

# One-off move available for Councils

NSW councils have welcomed a temporary reprieve from financial disaster after Local Government Minister, Wendy Tuckerman cleared the way for a special one-off rate variation for planned infrastructure and community services.

Councils struggling to recover from bushfires, floods and the pandemic were left reeling late last year when IPART handed down an historic low 0.7% baseline rate peg despite surging inflation, soaring fuel and other commodity prices, and a mandated wage rise for staff.

Local Government NSW (LGNSW) President, Darria Turley said the unexpectedly low 0.7% baseline rate peg had forced councils to look at recasting their budgets, scrapping planned infrastructure projects and forced to consider service and job cuts just to stay afloat.

"The announcement came as a massive kick in the guts to councils already working so hard to help their communities recover from the events of the past two years," Cr Turley said.

"The financial hit was particularly tough news for councils in regional and rural areas, who are often the largest employer in town and inextricably linked to the health of their local economies."

"Choosing between cuts to jobs or roads maintenance, parks, libraries and other community services would put these local economies at significant risk at the worst possible time."

Minister Tuckerman has now told an Estimates Committee of the NSW Parliament that councils would have almost two months to

apply to IPART for a special one-off rate variation if they could show the funding was critical to undertake planned work identified in last year's financial planning process.

The one-off variation could exceed the 0.7% rate peg, but would still be capped at a maximum of 2.5%, the Minister said.

"Our councils recognise that individual families and small businesses are also doing it tough and there is certainly no appetite to exacerbate the pressures they face," Cr Turley said.

"The opportunity to increase rates by up to 2.5% is still less than inflation, but it is in line with what councils expected when they finalised their budget, work planning and community consultation process last year."

"That process was undertaken very soberly and responsibly, to allow councils to continue to help drive a locally led economic recovery while minimising the impact of rates rises on individuals."

Cr Turley said the road to recovery will be incredibly tough, particularly when you consider the devastation caused by current widespread flooding across the state.

"The last thing we want as we emerge from the pandemic is to send our regional and rural communities into a downward spiral from which they cannot recover."

Minister Tuckerman said IPART had also been tasked with undertaking a broader review of its rate peg methodology, including the Local Government Cost Index, to prevent a reoccurrence of the 2022-23 anomaly.

Council applications for the special one-off variation will close on April 29 with decisions expected from IPART by June 21.

# Grants available to plant trees

Thousands of trees will be planted throughout the Riverina and Central West as part of the nation honouring the legacy of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and her 70 years of service to Australia and the Commonwealth.

Member for Riverina, Michael McCormack said eligible groups and organisations could lodge an expression of interest (EOI) in tree-planting grants being made available through the \$15.1 million Planting Trees for The Queen's Jubilee Program.

Grants from \$2500 to \$20,000 will be available to a broad range of organisations, with each Federal electorate eligible to receive up to \$100,000 for up to 10 projects.

To be eligible, applicants must have an Australian Business Number and be an incorporated not-for-profit entity or eligible government entity.

Schools and churches are also eligible to lodge an EOI, subject to sponsorship criteria which is available from Mr McCormack's Wagga Wagga electorate office.

"As I said in a speech in Federal Parliament on February 9, the people of the Riverina and Central West have a great affinity with Her Majesty, with a deep and abiding respect and love for her," Mr McCormack said.

"This is a wonderful opportunity to pay tribute to Queen Elizabeth II in a lasting and meaningful way."

"On the day trees are planted and for generations to come, people and the environment will benefit from the trees and commemorative signage will be a reminder of her great affection for and service to Australia."

EOIs for the Riverina electorate can be lodged with Mr McCormack up until 5pm on Monday, April 4.

After the close of the EOI period, a consultation committee will help Mr McCormack assess EOIs received.

Nominated applicants will then be invited to apply for funding.

EOIs should include details a short description of the project, total cost, grant funding sought, why the project is important to the community and contact details.

Expressions of interest forms can be requested by emailing

michael.mccormack.mp@aph.gov.au or by contacting Mr McCormack's Wagga Wagga electorate office on 6921 4600.

The office can also provide further information about eligibility of organisations and the type of trees which can be planted.

During her reign, the Queen has visited Australia 16 times and on many of these visits, planted trees at community events and ceremonies, leaving a long-lasting reminder of the special occasion for the people in those communities.

The Queen is said to have planted 1500 trees throughout her reign.

For more information and for how to get involved visit: <https://business.gov.au/ptqj>

## FAST FACTS

- Trees planted under the Planting Trees for the Queen's Jubilee Program may be native or non-native, but must be regionally appropriate and grow to more than two metres tall when mature.

- Plantings must be placed in a long-term position to provide a commemorative legacy and reasonable efforts should be made to support establishment of plantings.

- Projects must be completed by 30 November 2023.

- Grants will be available between \$2,500 and \$20,000.

- Interested parties must submit an expression of interest form by April 4, 2022 to be considered by Mr McCormack and a consultation committee. EOI forms can be obtained by emailing Mr McCormack or telephoning his Wagga Wagga electorate office.

- Each electorate will receive \$100,000 to allocate towards successful projects, with a maximum of 10 projects to be funded per electorate.

- The programme is open only to applicants who have been invited by their local Federal MP after the EOI period.

- Projects that are suitable must include formal commemorative events in 2022 to mark the Jubilee, plantings of regionally appropriate tree species and installation of commemorative signage or plaques.

- The Planting Trees for The Queen's Jubilee Program is one of a range of national and community events planned by the Australian Government to celebrate The Queen's Jubilee year.

## Dramatic rise in Covid cases

Bland Shire's active Covid cases have taken a dramatic rise in the last week after falling the previous week.

While 85 active cases were recorded last week, the figure has more than doubled this week to 192 (of those recorded), consistent with the increase across the Murrumbidgee Local Health District which has now exceeded 33,000 Covid case numbers since July 1 last year.

The MLHD had 5070 active cases of COVID-19 across the District as of Monday bringing the total number of cases since July 1, 2021 to 33,440.

There are currently 16 COVID-19 patients in MLHD who are being cared for in hospital, none of which are in ICU.

MLHD has renewed calls for people to come

forward for their booster vaccination.

Studies show that the immunity created by Covid-19 vaccines begins to wane over time.

A booster dose helps to strengthen your immune system and improve your long-term protection against serious illness from the Covid-19 virus.

Booster doses are now available for people aged 16 and over who had their second dose at least three months ago.

Anyone aged five and over can now have their Covid-19 vaccine.

People who have had Covid should still get their booster vaccination once fully recovered from the virus.

For most people this is around 4-6 weeks after infection.

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Printed and Published by H Vearing for

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INSIDE



TODAY

## Increased rate rise on the horizon

**Bland Shire Council has elected to apply for a Special Rate Variation this year to increase general rates by 2.4 percent as opposed to the Rate Peg determined by IPART of 0.7 percent.**

The decision attracted quite some discussion during Council's monthly meeting last week with councillors saying the 0.7 percent would "penalise" them for having budgeted efficiently in the long term.

A report to councillors suggested the application for a Special Rate Variation of 2.4 percent be permanent and not just for the 2022/23 financial year.

Councillors were further told if just the 0.7 percent increase was imposed it would result in a reduction in income of \$126,306 for Bland Shire in 2022/23.

Over the remaining seven years of Council's Long Term Financial Plan this would lead to a reduction in total income of \$968,875 which would potentially put jobs and service delivery within the local community at risk.

"This significant reduction in Council revenue will severely impact the organisation's ability to meet community expectations for service delivery and infrastructure maintenance, let alone support any future capital projects designed to benefit the communities within Bland Shire," stated the report submitted by Director Corporate and Community Services, Alison Balind.

Ms Balind said if Council supported applying for a Special Variation, it would give Bland Shire potential to increase its own-source revenue through application of levies as well as maintaining a reasonable trajectory of rating income.

"The 0.7 percent rate peg is the lowest increase in many years and is far below reasonable expectations," said Ms Balind's report, noting how it was determined due to the limitations of the model IPART used to account for the current global economic downturn and the additional expenditure needed to deliver the economic stimulus currently being implemented as part of the government-led recovery.

She said the low increase resulted from a number of factors including IPART's failure to recognise real wage cost increases, as represented by the Local Government Award increases of two percent, abnormally low increases in the Local Government Cost Index (LGCI) during 2020-21 as a result of the Covid-induced slump in economic activity in Australia and globally, and the excessive lag in the figures used to develop the LGCI each year upon which the peg is based.

"The lag indicators used by IPART do not provide a reliable basis for determining the peg for 2022-23," said Ms Balind.

"There is already evidence of a significant movement in inflation figures, most noticeably with huge increases in fuel costs and building and construction materials rapidly escalating as the result of increased activity and major shortages.

"It is certain that Council will face much higher costs across the board in 2022-23."

Ms Balind said for many Councils the only option to sure up revenue streams would be through applying for a Special Rate Variation for 2022-2023.

The timing of IPART's rate peg announcement in December 2021 was prior to the new Council being in place which, according to Ms Balind, also limited Bland Shire's ability

to even consider such action.

And when preparing its Long Term Financial Plan 2019-2029 (LTFP) as part of the Integrated Planning and Reporting Process, Ms Balind said Council adopted a conservative approach to its revenue forecasting to ensure it did not overstate its income.

"In the five years preceding the adoption of the LTFP, the average rate peg was in the vicinity of 2.3 percent.

"Since the 2018-19 rate peg was set, the average increase had been 2.4 percent until the announcement in December last year of 0.7 percent.

"In comparison, Council's calculations for the LTFP were based on an average 2.4 percent increase per annum."

Crs Liz McGlynn and Tony Lord said it was absolutely essential to apply for the variation adding 2.4 percent was not an excessive amount.

"It's similar to last year," said Cr McGlynn, "we'll be unsustainable if we don't do it."

"We have to get every dollar we can or we'll be going backwards."

Cr Kerry Keatley questioned why they should apply for the rise to be "permanent" thinking it was "silly" as Council has no idea what is going to happen in the future.

Cr Lord, however, described it as being similar to compound interest.

To be successful in its application, Council must demonstrate the need for a special variation to meet the obligations they set for 2022-23 in their Integrated Planning and Reporting (IP&R) documentation.

To seek a permanent special variation Council also needs to demonstrate the financial need in their rate base on an ongoing basis.

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<b>GOLF - LADIES &amp; MEN</b> Saturdays and Sundays		<b>BOWLS</b> Every Wednesday at 2pm		<b>Happy Hour each day</b> Courtesy Bus Available everyday after 5pm, on the hour	
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# Rates 'double whammy' with annual stormwater levy

Local ratepayers could be in for a double whammy if Bland Shire Council's application for a special rate variation gets approved after also voting at last week's meeting to apply a storm water levy on future rate notices.

The \$25 annual levy will be imposed to help with the costs of stormwater management services.

Twenty five dollars is the maximum allowable for land categorised as residential while for a lot in a strata scheme categorised as residential, the levy amount is \$12.50.

Land categorised as business attracts a \$25 levy plus an additional \$25 for each 350 square metres or part of 350 square metres by which the area of the parcel of land exceeds 350 square metres.

Councillors were told a review of Bland Shire's rateable properties would indicate there would be an estimated 1462 residential properties and a further 85 business properties which could be charged a stormwater levy.

The resultant revenue would be in the vicinity of \$38,675 per annum at a minimum.

The decision to approve the levy divided councillors.

Cr Tony Lord said Council's ability to afford stormwater management over the years had been inadequate due to the "rate pegging squeeze" so when it floods, they are unable to do anything.

He added Bland Shire was one of very few councils which does not already have a

stormwater levy which also helps with kerb and guttering and is only applicable to urban and village rates, not farmland.

Cr Liz McGlynn agreed Bland Shire was "way behind the eight-ball" in stormwater management in Wyalong and Ungarie saying \$25 was not much money a year yet it would benefit so many.

Cr Jill Funnell thought it might be a good time to try the levy however Cr Rod Crowe strongly objected to the name of it.

He thought the name "stormwater" was restrictive as people would think it was more about underground management whereas this Shire has open drains.

He also thought raising nearly \$39,000 a year would not pay for much and everyone would "whinge" about a rate rise and levy in one hit.

"What benefit is it to the homeowner in West Wyalong?" he questioned.

"Not everyone is going to benefit, it needs to be changed."

Cr Lord maintained such a levy would help with the cost of getting stormwater away from the open drains and kerbs and gutters and while the levy would initiate \$38,000, they could actually put \$60,000 in the budget for stormwater general funding.

"I'm prepared to wear the flack from the community, we need to improve the system and this is one of those hard decisions we have to make," he added.

The motion to apply the levy was passed, but not unanimously.

## Raid at Ungarie nets over \$50,000 in drugs

A 56-year-old man was refused bail on Tuesday to appear in Griffith Local Court Wednesday after police seized a large amount of drugs from his Ungarie property.

Police from the Murrumbidgee Criminal Investigations Unit and the Proactive Crime Team conducted a firearms prohibition search at a home on Ethel Street, Ungarie around 1.30pm on Tuesday.

During the search, police located PVC pipe and subsequently dug up areas in the backyard which led to the discovery of 7g of methylamphetamine and 45 grams of cannabis.

A thorough search of the garden uncovered an additional 2.3 kilograms of cannabis leaf.

Police also seized military ordinance.

The man, allegedly a member of a notable outlaw motorcycle gang, had fled the house and was found hiding in a neighbour's bedroom.

He was arrested and taken to West Wyalong Police station where he was charged with seven offences including supplying prohibited drugs, possession of a prohibited weapon without a permit and recklessly dealing with criminal gains.

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Friday 1 April 2022

## Bland Shire Council Notices

### COMMENT SOUGHT ON COUNCIL DOCUMENTS

Bland Shire Council now has on public exhibition for your consideration the following documents -

- DRAFT Your Vision, Our Future Community Strategic Plan 2017-2027**
- DRAFT Payment of Expenses and Provision of Facilities to Councillors**
- DRAFT Bland Shire Council Code of Meeting Practice**
- DRAFT Budget 2022-2023**

View the full documents, go to Council's website at [www.blandshire.nsw.gov.au](http://www.blandshire.nsw.gov.au).

Hard copies of the documents are also available at the Council Administration Office. Written feedback will be received until 4pm, TODAY Friday 1 April, 2022 on the DRAFT Payment of Expenses and Provision of Facilities to Councillors and DRAFT Bland Shire Council Code of Meeting Practice.

Written feedback will be received until 4pm, Friday 15 April, 2022 on the DRAFT Your Vision, Our Future Community Strategic Plan 2017-2027.

Written feedback will be received until 4pm, Friday 29 April, 2022, on the DRAFT Budget 2022-2023.

Written submissions on the DRAFT Your Vision, Our Future Community Strategic Plan 2017-2027, DRAFT Payment of Expenses and Provision of Facilities to Councillors, DRAFT Bland Shire Council Code of Meeting Practice and DRAFT Budget 2022-2023 can be made in writing and sent via email to [council@blandshire.nsw.gov.au](mailto:council@blandshire.nsw.gov.au) or mailed to Bland Shire Council, 6 Shire Street, West Wyalong, NSW 2671.

### TIP CLOSURE - EASTER

Council advises that all Council controlled tips will be CLOSED over the Easter weekend - 15-18 April.

Normal operations will resume on Tuesday 19 April.

### POSITIONS VACANT

Position	Closing Date	Salary Range
Purchasing Officer	14 April	As per award

To apply for a vacancy at Bland Shire Council please apply electronically and complete the online application form. A Position Description, Information Package and further information about Bland Shire is available on Council's website [www.blandshire.nsw.gov.au](http://www.blandshire.nsw.gov.au) or by phoning Council on 6972 2266.

### ROADWORKS - COMPTON ROAD

Transport NSW advise they will be undertaking roadworks on Compton Road from Monday 4 April until Thursday 7 April.

As a result, Cassin Street will be closed at the Compton Road intersection between 7am and 4pm during this period.

### ROADWORKS - QUANDIALLA ROAD

Council advises that road improvement works will be taking place on Quandialla Road commencing Monday 4 April.

Works are expected to take approximately three weeks (weather pending).

Traffic on Quandialla Road may experience some delays and motorists should plan their trip accordingly.

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[www.blandshire.nsw.gov.au](http://www.blandshire.nsw.gov.au)



# Draft budget open for comment

**Bland Shire Council has approved its 2022/2023 Draft Budget but not before some councillors argued they needed more time to consider the document.**

Cr Tony Lord said Councillors were only presented with the "sizeable" document at their recent workshop without proper time to review it, saying they needed more time before approving any draft.

Cr Lord also noted how the draft budget had been framed on the proposed 0.7 percent rate peg increase but with Council now applying for a special rate variation, the documentation would have to be readjusted for the proposed rate increase of 2.4 percent.

He wanted time to digest the document saying at first glance he was unable to find where the funds from the Voluntary Planning Agreement with Evolution was within the budget.

"We need more discussion," he said before eventually being one of the majority to vote in favour of endorsing the draft.

Cr Liz McGlynn, however, remained steadfast in her opposition to the draft voting against its endorsement.

Cr McGlynn raised questions over why

Council did not have agreements with the two solar farms and also focussed on the "blowout" in costs for the Tivoli Theatre last year.

While acknowledging that was the responsibility of the former council and not new council, Cr McGlynn said they had to answer to the community and wanted to be "shown everything".

She said "the horse may have bolted" but wanted to know why councillors haven't had these issues addressed before.

General manager, Ray Smith reminded Cr McGlynn it was the previous council who agreed to take no action on certain issues raised and it was also the councillors who voted to go ahead with the Theatre despite an original report advising against it.

He said Cr McGlynn's questions had all been answered.

Councillors will now have further opportunity to comment on the draft document during the public exhibition, as will members of the community, with the deadline set at 4pm, April 29.

In addition to the draft budget, the draft Revenue Policy, including fees and charges for 2022/23, was also endorsed and is on public exhibition for comment.

# Costly trip through town

**Travelling through West Wyalong after consuming five seven-ounce glasses of rum and coke, while her licence was suspended, has cost a woman \$1100 in fines and concurrent three-month disqualifications.**

Alisha Caroline Batchler, 39, of Leanyer in the Northern Territory, pleaded guilty to drive motor vehicle while licence suspended and drive with low range PCA during a phone hook-up in the latest sitting of the West Wyalong Local Court.

Batchler, who owns an Event Management company, said she was unable to attend court due to residing in the Territory.

Court facts showed how she was stopped for an RBT and licence check while driving in an easterly direction along Neeld Street at 2.15am on February 26.

When asked for her licence Batchler told police "I've lost my whole purse" with checks revealing she was suspended from driving on January 20.

At the time she had a male passenger, telling police she'd consumed the five drinks between 6pm the night before and 1.45am and they were



simply travelling through town.

Magistrate, Ms Jill Kiely noted Batchler was only stopped for a check and not due to her manner of driving, saying her roadside breath test reading was already dropping by the time she undertook the breath analysis at the police station.

Batchler's reading was 0.076.

With a number of minor matters on her Queensland record, Batchler was convicted on both charges with identical penalties of a \$550 fine and three month disqualification.

Friday 15 April 2022

## Bland Shire Council Notices

### NOTICE OF MEETING

Notice is hereby given that the following meeting will be held in the Council Chambers, Shire Street West Wyalong

### Ordinary Council Meeting – Tuesday April 19 commencing at 6.30pm

Business Papers may be inspected at Council's office and in the Library for the Ordinary Council meeting from Thursday 14 April 2022. A copy of the Business Paper will also be available on Council's website at [www.blandshire.nsw.gov.au](http://www.blandshire.nsw.gov.au)

Council Meetings are open to the public, interested persons are invited to address the Council on items of business to be considered at the meeting.

Persons interested in addressing Council during the Public Forum are to be in the meeting room 15 minutes prior to the commencement of the meeting. They must convey to the General Manager or their delegate, their wish to address the Council and identify the item of business on the agenda and whether they wish to speak 'for' or 'against' the item. Each address is to be for a maximum of three (3) minutes in length. Refer to Council's website for a full copy of the Code of Meeting Practice.

Audio recordings of each Council meeting will continue to be made available from Council's website.

### EASTER CLOSURE

Bland Shire Council wishes to advise that Council's offices, the Bland Shire Library, Visitor Information Centre and Council Landfills will be CLOSED over Easter from Friday 15 April until Monday 18 April.

Normal operations will resume on Tuesday 19 April.

## Community Reference Group

Council is calling for agenda items from the community for the Community Reference Group meeting on Tuesday 10 May at 6.30pm at the Bland Shire Council Chambers.

Members of the community are invited to put forward items for discussion or address the Council on any issue relating to culture, tourism, access, the arts or community events and issues.

Agenda items can be submitted by phoning Council on 6972 2266 or via email to [council@blandshire.nsw.gov.au](mailto:council@blandshire.nsw.gov.au) by **Wednesday 4 May**.

## REGIONAL EVENTS PROGRAM

The NSW Government has announced a new grants program, Reconnecting Regional NSW – Community Events Program, to support new and existing local events.

Applications are open to all NSW Regional Councils with a generous specific allocation available to support events in the Bland Shire which help to reconnect communities and provide positive economic benefits to the local area.

Events must be held before March 31 2023.

Council is inviting ideas, suggestions and proposals from community groups and individuals to be put forward at the next Community Reference Group meeting on Tuesday 10 May at 6.30pm at the Bland Shire Council Chambers.

To be eligible for potential funding events must –

- \* Be open to all members of the public
- \* Free to attend or a very small fee to cover any extra costs, and
- \* Have a primary purpose of reconnecting communities and improving social cohesion of the local community

Examples of eligible projects as supplied by the NSW Government include –

- Community markets and bazaars
- Festivals and fairs
- Sporting events
- Food and leisure events
- Recovery events
- Community classes and workshops
- Agricultural field days (run by community organisations)
- Regional racing carnivals (e.g. horse or greyhound racing) run by community organisations
- Touring events and theatre programs

Existing events seeking funding will need to demonstrate how funding will be used to make events larger or more accessible.

To discuss your event or for further enquiries prior to the Community Reference Group meeting please contact Council's Community Relations Officer, Craig Sutton, on 69722266.

Office Hours: 8.30am-5pm Monday to Friday

Phone: 02 6972 2266

Email: [council@blandshire.nsw.gov.au](mailto:council@blandshire.nsw.gov.au)

EMERGENCY NUMBERS: Council 0418 402 350, Goldenfields Water 1800 800 917, Fire 000

[www.blandshire.nsw.gov.au](http://www.blandshire.nsw.gov.au)

**TIVOLI SEE IT AT THE TIVOLI**

FRIDAY 15TH APRIL - THURSDAY 21ST APRIL

**RABBIT ACADEMY**  
Duration: 76 mins  
SATURDAY 16th 12pm

**SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 2**  
Duration: 122 mins  
SATURDAY 16th 2:15pm  
SATURDAY 16th 6pm  
MONDAY 18th 12pm  
TUESDAY 19th 11am  
THURSDAY 21st 12pm

**DOG**  
Duration: 101 mins  
MONDAY 18th 2:45pm

**RUBY'S CHOICE**  
Duration: 117 mins  
THURSDAY 21st 6pm

MOVIES TIL MIDNIGHT FOR YOUTH WEEK  
8PM TUESDAY APRIL 19  
SEE WEBSITE FOR DETAILS

THE TIVOLI WILL BE CLOSED ON  
GOOD FRIDAY & EASTER SUNDAY

DISCOVER LOCAL TIVOLI

**R & G STEPHENSONS FUNERAL SERVICES**

"Prepaid and pre-arranged funeral consultants!"

14 Shire Street  
West Wyalong NSW 2671

Phone Cynthia on  
0434 344 996  
02 6972 0775