



Community Engagement Strategy

Proposed Special Rate Variation

September 2014

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1. Introduction

In July 2014 Council agreed to develop a list of community infrastructure projects that would benefit from a special rate variation with a view to discussing the projects with the community to determine if Council should apply for an SRV in 2015 with the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART).

An important part of the IPART application is to provide evidence that the community is aware of the need, purpose and impact of the proposed SRV.

The intent of this Community Engagement Strategy is to inform the community that Council will consider applying for an SRV at the 9 December Council meeting and what the need, purpose and impact of the proposed SRV will be and; to involve and consult a representative sample of the community about the proposed SRV.

The strategy has been developed to meet the criteria set by IPART and to be clear and transparent about how Eurobodalla Shire Council will ensure that its community is aware of the need, purpose and impact of the proposed SRV in the timeframe that IPART sets out.

This strategy applies to activity from September 2014. The delivery of the activities are dependent on Council's decision to progress the applications on 25 September and then again 9 December. It should be noted that the strict timeline that IPART requires for notifications and the submission of a formal application may not necessarily align well with ideal times for community engagement as some activity will need to take place during the December January holiday period.

This strategy aims to address this by informing the community from September about the possibility of this public exhibition in December January.

In May 2015 and to meet Council's, statutory requirements, the Delivery Program, Operational Plan and Annual Budget for 2015-2016 will be on public exhibition and the community will again be invited to have their say.

2. What is Community Engagement?

Community engagement is about involving the community in the decision making processes for the development of long term objectives and strategies that impact the community.

Community engagement covers a broad range of activities and can take many forms.

Eurobodalla Shire Council's approach to community engagement is based on the spectrum of engagement activities as advocated by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2), which includes 5 levels of engagement:

- Inform
- Consult
- Involve
- Collaborate
- Empower

IAP2's Public Participation Spectrum is designed to assist with the selection of the level of participation that defines the public's role in any community engagement program.

The Spectrum shows that differing levels of participation are legitimate depending on the goals, time frames, resources and levels of concern in the decision to be made. The Spectrum also sets out the promise being made to the public at each participation level.

The Division of Local Governments Planning and Reporting manual also identifies and defines the same various levels of community engagement.

This community engagement strategy will deliver activities across the first 3 levels in the IAP2 spectrum that are to inform, consult and involve.

3. Background – previous community engagement

Council has already undertaken extensive community engagement to develop the Community Strategic Plan. The results of the consultation showed that the community highly valued the programs and infrastructure that Council provides.

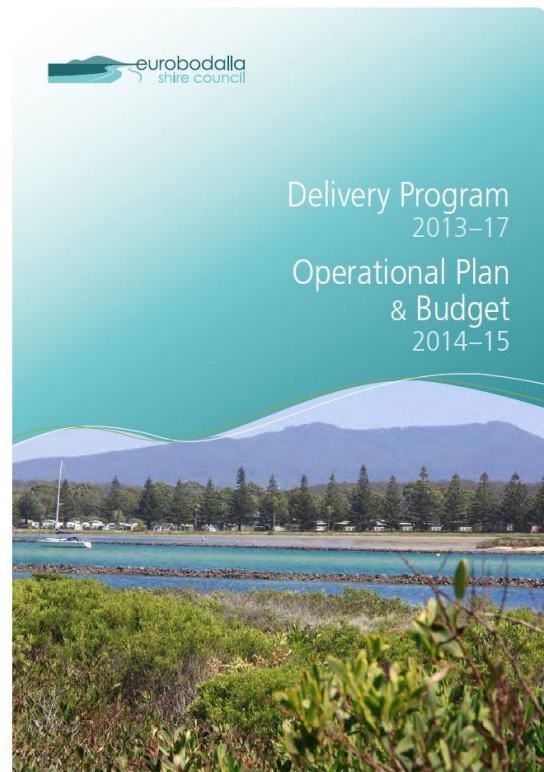
The community also said that they wanted Council to be able to maintain priority infrastructure into the future.

Further consultation was undertaken during 2012 to develop the Delivery Program 2013-2017, its capital works program and Resourcing Strategy. This included community surveys and focus groups that were specific about a possible Special Rate Variation.

The outcome of this was 62% of residents and 68% of non-residents said they would be supportive of a Special Rate Variation of 5.5% to improve local infrastructure and services.

The package of community infrastructure projects that are now proposed for a Special Rate Variation application are based on the original capital works program that were discussed in the previous community engagement process that led to the development of the current Delivery Program 2013-2017 and Resourcing Strategy.

Due to the timing of the Local Government elections in September 2012, it was decided that an application for a special rate variation would not go ahead in year 1 of the Delivery Program 2013-2017. The option for a rate variation was however retained for the latter years of the Delivery Program 2013-2017.



4. The proposed activity

To meet community expectations and to effectively work within IPART's timeframes, delivery of this engagement strategy is proposed in two phases.

Phase 1: Inform and Involve

If Council endorses this strategy on 25 September, phase 1 will start immediately and run through to early December.

In this phase we will inform, consult and involve the community.

600 community members will be invited to take part in a telephone survey in late October. The survey will be independent and residents will be canvassed about their opinions on the proposed SRV, and how well they understand the need, purpose and intent of the proposal. An information pack will be sent to all ratepayers before this survey so that participants are informed before they agree to respond.

Other members of the community wishing to provide feedback and suggest ideas, alternatives and proposals to inform decision making will be invited to write or email Council. This will be made clear in all communications.

Feedback from the community survey and from the general community will be summarised and reported back to Council to inform the decision that Council will make on 9 December about whether to apply, or not apply for a special rate variation. In this way, we can ensure that Council listens and acknowledges concerns, and provides feedback to the community about how public input influenced the decision.

To ensure the community is informed, consulted and involved we will:

- Prepare a useful web information hub
- Distribute a print information pack to all ratepayers
- Write letters to community groups
- Distribute information through local print and radio media
- Distribute digital newsletters to Council's subscribers
- Use social media to inform
- Provide information via displays at libraries and Council's customer service centre
- Provide information at Council's Meet us @ the Markets program
- Conduct a community survey of 600 residents.

Phase 2: Inform and Consult

If Council decides to move to the next stage of the application, an amended Delivery Program 2013-2017 will go on public exhibition for 28 days from early December to early January. The community will be invited to offer feedback via submissions.

The public exhibition will be promoted through:

- Council's website
- print and radio media
- digital subscriber newsletters
- Social media.

5. Explaining the proposed engagement levels, and our promise

Inform: One way communication providing balanced and objective information to assist understanding about something that is going to happen or has happened.

Promise to the public: we will keep you informed

Consult: Two way communications designed to obtain public feedback about ideas, alternatives and proposals to inform decision making.

Promise to the public: We will keep you informed, listen and acknowledge concerns and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.

Involve: Participatory process designed to help identify issues and views to ensure that concerns and aspirations are understood and considered prior to decision making.

Promise to the public: we will work with you to ensure that your concerns and issues are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how the public influenced the decision.

Stakeholders

A stakeholder is defined as someone who may be affected by or have a specific interest in the decision or issue under consideration. It is important to develop a consistent approach to ensure equitable inclusion of all potential stakeholders who reflect the demographics of the community.

For this engagement strategy, we will inform and consult with our stakeholders through the engagement activities already listed. Most stakeholders subscribe to Council's Online Newsletter and some are on the media distribution list.

In addition and when the opportunity presents, senior staff attending community and business group meetings and events will provide information and updates.

Council employees will be informed through internal emails.

Who are our Stakeholders?

- Councillors
- Council committees
- Ratepayers and residents
- Businesses
- Community groups
- Council employees
- NSW and Commonwealth Government
- Non-Government Agencies and Organisations