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Eurobodalla infrastructure priorities on the agenda

Thursday 24 July 2014

Councillors have agreed to develop a prioritised list of community infrastructure projects that may be suitable for funding under a special rate variation (SRV). Approval was also given at this week's Council meeting for the preparation of a detailed community engagement plan that would ensure residents are well informed and can have their say about the need for an SRV in Eurobodalla if Council decides to apply for one.

Mayor Lindsay Brown said the list will be put together from projects in Council's strategic and asset plans that have already been developed in consultation with the community.

He says that Eurobodalla has a shortage of funds to provide and maintain its existing services and assets and a SRV is a way of raising additional funds for the infrastructure the community wants.

'The cost of local government services has risen faster than inflation and Council's income is limited by the NSW Government rate pegging that has been at least 0.5 percent below inflation for the past 10 years,' Cr Brown said.

'Although Eurobodalla Shire Council provides much the same services as other similar sized councils, our rates income is 15 per cent less than the average. Every year there's an increase in the backlog of work that we have to do to maintain the levels of service and standards our residents expect. This leads to a significant and growing annual infrastructure renewal gap that we estimate to be more than \$3 million a year.'

Cr Brown said that a report on priority projects and the community consultation process will be presented to Council later this year and that if at this stage they believe that an SRV may be an option for addressing the funding shortfall, they will start a conversation with residents so that everyone can have their say on the proposal.

'We will be considering how we can address the gap. Should we increase our rates revenue, reduce services or allow our infrastructure assets to continue to deteriorate,' said Cr Brown.

If Council progresses to a community consultation, new Long Term Financial Plans and Delivery Programs will need to be developed to show residents both 'business as usual' and 'SRV' scenarios for community infrastructure works. The revisions would include the works program or projects that could be funded by SRV revenue and an explanation of how residents could be affected by the increase in rates over the life of the SRV.

If Council chooses to pursue an SRV for 2015-16 the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) would need to be notified by early December.

'Notifying IPART in December still doesn't commit Council to seeking a special rate variation. As part of the SRV process we would undertake a second consultation phase with the community through December and January and we would then need to consider the results of this consultation in February 2015 before making any final decision to apply for an SRV,' Cr Brown said.

Media contact

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Council to consider how to fund priorities

Thursday 18 September 2014

At next Tuesday's meeting (<http://www.esc.nsw.gov.au/inside-council/council/meetings/2014/september/ordinary-council-meeting-23-september-2014>), Eurobodalla Shire councillors will be asked to consider a package of social infrastructure, community projects and loan funding opportunities that, if endorsed, could form the basis of a notice of intent to apply for special rate variation with the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal.

If Council endorses the package of projects, it will start another phase of community consultation designed to keep residents informed about the need, purpose and impact of a rate variation before Council makes a decision about whether or not to apply for one in December this year.

Council has been considering a rate variation since 2012 when extensive consultation with the community showed that residents highly valued the programs and infrastructure that Council provides. Residents also said that they wanted Council to be able to maintain its priority infrastructure into the future. At the time 62% of residents and 68% of non-residents stated that they would be supportive of a rate variation of 5.5% to improve local infrastructure and services. However, the decision to apply for a variation was put on hold when the local government elections were held but the option of applying for a variation was retained for a later date during the life of **Council's 2013-2017 Delivery Program 2013-2017** (<http://www.esc.nsw.gov.au/inside-council/community-and-future-planning/delivery-program-and-operational-plan>).

The projects being considered by Council next week have already been identified as priorities by the community and are those that will deliver broad economic and social benefits.

In addition to being diligent about identifying savings and efficiencies, seeking grants and external funds, Council is still unable to meet the needs of the community in the years ahead with its current rates revenue. The proposal to apply for a special rate variation is one way that it can fund the increasing costs of maintaining, renewing and building its \$1.6 billion infrastructure. If Council endorses the projects, it will continue to talk to the community about how the proposed 5% rate variation would impact them. Councillors will then make a final decision on whether to apply for the variation with the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal in December.

The proposed package includes upgrades to sporting facilities, community halls and road projects, the Batemans Bay CBD and Moruya's library and exhibition centre. It also includes a commitment to ensuring that everyone can enjoy an active and healthy life in Eurobodalla with improvements to the accessibility of playgrounds, viewing platforms at popular locations and toilet facilities.

As well as an extensive list of infrastructure projects, the package also includes a new loan funding strategy where increased revenue would be used to fund the renewal of short lived infrastructure in order to address Council's annual infrastructure funding gap. Using loan funding for long lived infrastructure and larger works can help Council spread its infrastructure costs over time and ensure that all maintenance, renewals and depreciation costs for new and upgraded assets are covered in Council's budget.

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Council considers rate rise

Tuesday 30 September 2014

Eurobodalla Shire Council has endorsed a package of community and transport infrastructure projects that may be considered as the basis of a special rate variation application along with plans of how it will discuss the projects and the proposal with the community over the next few months.

The proposal to apply for a variation is being put forward as a way for Council to address the challenge of how to fund the needs and expectation of the community in the future, says General Manager Dr Catherine Dale.

'Despite having made significant operational savings, improving efficiency and productivity and having strategies in place to ensure this continues, Council's long term financial plans show that there will not be enough income to maintain and renew infrastructure at a standard that the community expects in the future,' said Dr Dale.

'In the next few months we will be making sure that our community has the opportunity to understand how this proposal could address the situation, what the additional income could be used for, and how it could impact ratepayers. We are inviting everyone to provide feedback on the proposed package of infrastructure projects.'

'Our consultation will include an information pack that will be posted to ratepayers, a community telephone survey of 600 people and detailed information about the proposal on our website and in our Batemans Bay, Moruya and Narooma libraries and at the Moruya customer service centre.'

In early December, Council will consider the community's feedback and decide whether it will notify the NSW Government of its intention to apply for a rate variation. If it does, the community would have another opportunity to have their say when an amended Delivery Program and detailed financial information would go on public exhibition for 28 days between December and January. The dates for this consultation phase are set by the NSW Government's Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal.

Dr Dale says that every dollar of the additional income would be used to fund community and transport infrastructure projects that would deliver broad economic and social benefits. 'These projects have already been identified as priorities by the community and include upgrades to sporting facilities, community halls and playgrounds, parks, road, bridge and pathway projects,' said Dr Dale.

'To make sure that everyone in Eurobodalla can enjoy an active and healthy life, the accessibility of playgrounds, viewing platforms and toilets would be also able to be improved by a rate variation.'

The proposal is for a 5 per cent increase in general rates above the NSW Government's rate peg each year for three years and ratepayers will receive the information brochure in the post soon with all the details. An informative web hub that features the list of proposed projects has also been developed and will go live later this week on the [proposal's page \(http://www.esc.nsw.gov.au/inside-council/project-and-exhibitions/proposals\)](http://www.esc.nsw.gov.au/inside-council/project-and-exhibitions/proposals) of Council's website, www.esc.nsw.gov.au (<http://www.esc.nsw.gov.au>). Watch the hub for regular updates and comprehensive details about the rate rise proposal and how it would impact you.

Media contact

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Information on a proposed rate rise on its way

Tuesday 14 October 2014

Eurobodalla Shire Council is asking residents to look out for a brochure that is being posted to all Eurobodalla ratepayers with information about a proposal to fund a package of community and transport infrastructure projects and works by applying for a special rate variation.

The *Funding our Future* brochure explains why Council would consider a rate rise as a way to fund the projects, what it would be used for and how it would affect residential, farming and business ratepayers.

Upgrades to sporting facilities, community halls and playgrounds, parks, roads, bridge and pathways and improvements to the accessibility of playgrounds, viewing platforms and toilets have been identified as priorities by Council and residents and are included in the package.

The brochure includes a summary of the savings and efficiencies that Council has already achieved in the past few years, and the financial challenges of continuing to maintain and renew infrastructure at an acceptable standard in the future.

General Manager Dr Catherine Dale says that it is important that the community has the opportunity to understand the proposal and provide feedback before Councillors decide in December if Council should notify the NSW Government that it intends to apply for a rate variation next year.

'Part of our community engagement will be consulting with a representative sample of 600 ratepayers in an independent 15 minute telephone survey that will be conducted by Micromex Research,' said Dr Dale.

'The information in the brochure or on Council's website will help you if you are asked to and agree to take part in the survey'.

Residents can provide feedback by on the package of projects and the special rate variation proposal by sending a letter or email to Council. Details of how to do this are in the brochure, on Council's website www.esc.nsw.gov.au (<http://www.esc.nsw.gov.au>) and in information packs at the Batemans Bay, Moruya and Narooma libraries and the Moruya customer service centre.

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Come and hear about rates proposal

Tuesday 28 October 2014

Eurobodalla Shire Council will soon host a series of community information sessions and market stalls that will talk about its proposal to consider increasing rates through a three year special rate variation.

Mayor Lindsay Brown and General Manager Dr Catherine Dale will speak at the sessions which will explain why Council is considering applying for a rate variation and what savings it has already put in place to become more efficient. There will be discussion about the package of community and transport infrastructure projects that would benefit from a rate rise and how any rise would affect ratepayers.

Dr Dale says the sessions and market stalls are some of the ways Council is ensuring residents understand the rate variation proposal and how they can provide feedback before the matter goes to a Council meeting in December.

'We have also sent around 20,000 information brochures to ratepayers on the proposal recently and are currently conducting a telephone survey of a representative sample of 600 residents,' said Dr Dale.



'I invite you to also take a look at the [Funding our future](#) (<http://www.esc.nsw.gov.au/inside-council/project-and-exhibitions/proposals/funding-our-future>) pages of Council's website www.esc.nsw.gov.au (<http://www.esc.nsw.gov.au>) or to phone us on 4474 1000 if you have any questions.'

Community information sessions (tea and coffee will be available)

Narooma Library, Monday 3 November, 5 – 6.30pm

Moruya Library, Monday 10 November, 5 – 6.30pm

Batemans Bay Library, Monday 17 November, 5 – 6.30pm

Market stalls

Moruya Country Markets on Saturday 8 November, from 8am – 1pm

Batemans Bay High School Markets on Sunday 16 November, from 8am – 12pm

Media contact

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Council provides more information on proposed rate variation

Monday 10 November 2014

Eurobodalla Shire Council has responded quickly to requests from some ratepayers for more detailed information about the special rate variation proposal by adding further information, tables, charts and comparisons to its website.

The additions include tables that show what the accumulative impact of an 8% rate variation over 3 years would be in the three categories of residential, farmland and business rates. An example is how the average current residential rate of \$818 would increase by \$212 to \$1032 in 2017-2018.

Other tables show that if a rate variation was applied, by 2017-2018 the average farmland rate would increase from \$1279.72 to \$1612.08 and the average business rate would increase from \$2932.27 to \$3693.82.

The tables show that after 3 years, rates would continue to be permanently maintained at the higher base rate which would be 25.97 per cent higher than the current rate.

General Manager Dr Catherine Dale said that it was also important that residents understood that no decision has yet been made on whether Council will notify the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal that it intends to apply for a rate variation next year.

'Council will make this decision on 9 December and we are currently seeking feedback from the community so that Council can be informed about your views when they make this decision,' said Dr Dale.

"You can provide your feedback by sending a letter or email to Council. You are invited to comment on the proposal and the proposed community and transport infrastructure projects and renewal and maintenance works that could be funded through a rate variation.'

Dr Dale says a rate variation is one way Eurobodalla Shire Council could deliver some of the new projects our community has asked for and to be able to look after our community and transport infrastructure at a standard that meets community expectations in the future.

'A three year rate variation would address some of the financial challenges we face in funding the backlog of infrastructure works that grows each year and the increasing ongoing costs of maintaining and renewing infrastructure in the future,' Dr Dale said.

Other information now available on Council's Funding our Future web hub shows that Eurobodalla's average residential rates are lower than Bega, Palerang, Queanbeyan and Shoalhaven councils and explains that this presents challenges for how the maintenance and renewal of infrastructure continues to be funded in the future.

More information on Council's [Funding our Future proposal \(http://www.esc.nsw.gov.au/inside-council/project-and-exhibitions/proposals/funding-our-future\)](http://www.esc.nsw.gov.au/inside-council/project-and-exhibitions/proposals/funding-our-future) can be viewed at www.esc.nsw.gov.au (<http://www.esc.nsw.gov.au>) or by phoning Council on 02 4474 7377.

Submissions on the proposal can be made by mail and email until 24 November to:

The General Manager
Eurobodalla Shire Council
PO Box 99 Moruya NSW 2537
council@eurocoast.nsw.gov.au (<mailto:council@eurocoast.nsw.gov.au>)

Media contact

Dr Catherine Dale
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Special rate variation on next week's Council Agenda

Thursday 4 December 2014

Eurobodalla Shire Council's General Manager Dr Catherine Dale will recommend that Council notifies the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal that it intends to apply for a special rate variation to commence in 2014-2015 at next Tuesday's meeting.

Dr Dale says that a rate variation would be a financially responsible direction for Council and the community who have clearly indicated that they want Council to maintain the current level of community and transport infrastructure and services in the future.

'It would be an important step in meeting the NSW Government's new financial criteria and increasing Council's medium and long term financial sustainability,' said Dr Dale.

The recommendations also include that Council should review its Rate and Debtors Hardship policy to assist any members of the community who may experience hardship as a result of a special rate Variation.

The report includes details of how the proposed rate variation would impact Council's ability to meet the financial criteria set out in the NSW Government's 'Fit for the Future' proposal which requires councils to demonstrate by June 2015 that they are structurally and financially fit. Councils will also need to show how they will be sustainable, efficient and able to manage and deliver the services and infrastructure required by their communities.

'The NSW Government's Fit for the Future proposal was released after Council made the decision to seek residents' feedback about a package of community and transport infrastructure projects that could be funded through a special rate variation in 2015-2016. If in addition to a rate variation, Council continues to successfully focus on efficiencies, reducing costs and reviewing service delivery models, we will make significant progress in achieving the criteria,' said Dr Dale.

Other information included in the detailed report is the effect of the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal's announcement this week that the 2015-2016 rate peg will only be 2.4 per cent.

'This is 0.06 per cent less than the 3 per cent previously advised by IPART and will negatively impact the base case in this report and Council's ability to be financially sustainable,' said Dr Dale.

Further recommendations include that any residual funds, once the proposed package of works are delivered, and any funds that become available once loans are repaid, should be entirely allocated and internally restricted to infrastructure renewals.

Information regarding Council's current rating situation, the special rate variation proposal and rate increase scenarios, and the economic, employment, social, asset management and legal implications are detailed in the report which will be presented at next Tuesday's Council meeting.

The 9 December 2014 report can be viewed on the Council meetings page of Council's website, www.esc.nsw.gov.au (<http://www.esc.nsw.gov.au>).

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Council supports financially responsible rate rise

Wednesday 10 December 2014

Eurobodalla Mayor Lindsay Brown says that Council's decision on Tuesday to notify the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal that it intends to apply for a special rate variation next year is financially responsible and will deliver a significant economic and employment stimulus to Eurobodalla.

The report presented to Council was amended by Councillors Neil Burnside and Peter Schwarz and makes sure the community will be widely informed about how a special rate variation would contribute to Council's ability to be financially sustainable and meet the NSW Government's Fit for the Future financial criteria.

Councillors Burnside and Schwarz also moved that Council's independent Audit Committee should monitor the implementation of a special rate variation, and 'ring fence' the future rate revenue to infrastructure renewal in perpetuity.

The amendments included that the audit committee would review the Fit for the Future criteria and report back to Council on the impact of the rate variation and the efficiencies and savings that will be required to achieve Council's long term financial sustainability in line with the NSW reforms.

The Mayor said Council has already made significant savings in recent years and this must continue to be a priority for the organisation.

'Costs have been cut by improving our procurement and asset management practices, improving productivity, reviewing service delivery and safety practice, using better work practices and technologies and building regional partnerships,' said Cllr Brown.

Another recommendation endorsed on Tuesday called for Council to review its Rate and Debtors Hardship policy to assist the members of the community who might experience hardship if a rate variation was introduced in the 2015 - 2016 financial year.

'The decision on whether or not to progress a special rate variation application was always going to be difficult and we certainly understand in an ideal world no one wants to see their rates increase,' said Cllr Brown.

'It is however a financial reality that in addition to focussing on efficiencies and cost savings, increasing the rates revenue is an important step towards ensuring our future financial security and delivering a broad range of economic, employment and social benefits.'

He said the local community had been very clear that it expects Council to continue to deliver the same levels of service and infrastructure in the future.

'It was this expectation and our responsibility to ensure that Council is financially sustainable that underpinned tonight's decision,' Cllr Brown said.

Council has developed its draft Long Term Financial Plan and revised its Delivery Program 2013-2017 to include a special rate variation and will place these documents on public exhibition from Wednesday 10 December 2014.

Residents can view the documents and how to make a submission by visiting the [Public Exhibition \(http://www.esc.nsw.gov.au/inside-council/project-and-exhibitions/public-exhibition\)](http://www.esc.nsw.gov.au/inside-council/project-and-exhibitions/public-exhibition) page of Council's website, www.esc.nsw.gov.au (<http://www.esc.nsw.gov.au>), the three libraries in Batemans Bay, Moruya and Narooma and Council's customer service centre in Moruya.

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Council to apply for reduced rate variation

Thursday 12 February 2015

Eurobodalla Shire Council has voted to apply to the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal for a special rate variation of 6.5 per cent a year (which includes the 2.4 per cent rate peg amount) for three years from 2015-16, with the increase to remain permanently in the rate base.

The amount of the proposed special rate variation endorsed by Council is 1.5 per cent less than the 8 per cent recommended in Tuesday's report.

The revised motion was put by Councillor Neil Burnside and seconded by Councillor Rob Pollock. On putting up the motion Cllr Burnside noted that the lesser amount would respond to the community's views expressed in last year's Micromex survey and other feedback. He said the savings could be made by removing the Moruya Library and Captain Oldrey Park expansions from the proposed projects and from the savings that Council has made since December, and by using Council's \$2 million cash reserve which can offset the loan funds required for the revised proposed schedule of works.

Noting the long term benefit that the project would generate for the community, the Council also resolved to investigate alternate funding options that could progress the multi-use community and exhibition space and meeting rooms planned for Moruya Library and to do the same for the staged expansion of Captain Oldrey Park because it is a district facility.

Council also resolved to note the 9 December 2014 decision that the Audit Committee monitor the implementation of the proposed special rate variation to ensure the funds are directed to the agreed projects in the most cost-effective manner and are used only for infrastructure renewals.

Council will now finalise its IPART special rate variation application with the new rate of 6.5 per cent and submit it to the tribunal next week. It expects to know the outcome in May.

Anyone interested in the full discussion between Councillors on the special rate variation report can now download the video recorded at the Tuesday 10 February meeting from Council's website, www.esc.nsw.gov.au (<http://www.esc.nsw.gov.au>).

Further information on Council's application for a special rate variation of 6.5 per cent will be available on its website next week.

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