



CREATING OPPORTUNITY CELEBRATING COMMUNITY

THIS IS FUTURE FEDERATION

FEDERATION COUNCIL
**Engagement
& Awareness**

SRV Project

EVIDENCE CATALOGUE



Acknowledgment of Country

Federation Council acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land in which we work and live. We pay our respects to elder's past, present, and emerging and recognise their continuing connection to the land, waters, and community. We will work together for a united Council that respects this land and values the contribution to our community of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, their culture, and heritage.

Pictured: NADIOC Week 2023 - Oaklands Weaving.



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Introduction

Community engagement must be undertaken prior to applying for a Special Rate Variation (SRV) under the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) Guidelines. In particular, IPART requires evidence that the community is aware of the need for and extent of a rate rise. The guidelines state the Council's engagement approach must utilize appropriate methods to ensure community awareness and input occur.

It is important to note that IPART's assessment is not based on the level of support received from the community, but rather that the community was made aware of the proposed SRV, inclusive of the impacts.

The summary report has been prepared as evidence of the extensive community engagement undertaken by Council, prior to its application to IPART for an SRV.

Community Engagement

Council actively engages with the local community, providing information in a timely, open and transparent nature, to ensure that residents and interested stakeholders remain well informed. This process is supported by a range of strategies which guide Council's engagement with the community.

A dedicated SRV Community Engagement Plan was developed to support the SRV project. The strategy was adopted by Council in March 2024. This plan outlines the methods and manner in which Council would conduct its community engagement for the SRV project. The plan details the following:

1. Introduction – Federation Council Local Government Area and our Financial Sustainability journey;
2. Aim of this plan – Special Rate Variation Purpose and Implementation of this plan;
3. Target Audiences;
4. Key Messages;
5. Communication Materials and Engagement Channels;
6. Resources to support this project;
7. SRV Project and Communication and Engagement Plan Implementation Milestones; and
8. Performance Measures.

This plan contains engagement and communication activities undertaken from December 2023 through to February 2025.

Community Engagement Overview

There has been community engagement on a future Special Rate Variation since mid-2021. An initial Special Rate Variation application to IPART in 2023 was not approved. Whilst IPART assessed Council as having financial need, they recommended improvements be made to community engagement in respect to communicating the rate increase as per the OLG and IPART guidelines. IPART did approve temporary increases to general rates for 2023/24 and 2024/25 to assist Council to make the required changes. Feedback from the University of Newcastle and IPART has guided Council on improvements made to its community engagement around the proposed increase to general rates. All recommendations from IPART have been implemented, and the OLG and IPART guidelines have been cross referenced in all outgoing communication. Comprehensive community engagement was undertaken in May 2024 and July 2024 on the need for the proposed SRV increase and the impact that it would have on ratepayers and the ability to renew assets that are important to the community.

Council utilised numerous methods of communication during each stage of the project to raise awareness in the community of Council's Special Rate Variation Project. All SRV communication material was designed to provide effective, comprehensive and consistent messaging to the public. During the engagement periods, Council encouraged ratepayers and residents to join the conversation, stay up to date on developments and provide their feedback.

This catalogue is a collation of communication materials, and detailed reports provided to ratepayers and residents throughout the project. To measure communication effectiveness, in September 2024, Council engaged a research company who conducted 200 resident telephone surveys. The purpose of this survey was to:

- Understand and identify community priorities for the Federation LGA and desired level of investment for future resources;
- Identify the community's overall level of satisfaction with Council performance and their satisfaction with Council services/facilities; and
- Explore resident satisfaction with Council's communication and methods of community engagement.
- Measure awareness in respect to Council's consideration of applying for a large increase to rates from IPART.

73% of residents surveyed were aware that Council was considering applying for a large increase to rates. Community discussions and mail outs were main methods participants being informed of Council applying for a rate increase with IPART, both of which were utilized methods throughout this project. Full details of this survey analysis are included in this catalogue for viewing.

Engagement Methodology

Council's formal engagement on the Special Rate Variation Project 24-25 commenced in July 2023 when the University of Newcastle was engaged to lead a project into the financial sustainability of Federation Council. This journey was supported with many lengthily face-to-face meetings with community groups, as well as several public forums (attended by hundreds and heavily covered in the local media). People attending the meetings were expecting a 2024 SRV. Following Council's formal adoption of the report findings, and long list of recommendations delivered by the University of Newcastle in December 2023, Council has worked extensively with the University of Newcastle since January 2024 to prepare reports and materials to support a future SRV project.

The engagement component of the new SRV project was further taken to the community in May 2024, as part of Council's Integrated Planning and Report Framework engagement. Council extensively engaged throughout this period on the following:

- Summary of the draft plans for 24/25;
- Summary of the draft plans for 2025/26 and beyond;
- Financial Planning principles;
- Independent Review led by Professor Drew;
- Council area initiatives for 2024/25;
- 2024/25 Commitments;
- 2024/25 Budget at a Glance;
- Special Rate Variation 2023/24 Year 2;
- Service Levels – increases and decreases;
- 2024/25 Rating Structure;
- Rating options;
- General Rates Estimator Tool;
- Other fees and Charges for 2024/25;
- Financial Sustainability;
- SRV temporary impact on ratepayers;
- Cost containment and Productivity Improvements; and
- Further opportunities for engagement.

The presentation, as well as other communication material and engagement opportunities available is affixed to this catalogue for viewing.

In May 2024, Professor Drew commenced pre-consultation meetings with key community stakeholders in the Federation Council Local Government Area in response to previous IPART feedback. As a result of these meetings, Professor Drew made a number of recommendations to alter the original draft SRV proposal to Council, which were endorsed in full. A detailed record and analysis are affixed within this catalogue for viewing.

In July 2024, 6200 comprehensive fact sheets and pre meeting surveys were sent to 6,200 residents via Australia Post. The survey and fact sheets were also made available online and in council customer facing service centres. Professor Drew, with the support of Council staff and Councillors hosted a series of listening post sessions, public forums and drop-in sessions to create

further awareness and provide many opportunities for input into the SRV proposal. A detailed record and analysis are affixed within this catalogue for viewing.

As the project progressed, Council and residents were updated on project milestones via Council meetings and further communication updates via a range of methods. This continued to provide an opportunity for residents to stay engaged and aware of progress. A detailed record of council reports and example communication are affixed within this catalogue for viewing.

As there are many engagement points in this SRV project, to assist readers of this catalogue, records and analysis have been collated in the following chapters:

- **Chapter One:** The Advantages and Disadvantages of Amalgamation and Federation Council's Financial Sustainability Journey;
- **Chapter Two:** Council's Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework Engagement;
- **Chapter Three:** Special Rate Variation Project Engagement;
- **Chapter Four:** Other communications related to the SRV application.