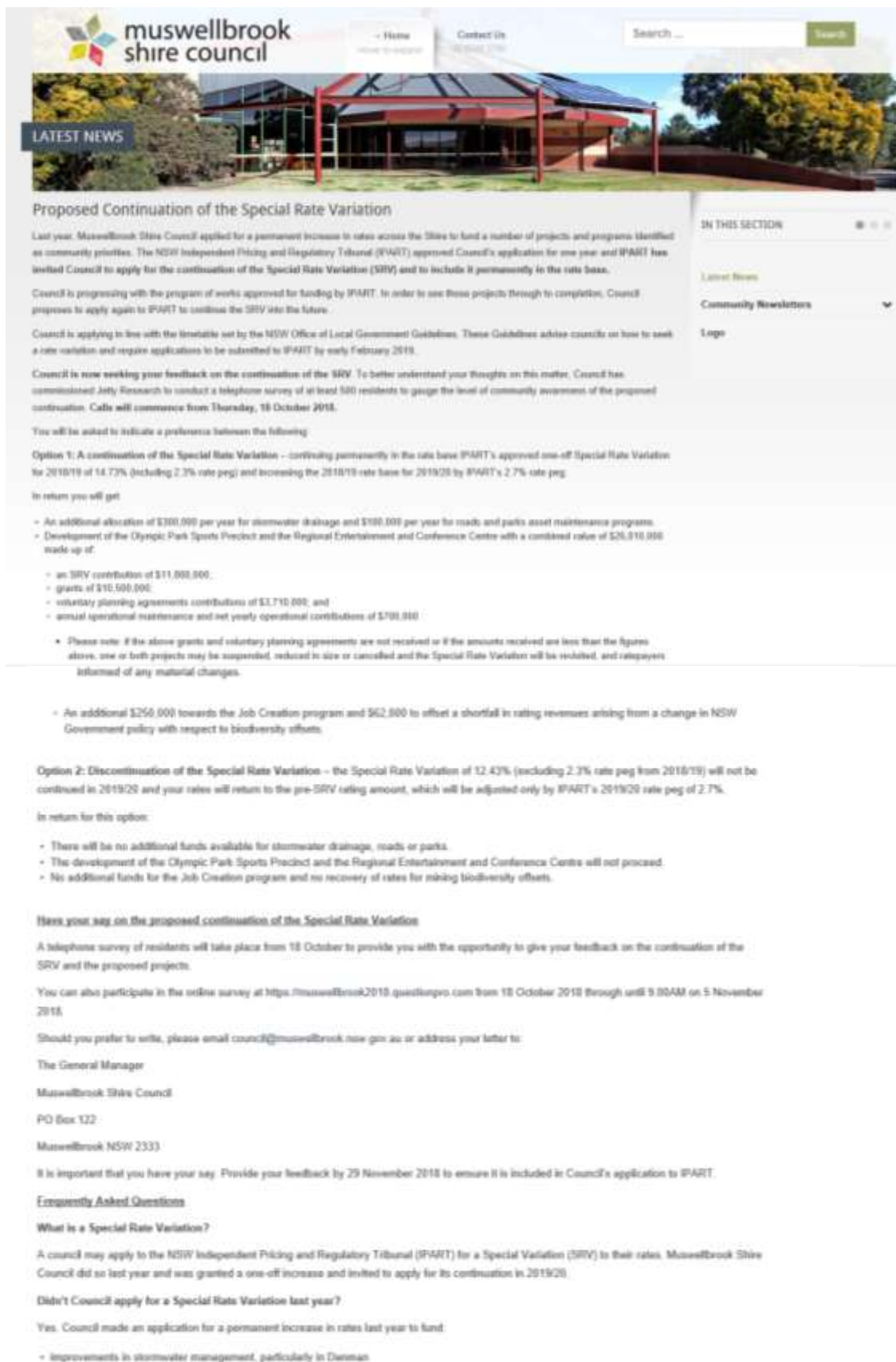
EPA Licence Information - Muswellbrook Shire Council

Proposed Continuation of the Special Rate Variation

Managing Water - Voluntary Level 1 Water Restrictions

Get your garden SORTED Garden Mulch for Sale

Dedicated Special Variation webpage: <https://muswellbrook.nsw.gov.au/index.php/2015-05-29-01-29-46/3046-proposed-continuation-of-the-special-rate-variation>



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LATEST NEWS

Proposed Continuation of the Special Rate Variation

Last year, Muswellbrook Shire Council applied for a permanent increase in rates across the Shire to fund a number of projects and programs identified as community priorities. The NSW Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) approved Council's application for one year and IPART has invited Council to apply for the continuation of the Special Rate Variation (SRV) and to include it permanently in the rate base.

Council is progressing with the program of works approved for funding by IPART. In order to see these projects through to completion, Council proposes to apply again to IPART to continue the SRV into the future.

Council is applying to live with the timetable set by the NSW Office of Local Government Guidelines. These Guidelines advise councils on how to seek a rate variation and require applications to be submitted to IPART by early February 2019.

Council is now seeking your feedback on the continuation of the SRV. To better understand your thoughts on this matter, Council has commissioned Jolly Research to conduct a telephone survey of at least 500 residents to gauge the level of community awareness of the proposed continuation. Calls will commence from Thursday, 18 October 2018.

You will be asked to indicate a preference between the following:

Option 1: A continuation of the Special Rate Variation – continuing permanently in the rate base IPART's approved one-off Special Rate Variation for 2018/19 of 14.73% (including 2.3% rate peg) and increasing the 2018/19 rate base for 2019/20 by IPART's 2.7% rate peg.

In return you will get:

- An additional allocation of \$300,000 per year for stormwater drainage and \$100,000 per year for roads and parks asset maintenance programs.
- Development of the Olympic Park Sports Precinct and the Regional Entertainment and Conference Centre with a combined value of \$26,810,000 made up of:
 - an SRV contribution of \$11,000,000.
 - grants of \$10,500,000.
 - voluntary planning agreements contributions of \$3,710,000, and
 - annual operational maintenance and net yearly operational contributions of \$700,000.
- Please note: if the above grants and voluntary planning agreements are not received or if the amounts received are less than the figures above, one or both projects may be suspended, reduced in size or cancelled and the Special Rate Variation will be included, and ratepayers informed of any material changes.

- An additional \$250,000 towards the Job Creation program and \$62,000 to offset a shortfall in rating revenues arising from a change in NSW Government policy with respect to biodiversity offsets.

Option 2: Discontinuation of the Special Rate Variation – the Special Rate Variation of 12.43% (including 2.3% rate peg from 2018/19) will not be continued in 2019/20 and your rates will return to the pre-SRV rating amount, which will be adjusted only by IPART's 2019/20 rate peg of 2.7%.

In return for this option:

- There will be no additional funds available for stormwater drainage, roads or parks.
- The development of the Olympic Park Sports Precinct and the Regional Entertainment and Conference Centre will not proceed.
- No additional funds for the Job Creation program and no recovery of rates for making biodiversity offsets.

Have your say on the proposed continuation of the Special Rate Variation

A telephone survey of residents will take place from 18 October to provide you with the opportunity to give your feedback on the continuation of the SRV and the proposed projects.

You can also participate in the online survey at <https://muswellbrook2018.questionpro.com> from 18 October 2018 through until 9.00AM on 5 November 2018.

Should you prefer to write, please email council@muswellbrook.nsw.gov.au or address your letter to:

The General Manager
Muswellbrook Shire Council
PO Box 122
Muswellbrook NSW 2333

It is important that you have your say. Provide your feedback by 29 November 2018 to ensure it is included in Council's application to IPART.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is a Special Rate Variation?

A council may apply to the NSW Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) for a Special Variation (SRV) to their rates. Muswellbrook Shire Council did so last year and was granted a one-off increase and invited to apply for its continuation in 2019/20.

Didn't Council apply for a Special Rate Variation last year?

Yes. Council made an application for a permanent increase in rates last year to fund:

- improvements in stormwater management, particularly in Denman

- upgrades to Muswellbrook's Olympic Park precinct
- a new Regional Entertainment and Conference Centre; and
- additional support for job creation across the Shire.

IPART approved the application for one year and has invited Council to apply to continue the Special Rate Variation into the future, to ensure the full delivery of these key community projects and programs.

What is the SRV process?

The Office of Local Government establishes the guidelines, which are available at www.olg.nsw.gov.au.

The NSW Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) assess and determine each council's application under powers delegated by the NSW Minister for Local Government.

In order to proceed with the projects and continue the SRV as approved by IPART, Council seeks feedback from the community on the proposed continuation and the projects and programs it will fund.

What am I providing feedback on?

Residents and other stakeholders are asked to provide feedback on their awareness of the proposed continuation of the SRV and the projects to be funded. Council has engaged Jetty Research to conduct a telephone survey of 500 residents of the Shire – ensuring that those surveyed are representative of the Shire's population by age, gender and place of residence – to seek the views of the community. All residents are encouraged to provide their feedback to Council by email council@muswellbrook.nsw.gov.au, post PO Box 122, Muswellbrook NSW 2333, or telephone 6549 3700 by 29 November 2018.

Will financial hardship be considered in deciding to continue with the SRV?

Council has a long history of supporting residents who experience financial hardship, including those who may have a reduced capacity to pay their Council rates. This policy setting will continue and be extended to any approved change in the rating structure. While Council does not expect that the continuation of the SRV will result in a significant number of applications, those that are received will be considered against the criteria of the policy. Generally, the policy aims to provide assistance where possible, in accordance with the Local Government Act 1993 and the Local Government (General) Regulation 2005, to those ratepayers who are experiencing genuine financial difficulties in paying their rates and charges. Council also has the power to approve assistance in exceptional circumstances beyond the standards set in the policy document on a case by case basis. Earlier this year, Council elected to not pass on the SRV to farmland ratepayers in view of the prolonged drought conditions and increased the Pensioner Rebate to eligible ratepayers to cover the impact of the SRV.

What are the projects proposed for funding and why do we need them?

Improved Stormwater Infrastructure

Council's stormwater drainage network began life in 1950 and remains to this day not fully developed. Together with the network's age, this has resulted in a decline in its overall condition, capacity, ability to manage pollutants and control erosion and sedimentation. The pipe network consists of concrete pipes and box culverts.

Council has undertaken a comprehensive audit of the system to identify areas of need. The results are out in the following plans:

- Denman Drainage Strategy;
- Merton Street Drainage Design
- Denman Drainage Strategy Review and Upgrade Options
- Industrial Estate Drainage Design
- Frossum Gully Drainage Study
- Bell Street Catchment Study
- Mill Street Catchment Study
- St Hellens Street Drainage Study
- Safety Review of Detention Basins

With the support of the community, Council will be able to provide funding for an ongoing program of works to improve stormwater management across the Shire.

Regional Entertainment and Conference Centre

After speaking with the community about the original concept, Council has incorporated your feedback into an updated plan and presented it to the community for comment as part of last year's SRV application.

The new concept for this project includes a 500 seat theatre, stage, orchestra pit, back of house and associated car parking for Muswellbrook's CBD. The facility will be capable of hosting travelling performances, local productions and regional conventions.

Council has held an architectural competition for the design of the Regional Entertainment and Conference Centre and entries are currently on public exhibition and you are encouraged to have your say on how the facility will look. It is proposed to be constructed at the site of the Brook Street Plaza and Council will work with existing tenants to facilitate relocation before any work commences.

The final design entries can be viewed at: <https://www.muswellbrook.nsw.gov.au/index.php/2015-05-29-01-29-46/3045-regional-entertainment-and-conference-centre>

Muswellbrook Olympic Park Precinct Upgrade

A master plan was developed for this popular and well utilised precinct, in close consultation with user groups. The proposed upgrades include:

- Field improvements
 - Additional amenities
 - Improved, safe access
 - New car parking
 - Additional storage
 - Additional vehicle and bus connections
-

- Better cycleway and pedestrian connections
- Design work for a regional standard grandstand to attract larger sporting fixtures.

Has Council sought funding from the Government for these projects?

Yes. Council has applied for funding from the NSW Government to contribute to the upgrade of the Olympic Park Precinct and for the Regional Entertainment and Conference Centre, totalling around \$10 million. Both funding proposals are dependent upon the continuation of the SRV being approved.

Created: 16 October 2018

APPENDIX 10 - Muswellbrook Shire Council 2018-19 SV Consultation Report

Attached under separate cover.