



Dear Resident

Investing in our Road and Bridge Infrastructure Community Forums to discuss a Special Rate Variation

Roads and bridges are vital infrastructure that connect and support our communities on the mountains, in our valleys, and on the seaboard. Bellingen Shire has approximately 636km of roads and 153 bridges and of this we maintain and renew 567km of roads and 136 bridges as assets. However, Bellingen Shire Council, like all NSW Local Governments, is faced with an infrastructure backlog in relation to roads and bridges at the same time as being restricted in our ability to match revenue to funding needs.

We have been working for the past two and a half years on a process of major organisational reforms which have aimed at improving our effectiveness and efficiency, and importantly our service to our community. This has involved a major structural review, reform of a series of processes and programs, embarking on a process of service reviews and most recently the adoption of a Customer Service Charter and establishment of an Internal Audit Committee.

Our Service Review Process to date has looked in detail at a number of areas of Council services including pools, weeds, roads and bridges. The process will continue in 2014 to ensure ongoing process improvement and reform. Each of these reviews aims to critically evaluate the services we provide to you in terms of standards of service and value for money.

Through Council's Integrated Planning and Reporting framework, we will be engaging with you over the coming months in developing new delivery programs and long term financial plans to address our infrastructure backlog. The first stage will see a series of three community forums where Councillors and staff will provide information on our financial position, road and bridge infrastructure requirements, and options to address the infrastructure backlog including an application for a Special Rate Variation. We will be seeking feedback at these sessions from you in terms of priorities and options, so please come along and have your say.

Community forums are scheduled for the following locations, dates, and times:

Dorrigo - Monday 25 November 2013, from 6.00–7.00pm at Dorrig Public Hall, Hickory Street Dorrig

Bellingen - Tuesday 26 November 2013, from 6.00–7.00pm at Bellingen Uniting Church Hall, Hyde Street Bellingen

Urunga - Wednesday 27 November 2013, from 6.00–7.00pm at Urunga Senior Citizens' Centre, Bowra Street Urunga

A range of engagement initiatives using various media are being utilised to ensure you are informed about this important issue and have the opportunity to have your say. Councillors and Council staff are actively seeking the opportunity to meet with individuals and community groups, so if you would like a council representative to address your community group or an informal information session, or require more information please contact Council by telephone on 02 6655 7300, email council@bellingen.nsw.gov.au, or use the "Have Your Say" feedback form which can be accessed from the home page at www.bellingen.nsw.gov.au.

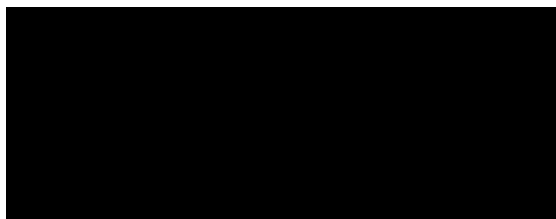
If you can't make it to one of the community forums, fact sheets and additional information will be available via Council's website and at locations across the Shire including our libraries and administration centres. To assist you to provide us with your feedback an online survey will be in place on our website following the community forums and available in printed format if you require one.

Our first round of engagement will be occurring from mid-November to mid-December 2013. Following this, and incorporating community feedback, we will be redrafting our Delivery Program and Long Term Financial Plan which will be subject to further community consultation in January and February 2014. Council will then meet to consider adoption of the new program and plan, as well as determine whether to apply for a Special Rate Variation.

We understand that seeking your involvement at this time of year is not ideal, however time frames that are not our own constrain us.

There are important, long term decisions to be made on infrastructure priorities and how to fund them. Please attend a community forum, write a letter, send an email, fill out our survey, or speak with staff or your Councillors. Above all, be informed and get involved.

Yours sincerely



Liz Jeremy
General Manager
November 2013

PRESS RELEASE

Keeping our community informed

Bellingen Shire
COUNCIL



Improving Services to the Community – the Need to Invest in Road and Bridge Infrastructure

Roads and bridges are vital infrastructure that connect and support our communities on the mountains, in our valleys, and on the seaboard. Bellingen Shire has approximately 636km of roads and 153 bridges and of this we maintain and renew 567km of roads and 136 bridges as assets.

“We have been working for the past two and a half years on a process of major organisational reforms which have aimed at improving our effectiveness and efficiency, and importantly improving our service to our community. This has involved a major structural review, reform of a series of processes and programs, embarking on a process of service reviews and most recently the adoption of a Customer Service Charter and establishment of an Internal Audit Committee” said Liz Jeremy, General Manager.

“Our Service Review Process to date has looked in detail at a number of Council services including pools, weeds, roads and bridges. The process will continue in 2014 to ensure ongoing process improvement and reform. Each of these reviews aims to critically evaluate the services we provide to our community in terms of standards of service and value for money” Liz added.

In parallel with our Service Review Process, in 2012 Council commissioned a customer satisfaction survey. This indicated that our community rates the following services as highly important:

- Maintenance of sealed roads
- River water quality
- Flood management
- Bridge maintenance
- Maintenance of unsealed roads
- Footpaths/cycle ways

Our ongoing reforms and Service Review Processes are addressing these priority issues and our reform but we, like all Local Governments, are faced with infrastructure backlogs as a result of underspending on certain assets over many years. NSW Local Governments have been restricted in their ability to match revenue to funding needs for a number of reasons, primarily rate pegging which has been in place for over 30 years. Although significant progress has been made over the past couple of years in terms of financial efficiencies and discipline to support long term financial sustainability, there is an urgent need for capital funding for road and bridge projects.

To assist in addressing these issues Council is considering an application to the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) for a Special Rate Variation, i.e. a rate increase above the standard peg rate, to fund capital works on roads and bridges. As this affects our entire community we will be talking with our community over the coming months in developing new delivery programs and long term financial plans to address our infrastructure backlog.

The first stage will see a series of three community forums where Councillors and staff will provide information on our financial position, road and bridge infrastructure requirements, and options to address the infrastructure backlog including an application for a Special Rate Variation.

“As part of this process we will be seeking feedback from our community” said Councillor Mark Troy, Mayor.

Community forums are scheduled for the following locations, dates, and times:

Dorrigo - Monday 25 November 2013, from 6.00–7.00pm at Dorriggo Public Hall, Hickory Street Dorriggo

Bellingen - Tuesday 26 November 2013, from 6.00–7.00pm at Bellingen Uniting Church Hall, Hyde Street Bellingen

Urunga - Wednesday 27 November 2013, from 6.00–7.00pm at Urunga Senior Citizens' Centre, Bowra Street Urunga

In addition we will be meeting with our local Chambers of Commerce and a range of community groups.

Our first round of engagement will be occurring from mid-November to mid-December 2013. Following this, and incorporating community feedback, we will be redrafting our Delivery Program and Long Term Financial Plan which will be subject to further community consultation in January and February 2014. Council will then meet to consider adoption of the new program and plan, as well as determine whether to apply for a Special Rate Variation.

“These are important and long term decisions that will determine our infratsructure priorities and the means to fund them, so I encourage the community to be involved and have your say” said Mayor Troy

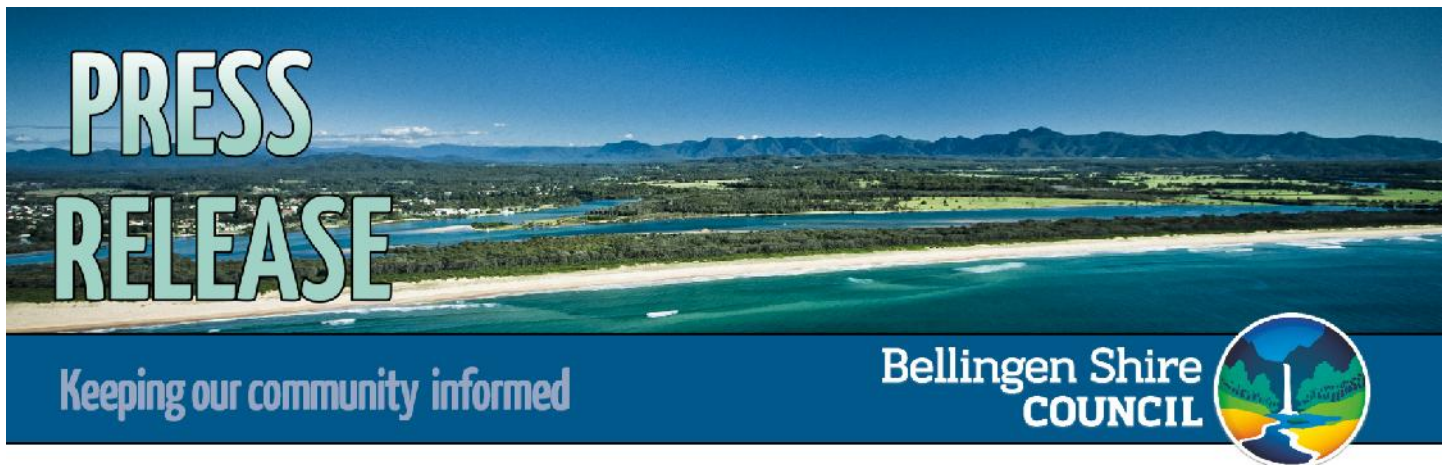
Authorised by **Liz Jeremy**

File No.:

Date: November 2013

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT: Liz Jeremy on 02 6655 7300

ALL COMMUNICATIONS TO BE ADDRESSED TO THE GENERAL MANAGER,
PO BOX 117, BELLINGEN NSW 2454, TELEPHONE (02) 66557300, FAX (02) 66552310



Investing in our Road and Bridge Infrastructure – Special Rate Variation Community Forums

Three community forums were held this week in Dorrig Bellinghen and Urunga to discuss future investment in Council's road and bridge infrastructure and in particular the option of a Special Rate Variation.

Around 50 community members attended each forum along with Councillors and Council staff with proceedings involving a briefing by Council staff and feedback from those present.

Information was provided around:

- The significant changes occurring in the local government sector which have a key focus on the financial realities facing local government, the need to change the funding formula and bolster the revenue base, tackling the infrastructure backlog, building stronger regions and keeping the 'local' in local government.
- Reviews underway by the NSW Government in relation to both the Planning Act and the Local Government Act.
- The impact of cost shifting from other levels of government which for rural Council's has a 3.88% impact and for Bellinghen in particular, a cost impost of \$1.085 million.
- The assessment carried out by TCorp of all Council's in NSW in terms of their financial health which rated Bellinghen Council as moderate with a negative outlook and noted 25% of Councils were rated as moderate, with 48% having a negative outlook. Only 2 Council's in NSW rated as strong.
- The infrastructure audit carried out by the NSW Government which confirmed the asset backlog at \$7.4billion in 2011, noting that in 2011 Council's collectively across the state raised \$6.8 billion in total rates to fund all works and services.
- The impact on Bellinghen Council by the State Government of the removal of financial assistance in the form of the timber bridge program and re-categorisation of roads.
- Collaboration between Council's in the mid north coast region and in particular work being undertaken regarding efficiencies and shared servicing.
- Major reform initiatives being implemented at Bellinghen Shire Council which have the objective of improving our efficiency and effectiveness.
- The results of our 2012 community satisfaction survey which indicated that sealed and unsealed roads and bridges are of high importance but attract a low satisfaction rating, and that if Council had additional funding these programs were seen as a priority for a large number of respondents.
- The Road and bridge review program which has been implemented over the past 12 months and the results of that review.
- The consequent need to provide increased investment in our asset base with the objective of addressing our asset backlog.
- The reality that 53% of our shire is not rateable due to it being State Forest or National Park

- The SRV scenarios that are being considered by Council, as follows:

Scenario	Additional annual rate revenue
8.4% increase	\$494 800
11.9% increase	\$700 900
17.4%	\$1 024 900

- The leverage opportunities that are being considered by Council including potential loan borrowings, interest rate subsidies from the NSW government's Local Infrastructure Renewal Scheme and other external grant funding.
- The community engagement program for the SRV.
- The next steps in the process which involve receiving feedback from residents via the community survey, various procedural steps and council's consideration of feedback from the community as part of its consideration of the SRV options at an Extraordinary Meeting of Council to be held on 13 January 2014.

Community members at the forum provided Councillors and staff with their feedback via various means which has been collected and will be presented to Council in January 2014.

In addition a range of background information was provided to those present at the forums along with advice about how to access further information. Specifically Council has established a Special Rate Variation Information Centre on its website which contains fact sheets and other information to assist the community in making informed comments in relation to this issue. Hard copy information is also available at the Council offices and Shire Libraries.

All Community members are strongly encouraged to complete a survey regarding the option of a Special Rate Variation which is available online at Council's website – www.bellingen.nsw.gov.au at the *Special Rate Variation Information Centre*. For those not able to access the internet, hard copies of the survey are available at the Council offices in Hyde Street Bellingen and at our three libraries at Dorrigo, Urunga and Bellingen.

Authorised by Liz Jeremy

File No.:

Date: 29/11/13

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT: Liz Jeremy ph 6655 7300.

ALL COMMUNICATIONS TO BE ADDRESSED TO THE GENERAL MANAGER,
PO BOX 117, BELLINGEN NSW 2454, TELEPHONE (02) 66557300, FAX (02) 66552310

PRESS RELEASE

Keeping our community informed

Bellinghen Shire
COUNCIL



SPECIAL RATE VARIATION UPDATE – 6 DECEMBER 2013

Council is conducting a range of community engagement initiatives in relation to the option of a Special Rate Variation (SRV). Council is considering four rate variation options including restricting the increase to the “rate peg” which is the legislated increase applied annually by IPART.

Scenario	Additional annual rate revenue
2.3% increase (rate peg, annual)	\$135,474
8.3% increase (one off, permanent)	\$488,886
11.8% increase (one off, permanent)	\$695,043
17.3% increase (one off, permanent)	\$1,019,003

As part of the process Council has modelled outcomes regarding what can be achieved on the basis that Council leverages outcomes via loan funding as well as accessing the Local Infrastructure Renewal Scheme which is a State Government Scheme designed to subsidise interest rates to enable infrastructure investment by local government.

The modelling shows the funding strategy would facilitate the following investment:

Scenario	Reseals	Reconstruction
2.3%	70km	4km
8.3%	84km	6km
11.8%	100km	8km
17.3%	150km	14km

For bridge infrastructure major investments would occur in terms of the immediate restoration of Newry Island Bridge, in addition to 5 other bridges across the shire which are currently subject to load limits. This is in addition to major work that has been carried out on 7 other bridges this financial year.

The SRV community engagement initiatives include writing to all residents to provide information regarding the options being considered by Council, holding community forums in the towns of Dorrig Bellinghen and Urunga as well as a separate forum for the three Chambers of Commerce, providing detailed information on Council's website at the section titled “SRV Information Centre” (including a series of fact sheets and responses to frequently asked questions), providing an opinion survey via Council's website for individual community response, providing information via email to those who regularly subscribe to Council newsletters, providing a variety of hard copy documents including fact sheets, frequently asked questions and a community survey which can be obtained from the Council Administration Office and libraries for those unable to access the web, in addition to providing individualised responses to those corresponding directly to Council on the matter.

These community engagement activities are designed to inform the community and capture community opinion so that this information can be included in a report to be considered by Council in January 2014 regarding the option of a special rate variation and which, if any, will be applied for. A further consultative process will be undertaken post Council's decision in January 2013.

The 3 community forums were hosted by a facilitator for the purpose of ensuring that the sessions were as independent and productive as possible. The timing of the forums was set to ensure those who wished to attend could do so with minimal disruption to work and personal schedules, noting that for those who could not attend there are a range of other opportunities for people to have their say. Councillors were in attendance as well as Council staff who were then available after each forum to speak with individual community members.

The forums were designed to include detailed information to residents, time for questions and answers and an opportunity for small group discussion from which further feedback could be provided to Council representatives. This approach was framed to obtain feedback from as many participants as possible including those who are not comfortable to speak in front of large groups. At two of the three community forums the opportunity for small group discussion did not transpire due to the number of questions and the facilitator accommodated this. The questions and answers form part of a range of information that is, or will shortly be, available on Council's website.

The Chambers of Commerce forum was productive with representatives providing a range of questions for Council to address and undertaking to provide further feedback.

In particular, the forums provided detailed information regarding the challenges currently faced by Council, the outcome and implications of the recent roads and bridges assessment, and the special rate variation options currently being considered by Council. In Urunga, Council staff also provided more detailed information in relation to the Newry Island Bridge.

A broad range of information was provided at the forums and in particular around:

- The significant changes occurring in the local government sector which have a key focus on the financial realities facing local government, the need to change the funding formula and bolster the revenue base, tackling the infrastructure backlog, building stronger regions and keeping the 'local' in local government.
- Reviews underway by the NSW Government in relation to both the Planning Act and the Local Government Act.
- The impact of cost shifting from other levels of government which for rural Council's has on average a 3.88% impact which for Bellingen translates to a cost impost of around \$1.085 million.
- The assessment carried out by NSW Treasury (TCorp) of all Council's in NSW in terms of their financial health which rated Bellingen Council as moderate with a negative outlook and noted 25% of Councils were rated as moderate, with 48% having a negative outlook. Only 2 Council's in NSW rated as strong.
- The infrastructure audit carried out by the NSW Government which confirmed the asset backlog of \$7.4 billion in 2011, noting that in 2011 Council's collectively across the state raised \$6.8 billion in total rates to fund all works and services.
- The impact on Bellingen Council of the State Government's removal of financial assistance in the form of the timber bridge program and recategorisation of roads.
- Collaboration between Council's in the mid north coast region and in particular work being undertaken regarding efficiencies and shared servicing.
- The results of our 2012 community satisfaction survey which indicated that sealed and unsealed roads and bridges are of high importance but attract a low satisfaction rating, and that if Council had additional funding these programs were seen as a priority for a large number of respondents.

- The Road and bridge review program which has been implemented over the past 12 months and the results of that review.
- The consequent need to provide increased investment in our asset base with the objective of addressing our asset backlog.
- The reality that 53% of our shire is not rateable due to it being State Forest or National Park or Crown Land.

What has been apparent at the forums is a level of concern over the perceived level of administration costs, the management of ratepayer funds, including the expenditure on the Raleigh Depot and, for some, the view that Council services should be restricted to the more traditional.

These issues, and more, will be addressed in the additional information Council will shortly publish on Q&A feedback from the forums.

However in brief:

1. STAFFING MATTERS

Post the organisation re-structure in May 2012, Council has published information regarding the number of staff involved in the various functions and services it currently provides. As an overview Council is currently working off position numbers of 146.

53.5% (78) of the permanent roles are engaged in outdoor operations with 46.5% (68) engaged in “indoor roles”.

Of the indoor roles at Council, 60% (41) are roles that are directly involved in providing services or support to our community including:

- Community planning
- Aged and disability support via our Dorrig Support Centre
- Library staff
- Youth Centre management
- Visitor Information Services
- Engineers and Planners
- Health and Building Surveyors
- Sustainability and Natural Resource Management
- Economic & Business Development including sourcing grant funding
- Front office customer service staff

The remaining “indoor roles” (27) are primarily related to fulfilling Council’s regulatory and legislative requirements such as the management and reporting of Council’s finances, the collection of rates, technical and records management services, corporate governance, procurement, human resources and workplace health and safety.

79% of our staff are residents of our Shire.

With regard to executive costs, the restructure saw the removal of 3 Director positions and the creation of 2, new Deputy General Manager positions with broader portfolios. This has resulted in an approximate reduction of 28% in salary costs at this level. In addition, the draw-down on reserves to fund non-recurrent \$270,000 implementation costs related to the organisation restructure was not required primarily as a direct consequence of the cost management and efficiency initiatives undertaken over the last 18 months.

2. A SNAPSHOT OF OUTCOMES FROM OUR REFORM PROCESSES

- Draw down on reserves to fund non recurrent (\$270 000) implementation costs related to the organization review has not been required primarily as a direct consequence of cost management and efficiency initiatives
- During last FY Council achieved a comparative reduction in temporary and day labour staff costs of around 11.75%
- Recruitment managed in house resulting in savings of \$95 000 in external recruitment fees in 2011/12
- Reduction in overtime hours by approximately 20% since June 2011
- 43% reduction in workers compensation claims since 2010
- 55% reduction in days lost to injury since 2010 both of which impact on our premium
- In 2013 we increased the library hours of Dorrigo and Urunga Libraries without any additional costs, by rearranging staffing
- Our youth Centre in the first quarter of 2013/14 has increased its income by 33%
- We are focusing on customer service and are actively managing our correspondence with outstanding tasks reduced by 60% since the beginning of the year
- We are measuring our customer response via telephone as we have a target of first contact resolution of 80%. Our average to date has been 50% and for November 63%
- We are number 2 in the state for waste diversion and whilst this has involved investment over a number of years, it is also ensuring that we are not paying a section 88 levy (state tax) of \$52 per ton for that material diverted
- We have resumed the operation of our waste facilities so they can operate as a business and are putting in place a range of initiatives designed to improve their financial viability. By way of example we have entered into a contract arrangement with MIDROC for the sale of metal which we expect to return \$285,000 over 3 years. Recent changes to the opening hours for our waste facilities for next year are projected to save around \$165 000

Moving forward we will continue to implement and further quantify these initiatives along with others such as reviewing our property portfolio, with the objective of addressing our operating deficit.

Authorised by

Date: 6/12/13

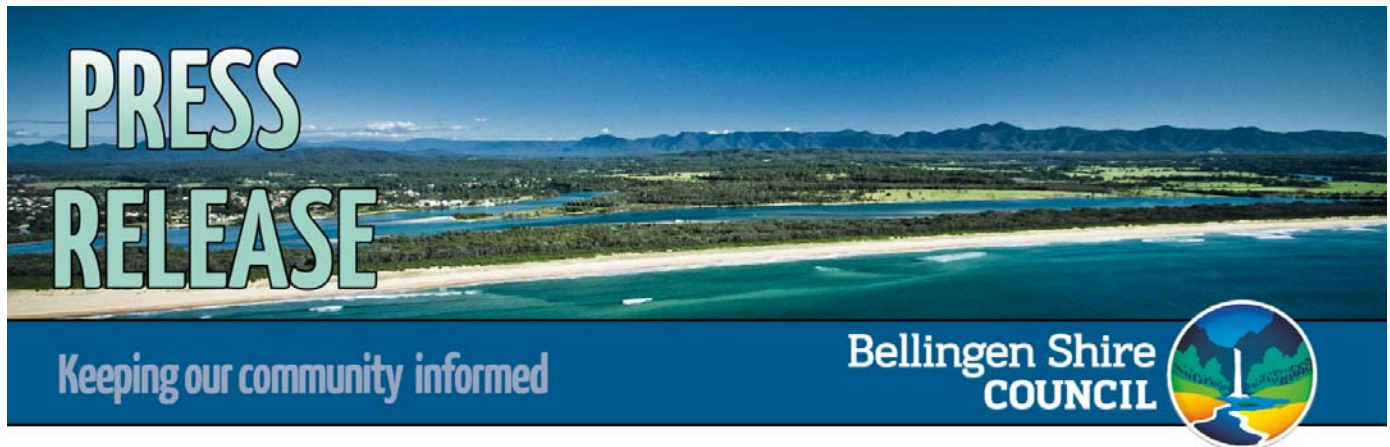
**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION
ALL COMMUNICATIONS**

PO BOX 117, BELLINGEN NSW 2453, TELEPHONE (02) 66557300, FAX (02) 66552310

File No.:

Liz Jeremy

GENERAL MANAGER,



Investing in Our Road and Bridge Infrastructure: Special Rate Variation Update – January 2014

At an extraordinary meeting on 13 January 2014 Council resolved to narrow down the options for a 2014/15 general rate increases and to further engage the community on the remaining options. The two options that are now being presented to the community via a revised Delivery Program, Long Term Financial Plan, and Revenue Policy are:

1. A 2.3% general rate increase in line with the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) determination in December 2013 (the “peg” rate)
2. An 11.8% Special Rate Variation – 2.3% for cost increases for Council services funded by general rates and 9.5% for additional road and bridge works

The initial community engagement in November and December 2013 sent a clear message to Council that the community expects Council to deliver better value and that some additional funding for roads and bridges should come from redirection and/or cost savings from other areas. As a result the report considered by Council specifically addressed future improvement initiatives and committed to presenting opportunities for efficiencies and cost savings of at least \$150,000 per annum for three years.

The report to Council also discussed:

- Community engagement activities and results
- Community needs and priorities
- Achievements in productivity and efficiency improvements
- What can be achieved in road and bridge works for each of the Special Rate Variation scenarios
- Community support for a Special Rate Variation
- The community's capacity to pay, and the affordability of, rate increases
- Alternative funding options
- Cost containment strategies
- Revenue sources for Council
- Public submissions

Council considered, however, that in the short term cost savings alone will not provide the resources required to address the backlog in road and bridge infrastructure and that on balance the proposal for an 11.8% Special Rate Variation is reasonable and affordable.

The draft Delivery Program, Long Term Financial Plan, and Revenue Policy are on public exhibition on Council's website from Wednesday 15 January 2014 until Tuesday 11 February 2014 with submissions open on the documents during that time. The minutes for the extraordinary meeting of 13 January 2014 and the associated attachments are also available on Council's website and provide a great deal of additional background material for information.

Submissions can be mailed, emailed, or made to Council via the “Have your say” page on Council's website.

Council will consider public submissions on the draft Delivery Program, Long Term Financial Plan and Revenue Policy at an Extraordinary meeting on 19 February 2014 with a view to adopting the documents. At that meeting Council will also consider whether to apply to IPART for a Special Rate Variation (applications close 24 February 2014).

If you have views on the draft Delivery Program, Long Term Financial Plan, Revenue Policy, or the proposal for a Special Rate Variation that you would like Council to consider please forward your submission by Tuesday 11 February 2014 and have your say.

Authorised by: Michelle McFadyen, Deputy General Manager, Corporate & Community

Date: 9 January 2014

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT: Liz Jeremy on 02 6655 7300

ALL COMMUNICATIONS TO BE ADDRESSED TO THE GENERAL MANAGER,
PO BOX 117, BELLINGEN NSW 2454, TELEPHONE (02) 66557300, FAX (02) 66552310

PRESS RELEASE

Keeping our community informed

Bellinghen Shire
COUNCIL



Special Rate Variation – Final Report to Council

The period for accepting written submissions on the Special Rate Variation proposal closed on Tuesday 11 February 2014 after a four week period of public exhibition of Council's draft Long Term Financial Plan, Delivery Program, and Revenue Policy. Together these three documents provided comprehensive and detailed information on the rate increase proposals and their impact.

The two options proposed in the draft documents were:

1. A 2.3% general rate increase in line with the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) determination in December 2013 (the "peg" rate)
2. An 11.8% Special Rate Variation (SRV) – 2.3% for cost increases for Council services funded by general rates and 9.5% for additional road and bridge works

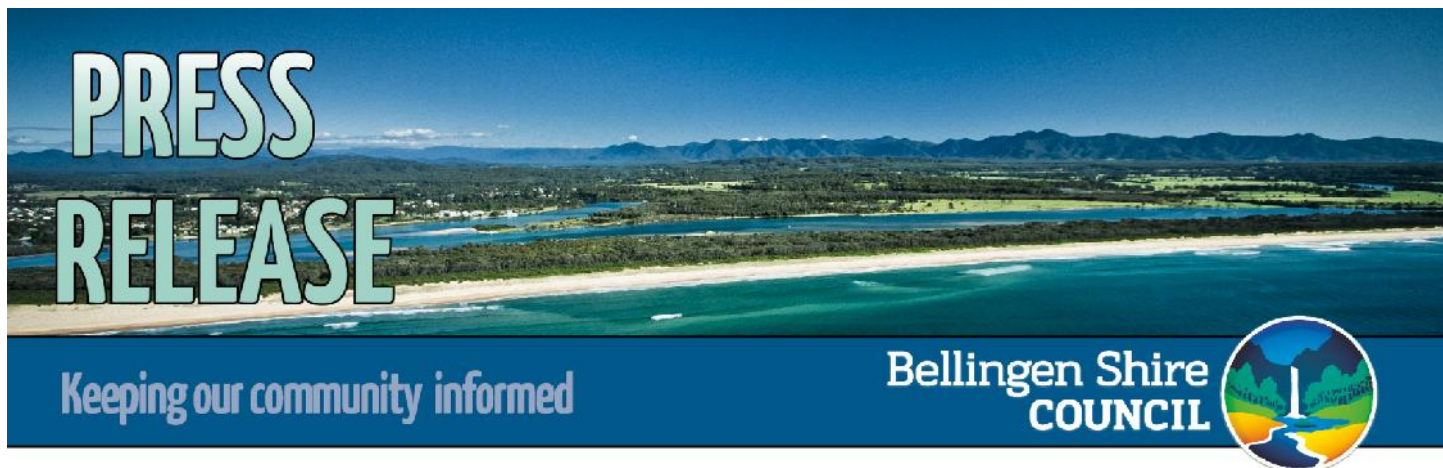
Submissions are being collated and will be included in a report to Council for its extraordinary meeting on 19 February 2014. Council will consider submissions on the draft Delivery Program, Long Term Financial Plan and Revenue Policy with a view to adopting the documents, and also consider whether to apply to the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal for a Special Rate Variation (applications close 24 February 2014).

The Business Paper (Agenda) will be available on Council's website prior to meeting day.

Authorised by: Liz Jeremy, General Manager

Date: 6 February 2014

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT: Peter Clare on 02 6655 7300
ALL COMMUNICATIONS TO BE ADDRESSED TO THE GENERAL MANAGER,
PO BOX 117, BELLINGEN NSW 2454, TELEPHONE (02) 66557300, FAX (02) 66552310



Have Your Say on the Proposed Special Rate Variation

Following Council's Extraordinary Meeting on 13 January 2014 the revised Long Term Financial Plan, Delivery Program, and Revenue Policy went on public exhibition on Wednesday 15 January 2014 for 4 weeks. These documents include detail on two options for rate increases:

1. A 2.3% general rate increase in line with the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) determination in December 2013 (the "peg" rate)
2. An 11.8% Special Rate Variation – 2.3% for cost increases for Council services funded by general rates and 9.5% for additional road and bridge works

The Long Term Financial Plan provides information on:

- Council's current and long term financial positions
- the community's capacity to pay, rate increase affordability, and impact of rate increases
- cost containment strategies
- revenue and expenditure forecasts
- performance measures

The revised Delivery Program provides additional information on what Council will be doing to improve productivity, and detail on the 10 year road capital works program so you can compare what you get with the two options being considered.

The Revenue Policy provides information including:

- revenue sources
- rating categories
- details on total rate revenue for the two options
- details on average rate increases by rating category for the two options
- sample average rates and charges notice comparisons for the two options

Together the three documents provide comprehensive and detailed information on the rate increase proposals and their impact. The draft documents are now on public exhibition on Council's website with written submissions being accepted until close of business Tuesday 11 February 2014. Submissions can be mailed, emailed, or made to Council via the "Have your say" page on Council's website.

Council will consider submissions on the draft Delivery Program, Long Term Financial Plan and Revenue Policy at an extraordinary meeting on 19 February 2014 with a view to adopting the documents. At that meeting Council will also consider whether to apply to IPART for a Special Rate Variation (applications close 24 February 2014).

If you have views on the draft documents or the proposal for a Special Rate Variation that you would like Council to consider please forward your submission by Tuesday 11 February 2014 and have your say.

Authorised by: Michelle McFadyen, Deputy General Manager, Corporate & Community

Date: 16 January 2014

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT: Peter Claire on 02 6655 7300
ALL COMMUNICATIONS TO BE ADDRESSED TO THE GENERAL MANAGER,
PO BOX 117, BELLINGEN NSW 2454, TELEPHONE (02) 66557300, FAX (02) 66552310

PRESS RELEASE

Keeping our community informed

Bellinghen Shire
COUNCIL



Special Rate Variation - transparency and accountability

Options for general rate increases for 2014/15 are currently on public exhibition until 11 February 2014. The options are:

1. A 2.3% general rate increase in line with the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) determination in December 2013 (the "peg" rate)
2. An 11.8% Special Rate Variation (SRV) – 2.3% for cost increases for Council services funded by general rates and 9.5% for additional road and bridge works

Details on the options are contained in Council's Long Term Financial Plan, Delivery Program, and Revenue Policy and together these three documents provide comprehensive and detailed information on the rate increase proposals and their impact. These draft documents are now on public exhibition on Council's website with written submissions being accepted until close of business Tuesday 11 February 2014.

Feedback and submissions from the first round of SRV community engagement indicate that you consider efficiency and productivity, and transparency and accountability in service delivery as key priorities. The documents currently on exhibition provide details on past, current and future work with regard to efficiency and productivity improvement. The report to Council in January 2014 made further commitments to identify efficiencies and cost savings of at least \$150,000 per year. While improving efficiency and productivity is an ongoing responsibility for Council management, we value your input to the process through considered suggestions for improvement.

With regard to transparency and accountability, Council is subject to a range of legislative acts and regulations, accounting standards and guidelines that dictate how we provide information and report to various parties. That said, we are interested in how we can inform you, our community, on the things that matter to you. One suggestion from the SRV community engagement was for Council's organisational charts to be published to allow comparison with other Councils and to let you see what positions Council has to deliver the services we provide. These organisational charts are now available on Council's website (under the Council tab, or search for "organisational charts").

If you have views on what you would like reported, how you would like to see it, and how often, please let us know. Submissions, suggestions, and proposals on all of the above can be mailed, emailed, or made to Council via the "Have your say" page on Council's website.

Council will specifically consider submissions on the draft Delivery Program, Long Term Financial Plan and Revenue Policy at an extraordinary meeting on 19 February 2014 with a view to adopting the documents. At that meeting Council will also consider whether to apply to IPART for a Special Rate Variation (applications close 24 February 2014). If you have views on the draft documents or the proposal for a Special Rate Variation that you would like Council to consider please forward your submission by Tuesday 11 February 2014 and have your say.

Authorised by: Liz Jeremy, General Manager

Date: 23 January 2014

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT: Peter Clare on 02 6655 7300
ALL COMMUNICATIONS TO BE ADDRESSED TO THE GENERAL MANAGER,
PO BOX 117, BELLINGEN NSW 2454, TELEPHONE (02) 66557300, FAX (02) 66552310



Australia Day Awards

The Bellingen Shire Australia Day Committee hosted the 2014 Australia Day Awards and community celebrations at Bellingen on Saturday 26 January.

The Mayor, Cr Mark Troy along with our Australia Day Ambassador, Actress and Television personality, Benita Collings congratulated all nominees for their contribution to our community. The winners this year were:

- Citizen of the Year: Gary Barnett
- Young Citizen of the Year: Naomi Howe
- Community Service: Iris Goldstein
- Community Group: Urunga Surf Life Saving Club
- Créative Arts Youth Award: Blake Cutler
- Community Event: Bellingen River Festival
- Sportsperson of the Year: Corey Wedlock
- Junior Sportsperson of the Year: Karlie Swanson
- Team of the Year: Urunga Raiders (State Cup) Team
- Special Committee Award Community Appreciation: Ruth Lenehan

Dangar Falls Pathway & Labyrinth

The upgraded pathway and Labyrinth at Dangar Falls Reserve were opened to the public by Bellingen Mayor, Mark Troy in late December 2013.

With funding from Council's Environmental Levy, the staged upgrade involved replacing the steep section of the old bitumen pathway with a raised wooden walkway to improve the safety, accessibility and appearance of this important environmental and community asset.

The Labyrinth is a winding paved pathway which provides an exciting recreational facility to the community with benefits for mental health. Its creation was instigated by local Art Therapist Jenni Francis and Movement Therapist Fran Clayton after a series of mental wellness workshops in the community.

With funding from ETC Community Support Fund, Dorriggo Expansive Education Program and Dorriggo Arts Council, the Labyrinth was project managed by Council and constructed by local contractors, dedicated community volunteers and the Dorriggo Aboriginal Green Team.

Russell Makoto volunteered his carpentry and practical skills to lead the construction crew, Jenni Francis lead the artistic design, Annica Makoto and Fran Clayton joined the creation and construction crew and Jim Norris captured the journey on film.

"These projects exemplify Council's commitment to providing facilities to encourage locals and visitors to enjoy the natural assets our Shire has to offer," said Mayor Mark Troy.

Working in partnership with community volunteers and Dorriggo Aboriginal Green Team on the Labyrinth was particularly rewarding for Council and it was pleasing that the new facilities were opened in time for the school holidays.

Ongoing bush regeneration work is also being undertaken throughout the endangered ecological community within Dangar Falls Reserve. Local native plants will be planted in strategic locations along the pathway in March 2014 to boost the natural regeneration of native vegetation after weed control.

Pictured below are members of the Dorriggo community celebrating the Summer Solstice at the Labyrinth.



Snippets

Bellingen Shire Employment Lands Strategy

As part of its 2030 Community Vision, Council strives to encourage a resilient economy where meaningful work opportunities and vibrant business exist within our community.

Council recently completed an Employment Lands Strategy that considers future land requirements for the growth of employment generating industries in the Shire and this has been conditionally endorsed by the State Government. While some areas favoured by Council for new or expanded industrial zonings have not been endorsed at this stage, Council will be working towards securing the necessary endorsements in 2014.

For other areas that were endorsed, planning processes have already commenced to implement the recommended changes to land zonings and an extension of the Bellingen business zoning is one example.

For further information contact Council's Planning Unit or visit our website at www.bellingen.nsw.gov.au.

Level 1 Water Restrictions

Residents are reminded that the Level 1 Water Restrictions introduced in late October 2013 are ongoing.

The main impact of level one restrictions are:

- Sprinklers & soaker hoses will be banned, except for newly laid turf, where one sprinkler can be used during the specified hours.
- Hours of hand watering are 6.00am - 8.00am and 5.00pm - 7.00pm.
- Vehicles must be washed with a trigger hose or pressure cleaner on a grassed area.

Residents with special needs are encouraged to contact Council in order that we can work with you around these requirements.

For further information visit Council's website at www.bellingen.nsw.gov.au or telephone the Operations Division on 6655 7300 during office hours.

Registering Your Companion Animals

All cats and dogs, other than exempt cats and dogs, must be registered by six months of age. The registration fee is a once-only payment, which covers the cat or dog for its lifetime in NSW, regardless of any changes in ownership.

Discounted registration fees apply to desexed cats or dogs. Having your cat or dog desexed prior to registration helps to reduce straying, fighting and aggression and antisocial behaviour, such as spraying to mark territory. It also helps to reduce the number of unwanted pets born each year.

Council send the registration fees it collects to the NSW Companion Animals Fund. The administrator of the fund then reimburses the majority of the funds back to Council to be used for providing companion animal related services. These include ranger services, pound facilities, dog refuse bins, educational and other on animal-related activities.

For further information visit Council's website at www.bellingen.nsw.gov.au.

Help Emergency Services find your Property

Being able to provide the following information to Emergency Service personnel will greatly reduce the response time during an emergency:

1. Know your own property (house) GPS coordinates (or Latitude - Longitude coordinates) in decimal format (see below).
2. Display very visible rural address at the entrance to your property (meaning large and accurate) - keep number display area cleared of undergrowth.
3. Disclose any known common medical conditions (such as heart problems, diabetes or allergies)
4. Disclose any alternative access routes to your property - must be readily accessible by say ambulance and not for instance fire trails.
5. Create your own Emergency Plan to implement if you are cut-off and evacuate early if required.
6. Identify all weather helicopter landing sites on your property or around the area in general (sites must be a cleared area 50 metres square and well away from power lines and other potential hazards).
7. Share the information with neighbours as a self-help type group whilst respecting privacy concerns.
8. Record and display all this information so it is readily accessible to yourselves and neighbours (on the fridge).

A reliable source to access your house co-ordinates is **Six Maps** at <http://www.six.nsw.gov.au>, this is a browser based mapping tool which has been developed NSW Land and Property Information.





Special Rate Variation Update

Following a period of community engagement in November and December 2013 on the options for investment in our road and bridge infrastructure, Council considered options on the proposed Special Rate Variation (SRV) for 2014/15 at an extraordinary meeting on 13 January 2014.

A comprehensive report providing detail on the need for investment in road and bridge infrastructure, three options for increased rating revenue to fund additional road and bridge infrastructure works, alternative sources for funding, and our community's capacity and willingness to pay for increased investment was considered by Council. The main report provided context and a summary of detail contained in three key planning documents: a revised Delivery Program, Long Term Financial Plan, and Revenue Policy, that explain what will be delivered and how it will be funded.

Council resolved to adopt these revised documents as drafts for further community consultation with two proposals for additional rating revenue:

- A 2.3% general rate increase in line with the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) determination in December 2013 (the "peg" rate)
- An 11.8% general rate increase - 2.3% for cost increases for Council services funded by general rates and 9.5% for additional road and bridge works

In doing so Council recognised our community's feedback that we need to become more productive and efficient and that we work towards reducing costs to redirect funds to road and bridge infrastructure works and to improve our bottom line generally. The report to Council summarises efforts made to date and those that will continue in the future. However, in the short term this will not provide the resources required to address the backlog in road and bridge infrastructure and the report outlines that the proposal for an 11.8% general rate increase is reasonable and affordable.

The draft Delivery Program, Long Term Financial Plan, and Revenue Policy are now on public exhibition on Council's website with submissions open on the documents until Tuesday 11 February 2014. The minutes of the extraordinary meeting of 13 January 2014 and the associated attachments are also available on Council's website and provide a great deal of additional background material for your information.

Submissions can be mailed, emailed, or made to Council via the "Have your say" page on Council's website.

Council will consider public submissions on the draft Delivery Program, Long Term Financial Plan and Revenue Policy at an extraordinary meeting on 19 February 2014 with a view to adopting the documents. At that meeting Council will also consider whether to apply to IPART for a Special Rate Variation (applications close 24 February 2014).

If you have views on the draft Delivery Program, Long Term Financial Plan, Revenue Policy, or the proposal for a Special Rate Variation that you would like Council to consider please forward your submission by Tuesday 11 February 2014 and have your say.

Local Artist pays tribute to past Mayor



Local artist Carol McLagan has generously donated her painting of former Mayor, the late Sue Dethridge OAM to Bellinghen Shire Council for display in the Bellinghen Library.

Using a small photograph of Sue taken at a dinner held in Dorriga in October 1993, Carol captured the moment beautifully in acrylic and named the painting 'Our Sue', in honour of a woman who worked tirelessly for the community.

Sue Dethridge was a popular and influential local councillor from 1987-2003, serving as Mayor from 1991-1999. Being a freelance journalist and an avid letter writer, she was a regular media contributor drawing attention to local issues with the use of amusing or poignant anecdotes.

On being diagnosed with breast cancer in 1991, she fought for improved support and treatment of cancer patients.

Sue was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia in 2003 for services to local government with the award being made early due to the state of her health. She died that same year and is survived by her husband Barry Dethridge and their three children.

The painting was handed over to Mayor Mark Troy on 10 January 2014 and will be hung at the Bellinghen Branch Library in Hyde Street.

Carol McLagan is a qualified art teacher and has twice won the EJ Mantova Memorial Art Competition.



Weeds Management Program

As part of the 2013/14 weed management program Council will be undertaking its annual roadside weed control program from January to April 2014. The program will be targeting a range of weed species including Blackberry; White Blackberry; Scotch Broom; Groundsel Bush; Lantana; Camphor Laurel under 3m; Yellow Bells; Privet and Kudzu.

Spot spraying using herbicides appropriate for the control of the target weeds will be utilised however, when implementing on ground weed control, Council considers a holistic approach and therefore utilises a 'toolbox' of management options.

These include chemical spraying and injection with appropriate chemicals at approved rates, mechanical machinery, manual removal techniques, biological controls and other bush regeneration techniques.



Lantana in flower

To date the 2013/14 Council weed control program has seen the manual removal of over one tonne of the noxious weed *Salvinia* covering an area of 3500 square metres from Ringwood Creek in North Bellingen. This work will be maintained with regular follow-up visits to the site to continue removal and prevent further regrowth of the *Salvinia*. This project has seen no application of chemical spray for noxious weed control in order to minimise impact on threatened species present in the area.

Further details can be found at www.bellingen.nsw.gov.au or contact the Invasive Plants Officer on 6655 7300.

Bellingen Community Events Signage

Residents and motorists will soon notice new community event signage at the eastern and western approaches to the Bellingen township on Waterfall Way.

As part of Council's commitment to supporting a broad range of community events, the signs can be utilised by community and not-for-profit groups conducting events in the Shire. The boards will be an effective means of creating a strong visual presence and will allow event organisers to promote community events to residents and visitors travelling through Bellingen.

A new set of guidelines have been established for their use to ensure effectiveness and safety and all signage must comply with the new guidelines.

The signs can be booked in advance via the 'Community Event Signage Application Form' which is available at Council's Administration Office or online at www.bellingen.nsw.gov.au.

Applications will be accepted on an ongoing basis.



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BELLINGEN HEALTH CAMPUS

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6692 7700

COFFS COAST WASTE SERVICE

1800 265495

RALEIGH RESOURCES WASTE HUB

6655 3777

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BELLINGHEN SHIRE COUNCIL MOVES FORWARD WITH PLAN TO ADDRESS THE SHIRE'S INFRASTRUCTURE BACKLOG

Bellinghen Shire Council met in an extraordinary meeting on Wednesday 19 February 2014 to consider the infrastructure renewal backlog in the Shire. After considering submissions received from the community, Council resolved to implement a plan to help address the issue. The plan includes the establishment of a Sustainability Committee, composed of all councillors, to drive and oversee the transition to financial sustainability for Council, and an application to the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) for a one-off (single year) 11.8% permanent rate increase for 2014/15.

Wednesday's council meeting was the latest step in a process which commenced in November 2013 when the Council considered a report which outlined a gap between the requirements to renew the Shire's transport infrastructure and Council's capacity to finance that renewal with the forecast revenue base.

At that time, Council resolved to commence community engagement on revising its strategic and operational planning documents to address the issue.

An intensive series of community engagement initiatives were undertaken during November and December 2013 both to inform the community on the underlying issues, and ask for:

- the community's views on the matter,
- possible solutions to rectify the infrastructure backlog, and
- feedback on some proposed options, including future efficiency measures and four alternative revenue proposals.

Council met again on 13 January 2014 to consider draft versions of the revised planning documents. Council resolved to undertake a second round of community engagement on the draft planning documents prior to making a final decision in February on the way forward.

There were a total of nineteen submissions from the community in response to the second round of engagement, with some constructive ideas and suggestions put forward by some members of the community. Where appropriate the planning documents were amended based on the submissions.

The Mayor of Bellinghen Shire Council, Cr Mark Troy stated "It is unfortunate that we, as a community, find ourselves in this situation, and we need to solve this problem collectively. Many years of cost shifting from other levels of government and increasing expectations with respect to the services that councils deliver have led to the funding gap. Action is required to prevent further significant infrastructure failure and Council is committed to take the steps required to make Bellinghen Shire financially sustainable."

"Council appreciates that some members of the community may find the changes difficult and both Council and the NSW Government have mechanisms in place to assist people who are experiencing financial difficulty."

"Regardless of the outcome of the application to IPART, Council intends to continue its financial sustainability program to adjust service levels to better reflect the balance between the community's desires and its capacity to pay for services."

Council has placed the adopted planning documents on its website at www.bellinghen.nsw.gov.au.

(End)

Authorised by Liz Jeremy, General Manager - Date: 20 February 2014

For Further Media Information: Contact: Robyn O'Dwyer, at rodwyer@bellinghen.nsw.gov.au or (02) 6655 7301.

ALL COMMUNICATIONS TO BE ADDRESSED TO THE GENERAL MANAGER,
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