Rating Reference Group

Terms of Reference

For the Cassowary Coast Regional Council
1 Background/Context

Cassowary Coast Regional Council (Council) as a part of its annual budget process reviews the general rating structure. On 18 July 2016 Cassowary Coast Regional Council adopted its 2016/2017 budget. One of the key budget strategies adopted was establishing a Rating Reference Group (the Group) to provide feedback and recommendations in regards to general rates and pensioner remission policies.

2 Function of the Rating Reference Group

The function of the group will be to:

- Conduct analysis and provide feedback on Council's differential rating structure
- Provide input in to a report regarding preferred options for the general rates structure for the whole of the Cassowary Coast Region.
- Provide an objective view to achieving a fair and equitable differential general rating structure for all ratepayers.
- Prepare a report, making recommendations of the future direction of Council's general rating structure.
- Present findings to the Cassowary Coast Regional Council
- Council will form the Group during October 2016 with the final report due by 24th February 2017.

3 Roles of the Rating Reference Group

The Role of the Group is to:

- Understand and analyse the current general rating structure and provide feedback in the final report.
- Identify possible changes to the general rating structure and run scenario testing
- After any suggested changes, maintain a revenue neutral position.

In working towards a fair and equitable differential rating structure for all ratepayers, the Group needs to consider the following:

- The provisions of the *Local Government Act 2009* and *Local Government Regulation 2012* relating to levying of general rates.
- The provisions of the *Valuation of Lands Act 1944*.
- The impact of the recommended general rating structure on all ratepayers within the region.

The role of the individual members includes:

- Seek to understand the methodologies of general rating across the Cassowary Coast Region.
- Provide input into a report regarding preferred options for the general rates structure
- Act in the interest of the organisation or interest group they are representing, while remaining receptive to possible impacts on all ratepayers in the Cassowary Coast
- Be an advocate for the group's outcomes and constructively work with all members of the Group to achieve this
- Be committed to, and actively involved in pursuing the project's outcomes
• Ensure that private information, including rates information, shared during the project is protected and remains confidential.

In addition to the role as an individual member, the role of the Independent Facilitator includes:
• Maintaining order and facilitating discussion for debate and provide expert advice on rating issues
• Set meeting dates
• Ensure that meeting agenda items are discussed and the entire rating structure is reviewed
• Liaise with Council regarding the progress of the group and arrange the final presentation.
• Coordinate the preparation of the final report and presentation to Council.

In addition to the role as an individual member, the role of the Technical Specialist includes:
• Conduct preliminary analysis of the Council's current rating structure
• Provide an introduction to the Group on the current rating structure.
• Provide an overview of rating and benchmark Council's rates where possible
• Provide expert advice on rating issues and methodologies
• Conduct "what if" analysis and run scenario testing of the group's ideas and suggestions, providing feedback on the affects of any of these changes.
• This role is non-voting member of the Rating Reference Group.

The role of Council as a part of this project includes:
• Appoint the Independent Facilitator and Technical Specialist
• Appoint Endorsed Representatives from local organisations/interest groups
• Appoint the public member representatives
• Ensure the availability of Council Officers and resources where required to assist/provide information when requested by the Independent Facilitator.

4 General

4.1 Membership

The Rating Reference Group shall be comprised of:
• An Independent Facilitator
• A Technical Specialist
• Endorsed Representatives from the following local organisation/interest groups:
  o Agriculture - 3 members
  o Chamber of Commerce - 2 members
  o Tourism - 1 member
• 4 members appointed by way of public expression of interest

Council will appoint an independent facilitator and a technical specialist with extensive knowledge of Local Government Rating. The appointment may result in a single person filling both roles.

The four members selected from the expression of interest submissions will be appointed by Council. Preference will be given to those residents who represent local...
organisations/interest groups not listed above and whose skills and experience will, in Council's opinion, most ably assist the Group.

4.2 Conduct of Meetings

Meetings will be chaired by the independent facilitator who will be responsible for setting meeting times and dates in consultation with the Group.

While the Group will be setting agenda and conducting analysis of the entire general rating structure, Council has identified some key items it would like addressed as a part of the project. They are:

- Land use for the purposes of Cattle Grazing - determine whether a separate rating category is appropriate for this group of ratepayers
- Land used for the purposes of Island Resorts - determine whether separate rating categories are appropriate for this group of ratepayers.
- Land use for the purposes of a hobby farm - determine whether a separate rating category is appropriate for this group of ratepayers

As a part of the meetings, full copies of the Minutes, including attachments are required to be recorded and distributed to all the Group members. Also at the completion of the project, minutes will be formally tabled to Council for noting in addition to the final report.

A quorum of at least half of the members is required prior to the commencement of the meeting. In cases where there is debate, the issue will be put to a vote with one vote from each of the Group members present. Results of these votes should be recorded in the Minutes.

By agreement of the Group, out-of-session decisions will be deemed acceptable. Where agreed, all out-of-session decisions shall be recorded in the minutes of the next scheduled meeting.