



BALLINA SHIRE COUNCIL

community engagement *strategy*

proposed special rate variation 2018/2019 and 2019/2020

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contents

Introduction	03
Social Justice Principles	03
Why a proposed Special Rate Variation?	03
Engagement	04
Key Messages	06
Stakeholders	06
Evaluation	07
Appendices	08

INTRODUCTION

Ballina Shire Council considers itself an engaged leader in the community, so we involve our community in the decision making process. We do this to develop strong partnerships so that we can represent the views of the community to other levels of government. We also do this knowing that community engagement provides for effective decision making.

This strategy has been prepared with reference to Council's Community Consultation Policy and the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2).

SOCIAL JUSTICE PRINCIPLES UNDERPINNING THE ENGAGEMENT

The development of this strategy responds to the principles of democratic representation and social inclusion expressed in Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) community awareness and engagement guidelines. Our aim is that Council engages across a representative spectrum of socio-culturally diverse community members.

These principles inform the way in which the community will be consulted. The principles of social justice are:

Equity – There is fairness in decision making and prioritising and allocation of resources.

Access – All people have fair access to services, resources and opportunities to meet their basic needs and improve their quality of life.

Participation – Everyone has the maximum opportunity to genuinely participate in decisions which affect their lives.

Rights – Everyone's rights are recognised and promoted.

WHY A PROPOSED SPECIAL RATE VARIATION

In 2015, Ballina was declared Fit for the Future by the NSW Government. This was based on a submission provided to the Office of Local Government (OLG) and IPART which outlined a number of actions Council would take to improve our financial sustainability. One of those actions was to increase our total rate revenue by way of an application to IPART for a special rate variation (SRV).

The purpose of the increase is to allow Council to generate more income above rate pegging so that we can renew our key infrastructure. Ballina Shire Council is responsible for the management

of over \$1 billion worth of assets. These assets deteriorate over time, and Council faces a challenge of making sure we have enough funds to look after these assets now and into the future. Through this SRV we can improve roads, playgrounds, storm water infrastructure, community facilities and sports fields in a timelier manner.

In order to make an application to IPART for this increase in rating income, it is essential that Council engages with the community so that they are aware of the need of this SRV and the extent and impact of this proposal on ratepayers.

ENGAGEMENT

Council has a commitment to community engagement as a growing trend towards participatory decision making by government. As a local council, we need to ensure that decision making processes reflect the community. We do this through regular ongoing information channels, individual or specific engagement strategies as well as reviewing the latest Micromex¹ research to determine how our community wishes to be informed of Council news. All of these methods are proposed to be used for the community engagement strategy for the special rate variation proposal.

Ballina Shire Council has used the principles of the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) participation spectrum for the development of this Strategy using the principles of Inform, Consult and Involve.

Engagement activities already undertaken

DATE	ACTIVITY	DETAILS	IAP2 PRINCIPLE
December 2016	Council resolution	Council decided to proceed with an application to IPART for SRV for three years	Consult
January 2017	Letter to ratepayers about SRV	Letter with fact sheet sent to 16,000 ratepayers	Inform
January 2017	Community survey	Independent survey of 400 residents in the Ballina Shire	Consult
January 2017	Website	Information on SRV proposal on ballina.nsw.gov.au	Inform
January 2017	Public meetings	Presented to four meetings to the community	Involve
March to June 2017	Public Consultation - Integrated Planning and Reporting Documents	Development and public consultation on the Operational Plan, Delivery Program and Community Strategic Plan	Consult
May 2017	IPART notification of approval of temporary SRV for 2017/18	Changes included in IP&R documents and presentations to the community	Consult
June 2017	Council endorsement and resolution	Council adopted the suite of IP&R documents including SRV, and resolved to apply for an SRV in 2018/19 and 2019/20	Consult

¹Ballina Shire Council Community Satisfaction Research - prepared by Micromex Research 2016

Proposed activity

DATE	ACTIVITY	DETAILS	IAP2 PRINCIPLE
August 2017	Report to Council	Community Engagement Strategy for SRV proposal	Consult
September 2017	Letter to ratepayers and fact sheet	Letter detailing proposed impact of SRV on ratepayers fact sheet sent to 16,000 ratepayers	Inform
September 2017	Community newsletter	Article outlining SRV and impact on ratepayers, distribution to 22,000 households	Inform
September 2017	Open online survey	To gauge community feedback	Consult
September 2017	Ward Committee meetings	Presentation to representatives of the community on SRV	Involve
September 2017	Radio interviews, community radio	Interview with General Manager	Inform
September 2017	Ballina Shire Council website	Information on SRV	Inform
September to October 2017	Social media	Information on SRV	Consult
September to October 2017	Media releases	Advising community on proposed SRV	Inform
September to October 2017	Advertising in the Ballina Shire Advocate	Advising community on proposed SRV	Inform
September to October 2017	Micromex Community Survey	Independent survey of residents in the Ballina Shire	Consult
September to October 2017	Public meetings	Present to community on proposed SRV and feedback mechanisms	Involve
September to October 2017	Re-exhibition of Delivery Program and Operational Plan 2017/18 - 2020/21	Detailing the impact of the SRV proposal on ratepayers and opportunity to provide feedback	Consult
31 October 2017	Online survey and submissions closes		Consult

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KEY MESSAGES

Ballina Shire Council is in a unique position where IPART have approved a temporary one year special rate increase for 2017/18. This will expire on 30 June 2018. Because of this, our planning has identified this matter as a challenge for Council to overcome, for what is already a complex topic to communicate. Due to the complex nature in communicating a SRV, a number of key messages have been developed so that we can convey essential information about the proposal. They include:

- Council is committed to consult , inform, and involve the community about the need for the SRV
- Council is working on cost containment strategies, cost efficiencies, funding sources and service levels
- Council knows that the community priorities are on infrastructure
- Council understands that rate rises are generally not welcome, but are necessary to ensure our asset renewal needs are met
- Council is committed to build relationships with the community and other agencies to ensure the communities priorities are understood and addressed.

STAKEHOLDERS

The major stakeholders for the SRV proposal are listed below.

- Ratepayers
- Community members
- Non-government agencies
- Neighbouring LGAs
- Community Groups
- Business and Industry
- State and Federal Government
- Council employees
- Councillors.


EVALUATION

Council will undertake an evaluation of the engagement activities to assist us in gauging whether the engagement program was successful. This can then be used for any future engagement activities.

OUTCOME	MEASURE	SOURCE	TARGET
Participation in meetings	Number of attendees	Attendance sheets	5% increase on meetings attendance held in January 2017
Level of service preferred by community and whether the SRV is supported	Number of online surveys completed	Service provider	5% increase in online survey participation from previous survey
Participation in offline discussion	Number of submissions received	Electronic records	5% increase from submissions received in January 2017

APPENDICES

Sample Media Release



Media Release

Monday 9 January 2017

Consultation on proposed special rate variation (SRV)

Ballina Shire Council wants to hear from the community to determine if we should apply for a permanent increase to our general rate income, known as a special rate variation (SRV), above the rate peg limit set by the NSW Government each year.

Like many councils across the state, Council faces the challenge of how to best maintain services and ageing infrastructure – the cost of which is rising faster than Council’s income.

The proposed rate increase, if approved by the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART), will commence in 2017/18 and continue for three years until 2019/20. The income from the rate increase will allow Council to renew key infrastructure such as roads, stormwater, playgrounds, sports fields and open spaces in a more timely manner. It will also fund a Healthy Waterways Program which will improve the health and amenity of water bodies such as the Richmond River, Lake Ainsworth and Shaws Bay. The total proposed special rate variation is as follows:

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Rate peg limit	1.5% (actual)	2.5% (estimated)	2.5% (estimated)
Asset renewal program	1.9%	3.4%	3.4%
Healthy waterways program	1.5%	0%	0%
Total rate increase	4.9%	5.9%	5.9%

Information about the proposed special rate variation has been mailed to each ratepayer and we encourage feedback from all property owners and residents in the Ballina Shire. There are many ways to provide feedback, including:

- Attend a public meeting at Alstonville, Lennox Head, Ballina, or Wardell
- Email svproposal@ballina.nsw.gov.au
- Complete the online survey at ballina.nsw.gov.au/srvproposal
- Make a written submission to Ballina Shire Council, P O Box 450, Ballina NSW 2478
- Visit our website ballina.nsw.gov.au/srvproposal

Submissions to the proposal close on **Monday 6 February 2017**. Council is required to advise IPART by 20 February 2017 as to whether we will be proceeding with the proposed rate increase. This due date has made it necessary to undertake this community consultation process during January and February.

Further information is available on Council’s website ballina.nsw.gov.au

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Distribution Media Outlets	

Media Release Media Release Media Release Media Release Media Release Media Release Media Release

APPENDICES

Sample Letter to Ratepayers



APPENDICES

Sample Factsheet

asset renewal and healthy waterways
possible special rate variation

asset renewal

The NSW Government established its Fit for the Future Program in 2014/15, where all councils in NSW needed to identify how they would comply with a range of financial criteria to demonstrate that they were financially sustainable.

Ballina Shire Council, in responding to this program, included in our submission a proposal to increase our general rate income above the standard rate pegging limit for the three year period from 2017/18 to 2019/20. This will allow us to renew our key infrastructure such as roads, stormwater, playgrounds and sports fields in a more timely manner.

This proposal was submitted to the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) and Ballina Shire Council was identified as Fit for the Future by the State Government.

The total proposed special rate variation is as follows:

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Rate peg limit	1.5%	2.5%	2.5%
Asset renewal	1.9%	3.4%	3.4%
Healthy waterways	1.5%	0.0%	0.0%
Total Rate Increase	4.9%	5.9%	5.9%

healthy waterways

The Richmond River continues to be rated as one of the unhealthiest rivers on the east coast of NSW and all levels of government, the business community, and all of us as residents, need to work together to improve this.

Council has had very limited funds to undertake works in respect to our waterways and we have had to rely heavily on Government grants to undertake projects.

In response to this, Council has decided to include in our consultation for the Fit for the Future Program, a 1.5% per annum additional increase for 2017/18 to create a funding stream for what we are calling our Healthy Waterways Program.

The focus of this funding, which will be approximately \$300,000 per annum, will be on the Richmond River and its tributaries, along with Lake Ainsworth and Shaws Bay.

Our Healthy Waterways Program priorities will include:

- Improving recreational amenity of Lake Ainsworth and Shaws Bay
- Reinstating riverbank vegetation
- Improving floodplain wetlands

1

APPENDICES

Sample Advertising - Ballina Shire Advocate

Proposed Special Rate Variation			
<p>Ballina Shire Council is proposing to apply for a permanent increase to our general rate income above the standard rate peg limit. This is referred to as a special rate variation (SRV).</p> <p>The income from the additional rate increase will allow Council to renew key infrastructure such as roads, stormwater, playgrounds, sports fields and open spaces in a more timely manner.</p> <p>It will also fund a Healthy Waterways Program which will improve the amenity and health of water bodies such as the Richmond River, Lake Ainsworth and Shaws Bay.</p> <p>The proposed rate increase will commence in 2017/18 and continue for three years until 2019/20. The total proposed special rate variation is as follows:</p>			
Description	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Rate peg limit	1.5%	2.5%	2.5%
Asset renewal program	1.9%	3.4%	3.4%
Healthy waterways program	1.5%	0%	0%
Total rate increase	4.9%	5.9%	5.9%

To assist with reducing the impact of this increase Council is also proposing to cease levying its Waste Operations Charge. This charge, which is levied on all residential and farmland properties, was \$73 for 2016/17.

Further information on this SRV proposal is available on Council's website ballina.nsw.gov.au

Council is seeking feedback from all property owners and residents in the Ballina Shire. There are many ways to provide feedback, including:

- Attend a public meeting from 7pm at the following locations:
 - o Wednesday 25 January Ballina Shire Council Chambers (NOTE: Ballina meeting is not 25 February as printed on the back page of the factsheet distributed to ratepayers).
 - o Monday 30 January Wardell Memorial Hall
- Email srvproposal@ballina.nsw.gov.au
- Complete the online survey at ballina.nsw.gov.au/srvproposal
- Make a written submission to Ballina Shire Council, P O Box 450, Ballina NSW 2478
- Visit our website ballina.nsw.gov.au/srvproposal

▶ **submissions close: Monday 6 February 2017.**

