



Notes from Public Consultation Meetings

Special Rate Variation

Locations

Monday 24th November, 5.30pm – School of Arts Hall, Barham

Tuesday 25th November, 5.30pm – Wakool & District Services Memorial Club

Wednesday 26th November, 5.30pm – Moulamein Bowling Club

Tuesday 2nd December, 5.30pm – Murray Downs RFS

Wednesday 3rd December, 5.30pm – Tooleybuc Sporting Club

SCHOOL OF ARTS HALL BARHAM 24th NOVEMBER 2014

Present: Bruce Graham – General Manager, Paul O'Brien – Deputy General Manager, Brian Ebery – Director Engineering Services, Kate Redfearn – Executive Assistant

Councillors Neil Gorey & Anthony Jackson

In Attendance: 21 community members

Time: 5.35pm

Comments/Questions from the floor

(Blue text denotes Council response)

- What is the success rate on people paying their rates?
The current figure for unpaid rates is around 11%
- Are the rates on irrigable land more expensive than dry land?
Yes they are. Definition of irrigable land - land that is capable of having water delivered to it.
- Is it possible to maintain the bridges for now and then replace them at a later date?
Maintenance is a huge cost to Council. Some of our bridges need replacing because of access issues for property owners.
- Council should write to Shires Association requesting they give us a percentage of GST.
A letter has been sent through RAMROC to put forward this point.
- When do the bridges need to be replaced by?
Out of 20 wooden bridges we have 12-13 that are currently unusable. Bridge construction dates range from 1912 to 1970.
- How many ratepayers do the bridges that need to be replaced service? Concerns that it is a lot of money if only servicing minimal amount of ratepayers.
Each bridge varies. However all ratepayers should have some form of right of access to their properties.
- Concerns that trucks that are ruining our bridges.

- Do we pay maintenance to service roads such as Deniliquin Road?
Council has six (6) main roads (290.9kms) throughout the Shire that are funded by the RMS which includes Deniliquin & Moulamein Roads. The construction of the Jimaringle (Yambinya Feedlot) was funded by the Federal Government & the Developer.
- Concerned about the principal of a rate variation as this demonstrates to State and Federal Government that ratepayers will put their hands in their pockets. Dead against any rate levy. Council need to go back to Canberra and ask for money. We should all lobby and write letters.
- When are we due for the next general valuation and would this have an impact on this proposal?
General valuations are undertaken over three (3) years and the next is due in 2015 and will be applied to the 2016/2017 rating year. General valuations do not increase Council's rate base it just redistributes the amount of rates paid by individual ratepayers based on the movement in their land values.
- Noted that the time of these public meetings does not suit landholders.
- A rate increase is not sustainable. Council's socio economic development report was interesting. Council can't keep going back to the ratepayers for more money. Government moved us away from rail forcing more trucks on the road.
- Council should apply to the NSW Government to build a toilet at the Barham truck stop.
- Council needs to formulate a solid argument and lobby to the government about the economic impacts on our Shire and government impositions on our community. As one of the most heavily impacted regions from constraints on the basin plan we should get some of the \$200,000 million constraints money. I believe that our Shire has the second largest amount of bridges in NSW.
There are 5 of our bridges affected by the constraints.
- We are the most impacted shire from the water buyback. Lost 500 jobs in the Wakool Shire. We need to be lobbying through RAMROC or even shock jocks in Sydney.
- The impact of water loss on my personal business is 12-13%. Have council explored all options? Have we looked at how our rates compare with surrounding shires? Encourage Economic Development in this region, if rates are too high we will not encourage people to live here.
- Are we going to vote on the special rate variation at tonight's meeting?
Would you prefer to remain as a local government entity or amalgamate with another Council such as Deniliquin?
Not comfortable to vote on amalgamating at this stage until we have more information.

- Vote on options for Special Rate Variation from 21 Attendees

3% Option 1 – 17 people

7% Option 2 – NIL

14% Option 3 – NIL

20% Option 4 – NIL

- Interested in hearing the consequences if the rates do not rise. Two people in the room have volunteered their services to help lobby.
- Council should organise a group of ratepayers to lobby to Sussan Ley MP.
- The State and Federal Governments are blissfully unaware of what they have done to our Shire.
- Take note that the meeting attendees found it hard to hear speakers due to the noise of the fans.

Close of meeting: 6.47pm

WAKOOL & DISTRICT SERVICES MEMORIAL CLUB – 25th NOVEMBER 2014

Present: Bruce Graham – General Manager, Brian Ebery – Director Engineering Services, Paul O'Brien – Deputy General Manager, Kate Redfearn – Executive Assistant

Councillors Neil Gorey and Anthony Jackson

In Attendance: 7 Community Members

Time: 5.34pm

Comments/Questions from the floor

(Blue text denotes Council response)

- Does Wakool Shire Council receive state money as well as federal money?
Yes. In this case it is the money from the federal government that has been frozen.
- How often do general property valuations occur?
Every three years, the last general valuation was in 2012 and was applied to the 2013/2014 rating year.
- Why do you never come onto our land to value the property?
Dept of Land and Property do the valuing not council. You can object to Land and Property if you do not agree with the valuation.
- There are 90 rateable blocks in Wakool not sure if that is equal to other towns.
Wakool has 105 rateable blocks which is similar to Tooleybuc. Barham & Moulamein have the largest number of rateable blocks.
- Concerns that the road grading is not distributed equally amongst the shire.
Roads have been classified and service levels are based on use. We held public meetings for road classifications in 2013.
- This doesn't seem fair if you are still paying the same rates as others.
- Does Wakool Shire Council have reserves?
Yes we do.
- What does the term Irrigable land cover?
Irrigable land is land that is capable of having water delivered to it for irrigation etc. and has water use/works approval licences attached to the land.

- What does the shire think will happen to the population in the future?
Although farming population is less, towns such as Murray Downs and Barham are increasing and stabilising the population.
- Discussion about fit for the future and amalgamation versus Rural Council
- What is the difference between a Rural Council and what we have now?
We are currently working on the definition of a Rural Council.
- Concerns that if Wakool Shire Council amalgamates there could be services taken away from us.
- The population has been dropping, look at the statistics and water is leaving the community at a rapid rate however the land will still be there. There are only two rice crops between Wakool and Swan Hill. I ask Council to consider the people who are left behind.
- There are positives happening in the Shire, recently the shire released a socio-economic impact report. The report leaves us in a good position to go to the Federal government.
- How can we gain traction to get money from the federal Government?
We are holding a water alliance meeting on 15th December with MIL, landholders and various others.
- Wakool Shire Council is a diverse and different shire and should stay on their own. I believe a rate rise is in order as we do not want to go backwards.
- Wakool Shire Council should be retained meanwhile pursuing shared services. I agree that we shouldn't be going backwards and therefore think a slight increase.
- Wakool Shire Council should remain as it is and the head office should stay in Moulamein. Our biggest problem is we have too much flood country which turns others away. Concerned that Council wants to become too big with too many employees.
- Why is the sub division at 500ha?
The figure comes from the 2013 LEP and was originally set in 1992.
- 500ha is a big number, Conargo Shire have 40ha
- Can we change the LEP?
It is a complex exercise that would be costly.

- Can you have a second dwelling on a property?
Yes, if it is within 100m of the main dwelling.
- If I have a farm that is less than 500 ha I can't put a dwelling on it?
Once again the figure comes from the LEP. You can apply to Council for a title search on your property.
- It seems like a flimsy argument from the Wakool Shire.
State Government sets the rules and Councils administer them.
- What is the likelihood of getting the LEP changed? We have some dried up land dried with no water; it would make sense to make the figure 200ha.
Suggest getting a group together and writing a letter to Council.
- Does Council see any of the stamp duty from properties that are sold
No
- Vote on options for Special Rate Variation from 7 Attendees
 - 3% Option 1 – NIL
 - 7% Option 2 – 3 people
 - 14% Option 3 – NIL
 - 20% Option 4 - NIL
- I am wavering between 7-14% as we need to make sure that Council is sustainable.
- Council need to make sure they make every effort to be efficient.
- Is there an opportunity with the federal government for the bridges?
We currently have applications in for funding for our bridges.
- We need to attract people to this Shire, Barham needs a shopping centre. We need to think outside the square.
- Wakool Shire Council gave this shire a guarantee over the raw water, Wakool has missed out. We can't even switch on a hose to water your lawn, the town looks dead.
This was promised back in Wakool Water days, if Wakool was on the same system as other towns it would cost several million dollars.

Close of meeting: 7.42pm

MOULAMEIN BOWLING CLUB – 26th NOVEMBER 2014

Present: Bruce Graham – General Manager, Peter Arthur - Director Corporate Services, Brian Ebery – Director Engineering Services, Paul O’Brien – Deputy General Manager, Kate Redfearn – Executive Assistant.

Councillors Neil Gorey, Anthony Jackson, Katarni Lipp, Colin Membrey and Ann Crowe.

In Attendance: 46 community members

Time: 5.40pm

Comments/Questions from the floor

(Blue text denotes Council response)

- Are the three year general valuations taken into account when increasing rates?
No. However general valuations do not increase Council's rate base it just redistributes the amount of rates paid by individual ratepayers based on the movement in their land values.
- If the rates go up 20% then we will be paying 3% on top of that. I would like to know what the figures would be in 10 years for the average ratepayer.
We have included examples in the presentation, we can send you a copy of the presentation or it is available on our website.
- After seeing all the options I believe that there is an option missing – Council should drive productivity and efficiency within Council harder so it can provide services before putting up rates. Do you think that against other Councils Wakool Shire Council provides efficient services?
Yes, we can always improve but believe compared to other Councils that I have heard of and worked for we are efficient.
- How confident are you that it is only a 3 year freeze.
That is all we have been told.
- How much did that rates increase after Wakool Water?
They increased by 13% the approved SRV was 7.14% in 2006/07.
- Have feasibility studies been done on amalgamation?
Not yet, we are in the process of meeting with other Councils and attending meetings about Fit for the Future.
- You borrowed \$2.3 million to accelerate bridges but why do we need to accelerate them?
We have 76 bridges of which 20 are timber with construction dates ranging from 1912 to 1970; most are unserviceable and thus have property access issues for ratepayers.

- I have read the Financial Statements and Auditors report and it looks good. What's the current working capital level and restricted cash reserve?
The working capital level is approximately \$2.4 million and internally restricted cash reserve approximately \$7.7 million as at 30 June 2014. There are peaks & troughs with asset renewals therefore in order to plan work (long term financial plan) funds need to be set aside to coincide for when the asset renewals are required.
- Concerned that if we go back into a drought for 10 years that you will expect farmers to pay all this extra money.
- What is Council's debt?
It is around \$4 million and we only borrow money for long term infrastructure renewal/upgrade.
- Noted in the report that the cost of employment went up by 20% will that continue.
Due to the fact that most of Council's assets are self-constructed a percentage of these costs include employment costs which do not get reported in the operating costs. Therefore is Council doesn't fully expend its capital budget in a particular year means an increase in employment operating costs. Council also deliberately increase its workforce last financial year.
- Observation that when the Shire office was in the main street it had approx. half a dozen people employed; it now appears to be bursting at the seams.
Reporting requirements to the Office of Local Government and changes to Government Legislation has increased significantly.
- Every time that Council increases rates we are letting the government off the hook.
- Agreed it is up to the whole community to get any Government change.
- If we went with option 1 – is there any likelihood of losing staff. Staff of the shire are important to our towns; they spend money in local business.
Yes we would need to rationalise staff levels.
- Farming businesses used to employ more staff but when times became tough we had to cut back on staff.
- Will you be allowed to increase rates?
Council will consider input from the community before making application to IPART.
- I commend Council on its presentation. Consider the moral philosophy of a rate rise. The federal government have made cuts to develop an economy, problem is the collapse of the mining industry and farming is just a poor cousin. Farmland is 71% of revenue. Farmers are price givers not takers. Immoral that you pass all the costs down the line. Council needs to sharpen its pencil. Please keep option 1 open.

- Vote on options for Special Rate Variation from 46 attendees
 - 3% Option 1 – 20 people
 - 7% Option 2 – 12 people
 - 14% Option 3 – 1 person
 - 20% Option 4 - NIL
- Another option for Government change would be to make a bigger stance as a community.
- My Grandson is the CEO of a Shire and to cut costs he took on two portfolios and increased the outdoor workforce.
- Until we get 100% definition of what a Rural Council is I am not keen to vote on it.
- 500 hectare minimum lot size for subdivisions in rural zoned land is in the LEP. The LEP was on public display and I am as much to blame as anyone as I didn't read it. After doing some research I discovered that Balranald rejected this and Wentworth were in a similar situation where the LEP was adopted and they are now going through a process to change it.
Wentworth have engaged an independent consultant. I suggest you write to Council and ask them to investigate. It will likely cost around \$250,000 to investigate.
- Council needs more flexibility with the LEP.
- Rural Council outsourcing would be hard to monitor.
- Concerns that with the rate rise we will lose residents. Rates are too high already; the average person will not be able to afford it.

Close of meeting: 7.33pm

MURRAY DOWNS RURAL FIRE SHED – 2nd DECEMBER 2014

Present: Bruce Graham – General Manager, Peter Arthur - Director Corporate Services, Brian Ebery – Director Engineering Services, Kate Redfearn – Executive Assistant

Councillors Neil Gorey and Ann Crowe

In Attendance: 35 community members

Time: 5.35pm

Comments/Questions from the floor

(Blue text denotes Council response)

- There should be a fifth option which is sourcing other avenues for funding.
- We want people to move here but rates are too high compared to Victoria.
When comparing you need to take into account that our rates include water and waste, Victoria are billed separately.
- Murray Downs needs parks on the river, at the moment there is nothing appealing to the eye. Other towns have parks; this is unfair on Murray Downs.
There has been land on the river earmarked for parks but ultimately it is up to the developer.
- The construction of the boat ramp needs to move faster.
- The Shire should be spending money to encourage more investment.
- When land is rezoned do they pay rates?
They don't pay rates until the blocks are developed.
- The LEP is a major handbrake. The setbacks need to be reviewed.
- Farmer's income is down; let them have some relief by allowing small subdivisions along the river.
The purpose of rural land is for agriculture, the blocks must be viable.
- You are saying 100 acre block is not viable, in Felton Drive I need to make money off my 100 acres. The 500 ha limit needs to be brought back.
- Can the LEP be changed?
It is a comprehensive and costly process. Council went through the consultation process for the 2013 LEP.
- I have lived here for 50 years and was never consulted.
- We always thought that the LEP could be altered.
- Surely sub division would create more income for the shire.

- The five year time limit is not going to work if you have grandchildren coming home to the farm.
- Applaud your actions of holding public meetings.
- Irrigable land there might not be much left. I will be applying to change my land back to dry land. The Shire should be pushing our barrow.
- Could you give me a figure on the last two wooden bridges?
With local expertise it was a rough cost of \$800,000 each. They vary in cost but on average a 15-20% saving on Council's current construction methods compared to conventional costs.
- Rather than spending money on a bridge that services a small number of ratepayers would it be better off to install pipes.
Large pipes can be just as expensive.
- Do we get a formal vote on the special rate variation?
There will be a straw vote tonight.
- What about people who are not here?
They are able to write to Council with their submission.
- There was a meeting of the Murray Downs advancement group this week. We have been trying to get money for years for the footpath at Murray Downs Club. This rate increase makes it hard on us we believe it is a straight out tax that will be a burden on us.
- How was the Murray Downs new raw water system funded?
Half from Council's Water Supply reserves and the other half from a Federal Government grant.
- We received notification about new raw water supply early in the piece. Did we get a final notification?
Yes letters were hand delivered to each property.
- Have Council looked into saving costs themselves? What has been done internally?
We are always looking into becoming more efficient and have been working hard and involving staff in cost cutting.

- Vote on options for Special Rate Variation from 35 attendees
3% Option 1 – 16 people
7% Option 2 – 8 people
14% Option 3 – NIL
20% Option 4 - NIL
- Concerns were raised about the times of bridge lifting conflicting with sale yard times.
This is not Council's decision; we suggest writing to the Minister for roads. We would be supportive of your suggestion.
- Murray Downs Advancement Group handed over a copy of specified motions. (Attached, note these were not discussed at the meeting.)
- Was there any reason why the little reserve in Kidman Reid Drive was flooded?
It was backwash from the filters, trial and error still working it out.

Close of meeting: 7.19pm

TOOLEYBUC SPORTING CLUB – 3rd DECEMBER 2014

Present: Bruce Graham – General Manager, Peter Arthur - Director Corporate Services, Brian Ebery – Director Engineering Services, Paul O'Brien – Deputy General Manager, Kate Redfearn – Executive Assistant.

Councillors Neil Gorey and Lois Lockhart

In Attendance: 24 community members

Apologies: Jim & Nerida Hoare, Dallas Pearse, Ralph Hoare

Time: 5.40pm

Comments/Questions from the floor

(Blue text denotes Council response)

- Have you factored in the rise from the Valuer General?
No, however general valuations do not increase Council's rate base it just redistributes the amount of rates paid by individual ratepayers based on the movement in their land values
- What is Council's preferred option for the Special Rate Variation?
Council would like to hear the public's opinion before making a decision.

- Have you factored in Nimmie Caira?
Yes this funding has been included in the LTFP. However grant applications submitted under the NSW Fixing Country Roads and Federal Government's Bridge Renewal Programme have not been included.
- Do we still maintain the Nimmie Caira area?
Yes we do, Waugorah Road is still a council asset.
- If nobody is living there why can't we close the road?
Public access is still needed to those properties.
- Wouldn't development of urban lands take the pressure off farmers paying a lot of rates?
Possibly, if you look at Murray Shire, farmland rates have decreased and urban rates have increased.
- There have been five rate meetings held around the Shire, can you tell us the general feeling of the meetings?
We will be conducting a straw vote here tonight and will give you the answer after that, we don't want to influence the meeting.
- Is the Council being as efficient as it could be?
Council is looking at its efficiencies and are always working towards improving.
- If we were to go with option 2 or 3 will council come back to us next year with further increases?
Council would not expect to come back in the short term. The last special rate increases in 2006/2007 & 2008/2009.
- At the end of the day Council will make a decision?
Yes, but will take into consideration the community feedback.
- What is working capital?
It is a financial benchmark (combination of cash + current debtors less current liabilities) in order to have the financial flexibility to cater for a major unforeseen event, without the need to make significant changes to the current budget. A target of \$1 million (increased by CPI each year) was set by Council in 2010/2011.
- This rate rise came about due to cuts from the Grants Commission. If a farmer has a bad year they cut costs to suit.
- Council need to look at irrigable land and the water impact, rice growing has been cut down.

- Vote on options for Special Rate Variation from 24 attendees
 - 3% Option 1 – 24 people
 - 7% Option 2 – NIL
 - 14% Option 3 – NIL
 - 20% Option 4 - NIL
- We concerned the 500 ha rule as we have a farm on one side of the road and our house is on the other side, we wanted to sell the farm separately to the house.
- Can this rule be changed in the LEP?
The figure is the same as it has been since 1992. It can be reviewed but would have to employ a consultant which is costly.
- The definition of viable is different in areas. In our area smaller blocks are still viable.
- Were ratepayers notified of the LEP?
Council wrote to each ratepayer about the LEP.

Close of meeting: 7.25pm