



# Media Release **COPY**

Date: 28 January 2014

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## **NO AMALAGAMATION - TENTERFIELD SHIRE TO STAND ALONE**

When the interim report of the NSW Independent Local Government Review Panel in June 2013 recommended the amalgamation of Glen Innes Severn and Tenterfield Shire Councils in 2020, it appeared that the autonomy of Tenterfield Shire in which Australia's Federation was born was at an end. Not satisfied with the Panel's recommendation to amalgamate, Tenterfield Shire Council made submissions to the Independent Panel demonstrating the Council's comprehensive plan for financial sustainability and ongoing consultation with the community. Following these submissions the Panel has now released its final report, in which Tenterfield Shire Council has been removed from the list of proposed amalgamations.

"This is a great result for our Shire, and a credit to the Councillors for whom this has been a difficult process", said Mayor Peter Petty. "Our staff, and especially our senior management team have worked tirelessly in preparing plans by which Council has demonstrated we are viable, and can maintain our assets into the future. While this necessitates increases to rates, we will still be lower than Glen Innes Severn while retaining Tenterfield Shire's own Council.

Released in January, the Panel's final report is a comprehensive review of NSW Local Government and makes several key recommendations including: the redistribution of grant funding to high needs areas such as rural Councils, changes to the rating system (specifically rate pegging), strengthening 'strategic capacity', improving working relations between local and state government, amalgamations – especially in metropolitan Sydney and stronger regional organisations to support rural and remote Councils.

"The final report contains many good suggestions and ideas," confirms General Manager, Ms Lotta Jackson. "It is encouraging that the Panel took our submissions into account and recognised the solid planning basis Tenterfield Shire Council has developed demonstrating our financial stability over the 10 year planning cycle. In fact, the majority of recommendations in the final report that are directed towards Councils, are measures we have already actioned including establishing fiscal responsibility, strengthening the revenue base, meeting infrastructure needs, improving productivity and accountability, and establishing political leadership and good governance."

The Panel's final report includes timetables for actions including reviews of rate pegging, the establishment of regional 'Joint Organisations' of Councils and confirmation of state/local cooperation at the regional level in strategic planning, state plan implementation and through regional road groups. The Final Report of the NSW Independent Local Government Review Panel is available from the Department of Local Government website at [www.dlg.nsw.gov.au](http://www.dlg.nsw.gov.au).

### **Media Contact:**

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### **Phone:**

**02 6736 6000**



# Media Release **COPY**

15 November 2013

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Council has recently completed its round of community consultations at Tenterfield and the villages of Legume, Liston, Drake, Jennings, Torrington, Urbenville and Mingoola to discuss the proposed Special Rates Variation for 2014 to 2018, and its role in Tenterfield's long term financial sustainability. The meetings were well attended with around 325 present across the 8 locations.

"It was great to see such a good turnout and so many good ideas. The great majority of people were there to inform themselves of Council's proposal and we had many positive comments following the presentations. It has been critical for the community to gain an understanding that the increases are to renew infrastructure and not to fund ongoing Council operations or employ new staff," said Mayor Peter Petty. "There were of course those who object to the SRV in principle, regardless of the rationale or need, and the community was able to hear those opinions expressed in the forums as well."

Ms Jackson commenced the presentations by explaining that NSW Treasury Corporation (TCorp) had audited Council, finding that it relied too heavily on grant funding with only 22% of Council's general revenue coming from rates, well below the TCorp benchmark (60%). Council's expenditure across the different departments was also presented showing the majority of expenditure on Engineering (58%) with the remainder spread across planning and compliance, cultural facilities, parks and gardens, economic development and tourism, administration and finance.

"It is not uncommon for staff members to have multiple roles" said Ms Jackson, "and much of our expenditure is related to services that Council is legally required to provide under the Local Government Act 1993 such as planning, compliance, library services, land use management, rural fire services, road management and public health."

The Director of Corporate Services Mr Allan Shorter provided an overview of the steps Council was undertaking to achieve financial sustainability and outlined the process of applying for Special Rates Variations (SRV). Mr Shorter explained that following submissions regarding the SRV, Council would review the data at its November meeting and determine if a SRV application would be made, and if so, what its form would be. Submissions are now closed and the report to Council's next meeting is currently being prepared.

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**Mayor Cr Peter Petty – 0411 475301**

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The presentation was concluded by the Director of Engineering Services, Dr Dennis Gascoigne who explained the reason why Council had a surge in pending infrastructure cost.

"Most of our infrastructure is now reaching the end of its design life," said Dr Gascoigne. "The most visible examples are our timber bridges of which 50% or more are older than 70 years and either need replacement now or in the next 10 years. But it's not just about bridges, we have roads to reseal and re-sheet, culverts to replace, causeways to reinstall and buildings to paint and repair. We have been able to get by with relatively minor maintenance for nearly 50 years, but now the time for renewal has arrived and we can't continue to just patch over \$400M of assets and hope they remain safe."

Following the half hour of presentations, the General Manager invited questions for the next hour. Common questions included money spent on salaries, the need for Council to lobby State Government for more money, personal hardship, pensioners capacity to pay more and differences between rural and town rates.

All Councillors attended at least one forum each with the Mayor opening and closing the forums with the exception of the Mingoola meeting where the Deputy Mayor was delegated that role.

Council will determine the Special Rates Variation, taking into account the outcome of the forums and submissions, at the 27 November 2013 Council meeting.



# Media Release COPY

Date: 3 December 2013

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## COUNCIL SUPPORTS LONG TERM FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

Faced with mounting challenges in maintaining and renewing infrastructure, Tenterfield Shire's Council has voted to support a submission for a series of special rates variations over the next four years. If approved by NSW's Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART), the decision will result in increases of 12%, 7%, 7% and 7% above the expected rate peg increase of 3% over the next four years. An alternative proposal which raised the same level of funds, but with increases spread over 7 years, was narrowly defeated in favour of the sharper rise.

"It is a credit to the Council and the community that the hard decisions we have delayed for too long are being made", said Mayor Peter Petty " Tenterfield's Councillors are rate payers too, and no one likes to have to increase rates, but our road infrastructure and public buildings are aging and in some cases starting to fail. If this investment isn't made and our assets aren't maintained, we cannot sustain our community and economy. I supported the increase that was selected because it leaves rates at a lower level at the end of the 10 year forecast period compared to the 7 year option, while raising similar funds."

The additional funding is to address the infrastructure challenges outlined in Council's 10 year financial plan and Asset Management Plans including replacement or major refurbishment to Council's timber bridges, resealing and resheeting of roads, and urgent maintenance of public facilities.

"Our plans show, and our recent community forums emphasised the fact that these additional funds will be used for infrastructure, said General Manager Ms Lotta Jackson. "We have already cut costs and restructured our Council's staff, favouring front line personnel. This will not result in a larger Council, rather it supports necessary investment in renewing the rural and urban roads and other infrastructure throughout Tenterfield Shire."

Wednesday's Council meeting saw robust discussion of the rates variation in the context of funding the Long Term Financial Plan. Ms Jackson explained the importance of demonstrating financial sustainability. "Not only is it responsible management to ensure that Council can continue to fund its responsibilities," said Ms Jackson, it is also good governance.

Council must advise IPART of its intention to apply for a Special Rates Variation by 13 December 2013 with further details to be submitted by 24 February 2014. IPART's decision is expected by mid-June 2014.

### Media Contact:

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30 May 2013

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## DRAFT OPERATIONAL PLAN 2013/14 – COMMUNITY FORUMS

Tenterfield Shire Council's General Manager Lotta Jackson and Director Engineering Services Dennis Gascoigne have recently completed a very successful series of community briefings, communicating Council's direction for 2013/2014 with residents and rate payers across Tenterfield and its seven (7) villages. The "Roadshow" as it has become known, is undertaken to explain the direction and focus of the new Council during this four (4) year term and builds on the results of the community consultation and survey undertaken in November 2012.

November's survey clearly indicated the community's views on future directions for Tenterfield Shire and these views now form the basis of Council's new 10 year Strategic Plan and 2013/14 Operational Plan. The Plans focus on the sustainability of Tenterfield Shire into the future including:

- Population growth;
- Prospering business district;
- Prospering economic development across the Shire;
- Prospering tourism industry;
- Well maintained roads, parks and gardens;
- Balance of heritage, environmental constraints and development;
- A community built on friendliness, culture and lifestyle;
- Adequate health, transport and community services; and
- Waste to land fill reduced.

In addition to establishing the goals for the next year, the Operational Plan also details Council's budget with increases to revenue and cuts to spending including:

- Updates of leases and new leases of Council property to bring an anticipated income of \$19,500;
- Increases to fees and charges of 10%;
- Increases to saleyard fees and charges and a WHS levy proposed of \$2.50 per head for three (3) years to pay for the installation of a new catwalk;
- Sewer inspection charge of \$150 per inspection;
- Reduction in the staff leave entitlements reserve of \$150,000;
- Reduction across all Council's operational budgets - except roads - and including cuts to staff and Councillor training budgets; and
- Reductions in administrative budgets right through to printing and stationery.

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Throughout the "Roadshow", the General Manager stressed that although the proposed cuts will sustain Council in 2013/14, the recommendation of the recent NSW Treasury report for Special Rates Variations would need to be enacted in 2014/15 and into the future.

"Councillors and staff have worked hard this year to achieve a balanced budget in 2013/14 but current revenue sources will not be sufficient to ensure Tenterfield's future, or deal with the proposed amalgamation recommended by the Independent Review Panel", said Ms Jackson. "Past Councils have resolved not to increase rates in line with rate pegging with the best of intentions, but our Shire now finds itself in a position where revenue is insufficient to maintain even basic services unless changes are made".

The difficulties faced through Tenterfield Shire's low rating levels were demonstrated through comparisons with similar Councils. Tenterfield's rural ratings sit at less than 50% of the group average and just over half of the rating levels at Glen Innes Severn. Residential and commercial rating levels were also significantly below other Councils.

Mr Gascoigne explained the impact of the revenue shortfall across the engineering budget, specifically commenting on the maintenance of gravel roads.

"Our current budget allows us to re-sheet about 10km of road per year. Given that we have over 1,000km of road, it will take 100 years to complete the process at current funding levels", he said. "This is without even considering sealed roads, timber bridge replacement, installation of culverts and rectification of drainage issues".

As Engineering Services was recently assigned the function of Waste Management, Mr Gascoigne also commented on the budget for waste, specifically the ongoing costs of EPA compliance. The Director pointed out that Tenterfield Shire is not alone in dealing with the cost of 50 years of underinvestment in waste with all Councils experiencing similar issues. Of significant impact in the proposed budget are the repayments for last year's \$1.25 million emergency loan which will add \$48.61 to every rate assessment for the next ten (10) years. The loan was used to respond to EPA directives relating to Tenterfield Shire's landfill, rural landfills and transfer stations.

Council's commitment to recycling was highlighted with a full recycling service targeted for introduction by December 2013 in conjunction with investigation of contract service provision to reduce the costs to ratepayers. To manage the ongoing efforts to gain regulatory compliance and service previous loans, the base levy for waste will increase to \$160 per assessment per year, and fees to dispose of waste will also rise.

The presentation was heavily focussed on investment and sustainability into the future. Both the General Manager and Director of Engineering Services emphasised the importance of the Main Street Masterplan which is currently in the detailed design phase and due for construction to commence over the next few months.

"In order for Tenterfield Shire to remain viable, Tenterfield town must be seen as an attractive destination to visit and in which to live. Council has allocated \$300,000 for the upgrade of the main street next year as this is a critical investment not just in our town, but in the future of our entire Shire", said the General Manager.

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The meetings closed with a discussion regarding the released Independent Review Report "Future Directions for Local Government in NSW". Council resolved at its May Council meeting to oppose forced amalgamations and to make a submission on the final report outlining how Council and the community will ensure sustainability into the future.

"The recommendation is for Tenterfield Shire and Glen Innes Severn Council to amalgamate in 2020. However, I believe that with the support of the community, Councillors and staff can demonstrate that Tenterfield Shire can support itself and remain a sustainably strong, vibrant and very liveable community", said Ms Jackson. "In order to do this, Council must increase revenue through a special rates variation. The increases we need for sustainability will still have us at a lower rating level than those likely under an amalgamation, so please get behind your Councillors and staff and keep the local in Tenterfield Shire Local Government area".

ENDS



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Date: 8 November 2012

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## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FORUMS - COMMUNITY STRATEGIC PLAN AND ASSETS HAVE YOUR SAY!

Tenterfield Shire Council will hold Community Engagement sessions in relation to the Community Strategic Plan and Assets, Management Forums will be held at each of the following locations:

- Jennings on Wednesday, 28 November at 4.30pm (QLD) and 5.30pm (NSW) at the Wallangarra School of Arts.
- Tenterfield on Wednesday, 28 November at 7.30pm (NSW) at the Tenterfield RSL Pavilion.
- Legume on Thursday, 29 November at 4.30pm (QLD) and 5.30pm (NSW) at the Legume Community Hall.
- Liston on Thursday, 29 November at 6.30pm (QLD) and 7.30pm (NSW) at the Liston Community Hall
- Torrington on Friday, 30 November at 5.00pm (NSW) at the Torrington Community Hall
- Drake on Saturday, 1 December at 10.30am (NSW) at the Drake Community Hall
- Jubullum on Saturday, 1 December at 12.30pm (NSW) at the Jubullum Community Hall
- Urbenville on Saturday, 1 December at 2.00pm (QLD) and 3.00pm (NSW) at the Urbenville CWA Rooms
- And Mingoola on Monday, 3 December at 5.30pm (QLD) and 6.30pm (NSW) at the Mingoola Community Hall.

All of these sessions will be facilitated by the General Manager, Lotta Jackson and the Director of Engineering Services, Dennis Gascoigne.

At these sessions three questions will be asked:

- 1) *What do you like about living in the Tenterfield Shire (and in your particular area)?*
- 2) *What don't you like about living in the Tenterfield Shire? (and in your particular area)?*
- 3) *What would you like to see in the future? (what would be your 3 priorities?)*

And in the asset session we will discuss priorities for our roads, drainage, water supply and liquid waste. This information will guide our asset management planning and ask questions such as;

- 1) *Considering our available resources, how do we balance the maintenance of existing assets versus. improving them or adding to them?*
- 2) *Is a higher standard of road maintenance more important than the regularity at which roads are maintained?*
- 3) *How do we balance the costs of urban and rural stormwater management with an acceptable level of service?*
- 4) *Are there assets where the cost of maintenance exceeds their value, or that can be better used to improve their value?*

All this information can be found on Council's website or on the notice boards in the villages of Urbenville, Drake, Jubullum, Legume, Liston and Mingoola.

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