



UPPER HUNTER SHIRE COUNCIL

MEDIA RELEASE

Council to Seek Community Feedback on Special Rate Variation for 2012/13

Following on from a number of community meetings earlier in the year, Council foreshadowed, in its 2011/12 – 2014/15 Delivery Program and Operational Plan, that it would look at applying for a special rate variation in its General Rates for 2012/13.

Upper Hunter Shire Council recently commissioned a study into its unsealed rural local roads which identified significant shortfalls in the level of funding required to adequately maintain Council's rural road network.

Upper Hunter Shire Council, at its meeting on 24 October 2011, adopted the report and resolved to seek further community feedback in regard to applying for a special rate variation.

"Council has been listening to community concerns about the condition of Council's road and bridge infrastructure and how it no longer meets their expectations", Mayor Lee Watts said.

NSW Councils are required to obtain approval from the Independent Pricing & Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) to increase their general income by an amount greater than the annual rate pegging limit.

This is the first time that Upper Hunter Shire Council, since it was formed in 2004, has sought to apply for a special rate variation. "It is not something that Council takes lightly and we are mindful of the impact on our ratepayers", Mayor Watts went on to say.

Council will be required to advise IPART by mid December of its intention to apply for a special rate variation with the application due to be lodged by late February 2012.

Council will shortly conduct a survey to fully determine the level of community support to fund improved road and bridge infrastructure within the Shire.



Lee Watts
MAYOR



UPPER HUNTER SHIRE COUNCIL

MEDIA RELEASE

Community to Determine Priority of Road Maintenance via Call for Special Rate Variation

Upper Hunter Shire Council will lodge an application to the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) in February 2012 for a nominal Special Rate Variation of 10%, including rate pegging, to fund improved road and bridge infrastructure for the Shire.

The application to IPART does not automatically mean that the requested rate variation will be granted. As part of the approval process Council is required to undertake a number of individual and Community Group consultations and to engage an independent organisation to undertake a phone survey in regard to the Special Rate Variation. This is in addition to the online survey and media briefings that have already taken place on radio and in newspapers.

The variation would be on the General Rate component of individual's rates and is being sought to improve the Shire's ailing road infrastructure. The proposed increase in the rates will equate to an additional \$800,000 per annum, above the rate pegging limit.

"Council has been listening to community concerns about the condition of Council's road and bridge infrastructure and how it no longer meets their expectations", Mayor Lee Watts said. "Our last Community Survey listed road maintenance as the highest ranking service or facility and a recent independent study has confirmed that our road infrastructure needs additional funding. So it is now time for the Community to demonstrate whether they support, or not, Council seeking a special rate variation", Mayor Watts added.

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UHSC Director of Technical Services, Bede Spannagle said that the nominal 10% variation had been determined after conducting a gap analysis between the current level of service to maintain roads compared to what is needed for infrastructure renewal over time.

"It's about balancing the level of service that we provide versus replacing what we have over a longer period of time," Mr Spannagle explained. "You could have picked a figure up to 20% and justified it with what is needed. We have 34 timber bridges in the Shire as just one example. The replacement of these bridges alone will require an additional \$20-\$25m in coming years. The public consultation that will occur specifically on this proposal will include options and the impact of any increase and of no increase above the rate pegging limit."

Following on from the public meetings earlier this year Council foreshadowed in the adopted Delivery and Operation Plan for 2011/12 to 2014/15 that a Special Rate Variation would be sought for the 2012/13 year. Council at its October meeting resolved to undertake further community consultation early in the New Year, prior to submitting an application to IPART.

Lee Watts
MAYOR

30 November, 2011



UPPER HUNTER SHIRE COUNCIL

MEDIA RELEASE

Have your say on Upper Hunter Shire Council's application for a special rate variation.

Upper Hunter Shire Council is seeking the community's response to its application for a special rate variation in 2012/13. IPART has announced an across the board rate increase of 3.6% in 2012/13. Upper Hunter Shire Council is seeking an additional increase of 6.4%. If approved, this one off increase will be built into the rate base on a permanent basis.

"This is a very important decision and Upper Hunter Shire Council is committed to involving the community in the making of that decision. There are a number of ways for the community take part" said Mayor Lee Watts. "There is a survey on council's website and a place for community members to have their say. We also are encouraging individuals, community organisations, businesses and stakeholder groups to write to council and express their views."

Upper Hunter Shire Council has commissioned an independent telephone survey to gauge community response. A minimum of 400 residents from across the shire will be contacted in mid January 2012 and the results of the survey will be available in late January. In the first two weeks of February 2012 Upper Hunter Shire Council will stage a series of community forums and will schedule individual stakeholder meetings upon request.

"In the New Year, Upper Hunter Shire will write to all households and non resident rate payers providing details on the special rate variation, what it means for them and the benefits it will deliver to our community. We will also advise community members of the dates and venues of the community forums" Mayor Watts advised.

"In October 2011, Upper Hunter Shire Council adopted a Community Interaction Policy establishing clear guidelines for both council and community members. Our community engagement strategy for the Special Rate Variation reflects the standards established by that policy and goes beyond IPART's own recommendations" said Daryl Dutton.

To have your say
Visit www.upperhunter.nsw.gov.au
Email council@upperhunter.nsw.gov.au
Post PO Box 208, Scone NSW 2337
Or call 6540 1100

Lee Watts
MAYOR

12 December, 2011



UPPER HUNTER SHIRE COUNCIL

MEDIA RELEASE

Have your say – Community Forums

In November 2011, Upper Hunter Shire Council launched an on line survey, the first of its community consultation activities concerning the proposed application to IPART (Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal) for a special rate variation. Throughout January and into mid February, residents have many opportunities to have their say on the proposed special rate variation.

"It's important to council and IPART that we consult broadly and thoroughly with the community on the proposed Special Rate Variation" said Mayor Watts. "More than 400 residents will take part in an independent telephone survey to gauge public sentiment and we are holding four community forums. The community forums will give residents a chance to hear about the application process and requirements, what it will mean for residents and rate payers and how the extra funds will be spent. Council will present the broad community views to date from the telephone survey, the on line survey and submissions from the public."

"Council has written to all households within the shire, to present the reasons behind the proposal and the many ways for community members to have their say about the proposed application. Naturally, community members are very interested in this issue and there is strong interest in attending the four community forums" said Director of Corporate Services, Steve Pryor.

The community forums will commence at 6pm and will be held -

Tuesday, 31 January Scone Administration Centre
Thursday, 2 February Aberdeen Community Centre
Tuesday, 7 February Murrurundi RSL Hall
Thursday 9 February, Merriwa Branch Office UHSC

For information on how to Have Your Say visit www.upperhunter.nsw.gov.au or call 6540 1100

For general information on IPART's role in special rate variations visit
http://www.ipart.nsw.gov.au/Home/Industries/Local_Govt

Lee Watts
MAYOR