



Walgett Shire Council

ABN 88 769 076 385

MEDIA RELEASE

RADIO

- × ABC Western Plains
- × ABC New England
- × ABC National
- × 2WEB
- × NOW FM/2VM
- × Opal FM

PRINT MEDIA

- × Walgett Spectator
- × Lightning Ridge News
- × Mungindi Matters
- × Daily Liberal – Dubbo
- × Western Magazine
- × North West Magazine
- × Sydney Morning Herald

TV

- × Prime (Dubbo)
- × WIN (Dubbo)
- × Southern Cross 10
- × Imparja
- × NBN

DATE: 06/03/2013

EMBARGO: Nil

SHIRE SEEKS ADDITIONAL 3% RATE INCREASE FOR ROADS IN 2013/2014

Walgett Shire Council, at its February 2013 meeting, resolved to seek approval through the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) for a one off rate increase under Section 508 (2) for an additional 3% in 2013/2014 over and above the set rate pegging limit of 3.4%.

It is proposed to use the additional funds raised to establish a special reserve for an ongoing programme of “betterment funding” for rural local roads within the Shire. The additional rates raised would be transferred into the reserve annually and quarantined to fund future local road upgrading works.

Council is currently preparing an initial five year programme of betterment works for consideration at Council’s March, 2013 meeting and inclusion in the ten year Walgett Shire Community Strategic Plan and Council’s four year Works Programme and annual Operational Plan and Budget.

Council has raised the issue of seeking “betterment funding” in a range of forums and community discussions following repeated flooding over the last three years.

Council is responding to well aired community concerns that major disruption has occurred to the local road network throughout the Shire during the last three flooding episodes, and in the majority of cases flood waters have caused extensive damage to the same sections of roadway, and in particular unsealed black soil and gravel roads.

These concerns centre around the fact that children living on black soil roads have been prevented from attending school for periods of upwards of six weeks or more, farmers have been prevented from getting their grain harvest to local silos and it has become extremely difficult to attract families to work on farms in these areas because of the road access issues.

In most cases the upgrading of such roads by lengthening and sealing causeways, lifting the level of the actual roads or replacing causeways with culverts would prevent future damage and disruption. The cost of such “one-off” upgrading, known as “betterment works” would equate to around the same cost of flood damage repairs being incurred after each flood.

The “betterment” provision is found in the Commonwealth’s 2007 Ministerial Determination for Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements (NDRAA). It’s termed “betterment” because this

Walgett Shire Council PO Box 31, Walgett NSW 2832

Telephone: (02) 6828 1399 Facsimile: (02) 6828 1608 Email: admin@walgett.nsw.gov.au

enlightened piece of legislation allows governments to share the cost of rebuilding infrastructure damaged by disasters to a better than pre-disaster standard.

The concept is simple. Rather than replace like with like, we should be repairing and rebuilding damaged infrastructure so that it can withstand future disasters. Quite obviously the initial cost will be greater because of the aim to disaster-proof essential infrastructure. However, the potential return on investment is exceptional – a reduction in the cost of repairs to government in the future and less community suffering in both the short and longer term.

Although it could be much higher, initial research reveals that the return on such investments is in the order of 15%.

It is proposed that Council's first five year "betterment works" programme would be the subject of an application to both the State and Federal Government for additional matching funding on a \$:\$:\$ basis under the 2007 Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements (NDRRA).

An essential element of successfully implementing the "betterment" approach requires that Council have almost immediate access to its share of the funding involved as it is more often than not necessary to be able to commence improvement works immediately as part of the actual re-instatement/flood recovery process.

A number of general and specific projects have already been identified including the replacement of the causeway at Old Burren with a concrete culvert, raising the level of the Wilby Wilby Road which provides direct access to Grawin and surrounding opal mining areas as well as the upgrading and sealing or concreting of various causeways on black soil roads which are school bus routes in the eastern part of the shire immediately come to mind.

Council is keen to take advantage of a one-time transitional opportunity available in 2013/14 to apply to IPART for a special variation under Section 508 (2).

The draft revised ten year Walgett Shire Community Strategic Plan, which includes provision for the additional rate income and establishment of the "Betterment Funding Reserve", is nearing completion and will be the subject of further extensive community consultation during March/April.

"Betterment" is the sleeping giant of achieving disaster resilience for the smaller and more isolated communities in Western NSW.

Any prudent investor knows that you invest where you get the biggest bang for your buck. The challenge for all levels of government is to recognise what betterment investments are best for the community at large.

Council is keen to hear from any residents or ratepayers who would like to comment on this proposal or put forward locations to be included in the Works Programme.

ENDS

For further information please contact:

Don Ramsland – General Manager