

## **Media Release: 21 December 2016**

*For immediate release*

### **COUNCIL ASKS FOR COMMUNITY FEEDBACK**

Inverell Shire Council's latest newsletter will arrive in to letterboxes over the next week asking for residents to provide feedback to a potential increase in general rates.

It's the first time since its formation in 1979 that Inverell Shire Council has sought to apply for a rate rise, known as a Special Rate Variation.

While the timing of the community consultation may not be considered ideal, Inverell Shire Council mayor Paul Harmon explained the timeline for the Special Rate Variation has been set by the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART).

Cr Harmon says the Long Term Financial Plan tabled at the October meeting revealed a deficit of \$13.66 million in Council's General Fund for the period 2017-18 to 2025-26, which would have a pronounced impact on the ability to maintain roads and infrastructure to current levels.

"As things currently stand, Council's revenue is regulated under the Rate Pegging system, which is set by IPART, which means to increase rate levels above the Rate Peg, Council must apply to IPART".

"At our November Council meeting, councillors voted to seek a Special Rate Variation, to increase the general rates by 14.25 per cent, to be phased in over a three-year period".

If approved, the rate increase would generate \$13.66 million over the period to June 2026, with \$10.12 million allocated to the Shire's regional and shire road network.

"Without the Special Rate Variation, Council will not be able to continue to deliver the current standard of service delivery".

"Being determined Fit for the Future last September was a significant milestone for our Shire," Cr Harmon said.

Under the Fit for the Future reforms, councils across the State had to meet a series of 'fitness' criteria relating to scale, capacity and financial health.

"Even though our Shire was declared Fit for the Future, we still have much work to do to meet all seven of the Fit for the Future benchmarks and be independently and financially viable as a Council," Cr Harmon explained.

"In recent years, Council has been working hard to improve operational efficiency by reducing electricity costs, decreasing our governance and administration expenses and also making improvements to workplace safety to bring down Workers Compensation premiums".

While a rate rise is never welcome, we believe a Special Rate Variation is necessary to meet the needs of the community”.

To gather community feedback on the rate rise proposal, Council has enlisted the University of Technology Sydney and Galaxy Research to conduct a random survey of residents and also host a two-day community panel session in January.

“The University has conducted these panel sessions with rural and regional communities right across Australia and they select a representative sample of the community to participate”.

An online survey is also available at the Council website and residents can also provide feedback via a free internet kiosk at Inverell Library, post or email.

Information brochures regarding the proposal and how it impacts on ratepayers throughout the shire can be found at the Council Administration Centre, Inverell Library, Yetman Store, Gilgai Store, Ashford Post Office and Delungra Post Office. Copies are also available at <http://www.inverell.nsw.gov.au/special-rate-variation>.

**ENDS**

**Image:** Inverell Shire Council Library Manager Sonya Lange with mayor Paul Harmon and the free internet kiosk for residents to provide confidential feedback.



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