

MAYOR'S BUDGET SPEECH 2023-2024

My fellow Councillors, staff, and community members of the Cassowary Coast, it is my honour to table the Cassowary Coast Regional Council 2023-2024 Budget.

The 2023-2024 Budget is the final of four budgets to be presented in our current term, and it has certainly been a tough process from the beginning.

I would like to thank Council team members for their substantial contributions during the budget deliberations, and for assisting us to develop a budget that is focused on living within our means whilst still delivering outcomes for and with our community.

As Council, we aspire to provide great experiences, deliver value, and create a sustainable future for our community.

Delivering outcomes that embrace value in everything we do is fundamental to a vibrant and prosperous community that 'love the place we live' and is summed up in our vision statement – One Coast: Cassowary Coast.

Through our budget deliberations, Council looked to develop a budget that balances the current financial pressures against delivering value for our community.

Council, like our residents and businesses, is facing rising cost pressures from global and domestic factors and this has flow-on effects across Council's operations.

The 2023-2024 budget aims to balance the cost-of-living pressures, which we are all experiencing, with the investment needed to continue to maintain and upgrade our existing services and facilities as well as grow our economy.

This year's Budget is focused on our future, and investing in the people, places and spaces which make the Cassowary Coast great.

The 2023-2024 budget provides for a total operating revenue of \$93.05 million and operating expenditure of \$93.2 million, resulting in an operating deficit of \$149,000 which is an improved position when compared to the 2022-2023 Budget.

Council plans to deliver a record \$67.4 million Capital Works Program for the Cassowary Coast community.

The 2023-2024 budget is underpinned by a general rate increase of 4.75 per cent. This increase in general rates represents an average increase of \$4.43 per week for the majority of residents. It has been a significant focus of Council to ensure that this increase is below the annual CPI increase of 7.4 per cent, as seen in Brisbane for the March quarter 2023. Council will continue to offer a 5 per cent discount on general rates paid by the due date.

Changes to fees and charges also reflect the increased cost of community service provision. Fees

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and charges are a user-pay approach and as such, if you don't use the service, you won't be charged for it. Increases in 2023-2024 fees and charges have been restricted to 6.8 per cent.

Commencing, as from 1 July, Council has introduced user-pay charges for domestic dry and wet waste in a bid to curb the region's waste to landfill and to progress towards the Queensland Government's 2050 targets of 25 per cent reduction in household waste, 90 per cent waste recovery and a 75 per cent recycling rate across all waste types.

This Budget reflects the priorities outlined in Council's Operational and Corporate Plans which specifically incorporate the outcomes of the 2022 MARKYT Community Scorecard consultation.

The Community Scorecard clearly articulated what is important to our community, what we are doing well and where we can improve our performance. Over 1,850 community members joined the conversation sharing more than 100,000 words to guide Council with future priorities that are now reflected in our 2023-2024 Budget.

Expenditure in Council's Capital Works Budget for 2023-2024 invests heavily in rehabilitating and improving our essential infrastructure - our roads, drainage, water and sewerage.

Highlights from this program include:

- \$1.6 million for Recreation and Natural Areas including:
 - \$780,000 for Warrina Lakes Nature Play Space
 - \$380,000 for Banyan Park, Tully; and
 - \$408,000 for Recreation areas across the region
- \$5.3 million towards road improvement programs, including:
 - \$1.8 million for 50 kilometres of road reseals across the region;
 - \$300,000 for Bowen Street Upgrade Project, Cardwell;
 - \$350,000 for Flynn Road, Mourilyan;
 - \$1.2 million for Blackman Road, Warrami; and
 - \$1 million for unsealed road renewals.
- \$1.5 million for pathway renewals and upgrades including:
 - \$1 million for renewal of kerb and footpath along Mourilyan Road; and
 - \$280,000 for new shared path at Wongaling Beach
- \$5.5 million towards bridge and culvert renewals.
- Increased investment of \$5.2 million from \$3.6 million in 2022-2023 into water main renewals across the region.

In addition to focusing on renewals, Council will begin the delivery of three major projects, some of which are delivered over several years:

- \$10.5 million for all stages of the Mission Beach CBD Upgrade
- \$18.1 million for Stage One of the Cardwell Hinchinbrook Sewerage Treatment Plant and Normalisation Program
- \$8.8 million for the Hyatt Street Water Reservoir in Tully

Council thanks the Australian Government for the extension through Phase 4 of the Local Roads Community Infrastructure Program. This allocation of \$1.16 million for non-urban road and community infrastructure projects provides for funding nominations for the Warrina Lakes Nature Play Space and Blackman Road, Warrami projects.

Council's focus is very much on continuing to lay the foundations for future growth. This has been made possible through external funding opportunities with over \$20 million of funding provided to deliver key infrastructure projects that will improve the liveability of our region. Council extends our thanks to the Queensland Government and Australian Government for the investment they are making in our region.

Council will actively continue to advocate for our community, addressing key areas highlighted within the 2023 Advocacy Plan. In response to community priorities, Council's advocacy is very broad ranging and includes the Reef 2050 Plan, Kurrimine Beach Boat Ramp, implementation of the Coastal Hazard Adaptation Strategy, investment in water and sewerage infrastructure, implementation of the national Feral Pig Action Plan and seeking local solutions for primary health care services, just to name a few.

Council seeks to leverage opportunities through strategic partnerships and collaboration between State and Federal Governments, community, and industry and exploit our strategic advantages. In our 2023-2024 Budget, we have an allowance to fund 50 per cent of the costs for a Feral Pig Coordinator and we are actively seeking contributions from industry and other levels of government.

In April this year Council made a submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Inquiry on Bank Closures in Regional Australia. That submission was a direct result of Westpac's advice of their Tully branch closure. The submission was founded in lived experiences that were communicated to Council through engagement that was undertaken to prepare the community-based submission to the Inquiry. Council also engaged directly with Westpac following their advice of the imminent Tully branch closure. Fortunately, Westpac listened to the many community voices, including that of Council, and the Tully branch will remain open.

For those in hardship or just looking to manage household budgets, a wide range of payment arrangements remain available. Through this budget Council continues to support community and sporting groups as well as those more vulnerable.

Council will retain the \$300 Pensioner Rebate and interest-free payment arrangements. The Pensioner Rate rebate equates to over \$720,000 in foregone revenue by Council.

Eligible community organisations will continue to receive a Rating Concession of 100 per cent which equates to a value of over \$200,000. These concessions allow our community organisations, sporting groups and not-for-profits to reinvest back into the great work they do for our community.

Small measures in the 2023-2024 Fees and Charges continue to make a difference to the disadvantaged members of our community with no registration fee charged for the first desexed dog per dwelling for community members with an eligible concession. In 2022-2023 over 750 community members received this concession.

Our focus on economic development within our region has never been more important and is supported by dedicated in-house resources as well as leveraging of new partnerships and collaborations which will support, attract and sustain investment in our region.

In 2022-2023 Council commenced the development of our Economic Development Strategy with the first stages being consulting with our community, businesses and industry stakeholders and
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the Council's Economic Development Advisory Committee. In 2023-2024 we will deliver the Strategy, Implementation Plan and Investment Prospectus. This will provide Council, industry and community with a road map to guide our region to build a stronger and more resilient economy.

The Community Grants Program has an allocation of \$201,092 in the 2023-2024 budget and this includes additional funding allocated for youth, community, and infrastructure initiatives.

Council's Community Grants support initiatives in community well-being and lifestyle, economic development, environmental sustainability, youth and arts and culture.

In seeking to deliver more from Council's Community Grants Program, a review has commenced, and community members are encouraged to engage with Council so that Council has a deeper understanding of the Program's effectiveness, accessibility, and impact.

Council employs over 370 locals who live, work, play and invest in the Cassowary Coast. Consideration has been provided through the 2023-2024 budget to provide for sustainable wage growth to keep up with cost of living pressures with \$32.5 million allocated towards employee-related expenditure, including additional training and safety programs to ensure that we "grow our own" Cassowary Coast team.

In closing, I'm extremely proud to lead a team that has developed a budget that balances the current financial pressures against delivering value for our community.

Leading our region is a significant responsibility. It is not one this Council takes lightly. We are focused on meeting our challenges and harnessing opportunities to provide long-term inclusive and sustainable outcomes.

This year's Budget is firmly focused on our future, investing in the people, places and spaces which make the Cassowary Coast great – One Coast: Cassowary Coast.

I am proud to present the 2023-2024 Cassowary Coast Regional Council Budget.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. Nolan".

Mayor Mark Nolan