



clarence  
VALLEY COUNCIL

## **Community Engagement Strategy**

**Financial Sustainability – the Road Ahead**

## **Executive Summary**

The Clarence Valley Council is considering making an application to the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) for a special rate variation of 8% a year for each of five years starting from July 1, 2016, to secure funding to address a growing infrastructure maintenance backlog on local roads and road-related infrastructure.

The Clarence Valley Council is committed to delivering quality services to the community. In order to begin addressing our growing needs for road maintenance and road-related infrastructure improvements, Clarence Valley Council is proposing a rate increase of 8% a year for five years from July 1, 2016, which includes the allowable increase set by the State Government.

Council will also seek community views on a range of non-essential services to determine council's future commitment to them and review a range of other measures that could lead to a reduction in operating costs.

At the end of the consultation period, Council will be able to make an informed decision about whether to proceed with an application for a Special Rate Variation, changes to our discretionary services, the possible sale of under-utilised assets and possible lease of plant and equipment, based on feedback from the community.

## **Purpose**

This strategy provides a framework for consultation activities to be undertaken for the purpose of informing a Council decision regarding whether to proceed with a Special Rate Variation to IPART, review a range of discretionary services, the possible sale of surplus or under-utilised assets, and possible leasing or other arrangements for plant, equipment, vehicles and, if feasible, large infrastructure items.

## **Objectives**

Council's primary objective is to achieve broad community awareness of and feedback on this proposal.

Council's strategy will be to:

### **1. Inform the community**

Council will use a range of communication mechanisms in order to inform the community of its intention to apply for a Special Rate Variation, the reasons why Council believes it necessary, the impact this will have on ratepayers, and how residents can provide feedback on the proposal.

### **2. Consult and Involve the Community**

Council will use a number of mechanisms for the community to be consulted and involved in the discussion about this proposal. Council intends to undertake a telephone survey of residents. This will enable Council to obtain a statistically valid sample of resident opinion.

Council will also use this survey online so all interested residents are provided the opportunity to be involved in this way.

### 3. Collaborate with the Community

Council is committed to providing opportunities for interested residents to engage in a more detailed conversation around this issue than can happen when completing a survey. Council will conduct community meetings in Grafton and Maclean where Council's position and options are outlined in detail.

### 4. Collate Information to Empower the Council to Make an Informed Decision

Council will collate the information received through the surveys and any formal submissions received and this will guide the decision of the elected council as to whether it will make the application to IPART.

### 5. Provide a Range of Feedback Platforms

Council plans to undertake a comprehensive review of all its services, in consultation with the community, in order to build on work it has already undertaken around improvements to services. This will enable Council and the community to work together to identify priorities and opportunities to meet community needs and aspirations into the future.

## Definitions

**Engagement:** Any process that involves the public in problem-solving or decision-making and uses the public input to make more informed decisions.

**Consultation:** The actual practice and tools used to engage with the community and are part of the overall concept of community engagement.

For the purpose of this strategy, "engagement" is used as a generic, inclusive term to describe the broad and ongoing range of interactions between Council and the whole of the community. Therefore, by this definition, community engagement is an outcome.

Consultation includes a variety of approaches and/or methods to achieve outcomes, such as information delivery, involvement and collaboration in decision-making and empowered action in informal groups or formal partnerships.

## **Background**

In 2009, the State Government introduced changes to legislation to help improve the way communities plan for their future. As a result of these changes, in 2014 the Clarence Valley Council endorsed its Our Community Plan, a 10-year vision developed in consultation with the community for the future.

The Our Community Plan forms the basis for future plans and strategies for the Clarence Valley Council. The plan is supported by a number of other plans:

- **Delivery Program:** A four-year program that sets out the projects and services Council aims to that work towards achieving the visions in the Our Community Plan.
- **Operational Plan:** A plan that contains a detailed annual budget for Council as well as actions and projects for a 12-month period.
- **Long Term Financial Plan (Resourcing Strategy):** A 10-year plan that aligns budgeting, resourcing and asset management together to provide a sound basis for financial decision making.
  - **Asset Management Plan (Resourcing Strategy):** A plan that provides detailed information on the type and condition of our assets and their expected renewal requirements.
- **Workforce Plan (Resourcing Strategy):** A plan that ensures Council has the appropriate skills and capacity to deliver the desired outcomes of the Our Community Plan.

Through the development of these plans, Council has identified a gap between the current level of funding available to maintain and improve its assets and services and the funding required, particularly in roads and road-related infrastructure.

If the infrastructure backlog is not addressed, and continues to grow, the future cost for renewing and replacing these assets will increase over time. The backlog in asset maintenance renewal, particularly relating to roads, needs to be addressed as a priority. Council has been involved in ongoing measures to improve its operational efficiency and focus through its Strategic Organisational Action Plan. In the recent past we have re-assessed all our assets, undertaken a review of all our services and structures and introduced zero-based-budgeting. Using the NSW Government's Fit for the Future guidelines, the Clarence Valley Council is already recognised as efficient, but will continue to pursue measures to improve the efficiency further.

Our internal assessments, which are supported by independent review, show Council is spending more on delivering services than it is receiving in income. That cannot continue in the long term. In May, councillors asked that public consultation be undertaken to determine the community's views on ways to make Council financially secure over the long term. Those options included the review/or elimination of some or all of the 25 discretionary services, the possibility of an 8% rate rise (including any rate pegged amount) for each of five years starting from 2016/17, the sale or lease of under-utilised property assets, possible lease-finance arrangements for plant and equipment, or a combination of all.

## Stakeholders

For the purposes of this strategy, the stakeholder groups identified are those who would be most affected by a proposed Special Rate Variation or other measures – Clarence Valley Local government area ratepayers and other non-ratepaying residents who may be ratepayers in the future or who may be affected by rate increases above the pegged limit.

## Engaging the community

The receipt by ratepayers of the rates information pamphlet “Roads to Recovery” marks the start of the communication process.

Dates below subject to change depending on how weekends fall.

### Working Day 1 (Wed 12<sup>th</sup> August)

- Ratepayers receive Roads to Recovery pamphlet
- Pamphlet and more detailed information to be provided on [www.clarenceconversations.com.au/roadstosustainability](http://www.clarenceconversations.com.au/roadstosustainability) (with budget allocator) and [www.clarence.nsw.gov.au/roadstosustainability](http://www.clarence.nsw.gov.au/roadstosustainability)
- Newspaper advertising begins in The Daily Examiner and The Clarence Valley Independent (issue immediately after the distribution of Roads to Recovery pamphlet).
- Announce when comments will be opened.
- Radio advertising directing listeners to websites begins.
- Posting on each of the 10 Clarence Valley Council-related Facebook pages directing people to websites.
- Media release to all media promoting the consultation period has started.
- Comments open until September 25.
- Consultations open for comment via email, post and [www.clarenceconversations.com.au/roadstosustainability](http://www.clarenceconversations.com.au/roadstosustainability)

### Working Day 2, 3, 4 (Friday 13<sup>th</sup> – Monday 17<sup>th</sup> August)

Repeat newspaper and radio advertising.

### Working Day 5 (Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup> August)

- Phone poll begins (duration approx. 2 weeks)

### Working Day 6 (Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> August)

- Radio and newspaper advertising of community meetings in Grafton and Maclean.
- Media release promoting community meetings in Grafton and Maclean.

### Working Day 7 (Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> August)

- Shopping centre display, Grafton, 10am-noon.

**Working Day 8 (Friday 21<sup>st</sup> August)**

- Main street display, Maclean, 10am-noon.

**Working Day 9 (Monday 24<sup>th</sup> August)**

- Shopping centre display, Yamba, 10am-noon.

**Working Days 10 and 11 (Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup> – Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> August)**

- Radio advertising of community meetings.
- Working day 10 – community meeting in Grafton - Duke St Community Centre. (5.30 – 6.30) 25/8
- Working day 11 – community meeting in Maclean Civic Hall (5.30 – 6.30) 26/8

**Working Day 11 – Close (Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> August – Friday 25<sup>th</sup> September)**

From working day 11 to September 25, media releases and advertising pointing to information online and that proposal is open for comment.

**Timeframe - Key Dates**

September 2015 (tbc) - The guidelines for 2016/17 issued by IPART

20<sup>th</sup> October 2015 – Council resolves to apply for 16/17 SRV

December 2015 - Council to notify IPART if intends to lodge an application for a SRV.

February 2016 – SRV Application due to IPART