

2023-24 BUDGET



MAYORAL BUDGET STATEMENT

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Good morning Councillors, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to present the last budget for this term of Council. This year's budget we will hand to the Council term of 2024-2028 a surplus budget that is forecast to continue in our long-term financial plan. To achieve the surplus has been a culmination of many years working towards financial sustainability and lobbying for change in the distribution of the Federal Assistance Grants. The proposed budget has a net operating surplus of \$1.372m (excluding capital revenue) and a net result of \$18.50m (including capital revenue). The total revenue is \$108.67m and expenditure of \$90.17m. The Capital works program for 2023/2024 is forecast at \$26.43m.

Reflecting on the last three years of our term of our four-year term we have been working towards Council's vision '*Welcoming, connected and innovative communities, where economies are strong, and opportunities are abundant*'. Delivery of projects such as improved Digital Connectivity, business mentoring for economic development, Wild Dog Exclusion Fencing and completion of new facilities like the Splash Park and the Library Hub are all great examples of implementing this vision.

This term of Council commenced in March 2020 in the midst of a flood event that followed with COVID-19 and five flood events. The approved flood recovery submissions we have completed include \$58.9m at the end of 2021/2022; an estimate of \$22m completed in 2022/2023 and a further estimate of \$50m to be completed by June 2024. There are additional submissions yet to be approved and a number of betterment projects that are listed in our capital works program. Council have also welcomed the State Government announcement for improvements to the Castlereagh Highway between Hebel and Dirranbandi.

Into the future Council is in a good position to increase revenue through contract works with the achievement of ISO accreditation for our quality, environmental and safety systems for transport and infrastructure along with maintaining Transport & Main Roads accreditation.

The key focus for 2023/2024 budget will be the finalisation of the following key projects, the majority of which were made possible through State and Federal funding:

- Upgrade of Victoria Street (Federal Local Roads Community Infrastructure funds (LRCIP) and Federal Murray Darling Basin Economic Development Program (MDBEDP))
- Dirranbandi Rail & River Precinct Federal Murray Darling Basin Economic Development Program (MDBEDP))
- Balonne Shire beautification project for shop facades and energy efficiency (MDBEDP)
- Business Mentoring program (MDBEDP)
- Betterment road programs on Jakelwar-Goodooga Road and Whyenbah Road (Queensland Reconstruction Authority – QRA)
- \$50m in flood recovery works (QRA)
- Improvement to the Beardmore Dam Facility (Queensland's Fishing Infrastructure Grant and Works for Queensland)

Council will also commence delivery of the following projects:

- St George Industrial Development (LRCIP)
- Mungindi Water Security Project (New South Wales Cross Board fund – NSWCBISF)
- Expansion of the St George cemetery

- Construction of staff accommodation (Works for Queensland)

These are just some of the initiatives we will progress in 2023/2024 that provide opportunity and support for local business, landholders and contractors to work with council to deliver the projects.

CAPITAL WORKS PROGRAM

Council will deliver a capital works program of \$26.4m with over \$17.1m of this funded by grant programs.

Local Roads

The capital works program for local roads is \$17.12m supplemented by \$12.9m in State and Federal Government funding. The program includes a range of disaster funding and council funds that will see a total of \$6.1m to continue works on the Jakelwar Goodooga Road and \$2.8m on Whyenbah Road. The full program of works and source of funding is outlined in the Capital Works Projects list.

Plant

Council's fleet and plant continues to be hampered by the world-wide shortage in the supply of vehicles. The budget reflects a three year program for plant replacement with a total budget of \$1.12m.

Recreation

Council will focus on completion of the basket ball court at Rowden Park (\$104,000) and contribute to the renovation of the change rooms to allow for female change rooms for our rugby teams. The St George Foreshore will receive an upgrade of shelters and picnic tables to replace those that are deteriorating.

The St George Swimming pool will be drained this winter and repainted (LRCIP contributing funds); Dirranbandi Swimming pool will receive a chair lift and stairs; the town entry signage is to be lit up (\$122,000) and Creative Arts St George will have its exterior painted and air conditioning replaced. Council will add to our festive lighting across the Shire. (\$35,000) and have a number of initiatives that will benefit our Showgrounds.

Land development

Council's aerodrome hangar development was made possible with Building our Regions fund. Planning is now underway to service these allotments with LRCIP funds. Council has plans for an industrial development and land acquisition adjacent to the St George aerodrome.

Waste

Delivery of our landfill waste services continues to be a challenge with increased licensing provisions from the Environmental Protection Authority. Fencing at the Thallon Landfill and concrete bunker walls at all landfill sites are just some of the proposed improvements. (\$105,000).

Water, Wastewater Projects

A number of projects for upgrade and renewal of our water mains have been carried forward. Mungindi Water Security funded by NSW Cross Border Infrastructure fund and Council reserves will see delivery of a \$1.6m project. Council will also complete a Water Security and Cooling Plan with funding from Building our Regions that will research options to improve water services across the Shire.

Footpaths, Kerbs and Drainage

Stormwater works have been carried forward for Dirranbandi, St George and Mungindi along with kerb replacement and upgrade in Main Street Dirranbandi. Nindigully foreshore footpath and Wallam Creek footpath have also been carried forward. A local roads (town) works program of \$250,000 will see improvements across the Shire.

OPERATIONAL PROJECTS

Council's Operational Projects Budget for 2022/2023 (excluding flood recovery works) is \$2.85m with grant funding of \$964,000.

Projects to be delivered include:

- Finalising works at Beardmore Dam with Queensland Fishing Infrastructure fund and Works for Queensland
- Completing the Cultural Burning Weed Management – Advancing Pest & Weeds Control Solutions)
- Continuing the Business Mentoring Program with Disaster Recovery
- Continuing our multicultural programs and community resilience and recovery programs

In addition to specifically funded projects there are the many council operations supporting community liveability and sustainability such as:

- A growing number of Council and facilitated community events and programs post-covid with Regional Arts Development Fund (RADF) and Community Grants
- Flood mapping and modelling (PACP)
- Landfill initiatives including master planning, surveys, green waste options and concrete crushing
- Stronger Indigenous relationships with recognition of native title, Indigenous Land Use Agreements, cultural burning, and consultation
- Active Biosecurity Committee and Wild Dog Advisory Committee revising priorities with the strength of Shire fencing
- Development of the youth council and youth engagement partnerships
- Mental Health and Wellbeing programs
- Feasibility study for an Equine Events Centre

Road Performance Contracts

Council has a number of road performance contracts with Queensland Transport & Main Roads with over \$5m to be completed in 2023/2024. Council's Road Performance Maintenance Contract with the Queensland Transport & Main Roads will continue with \$4.38m proposed across the State controlled road network.

RATES & CHARGES

The cost of living is ever increasing for households and for Council. We have delivered an overall rate increase lower than CPI. On average a typical residential property in St George will see an increase of \$105 per half year in their rate notice. Council has had to balance the need for full cost recovery for our waste, water and sewerage charges with the increasing requirements for environmental compliance – particularly for our landfill sites. We have also had to factor in land valuations and to this end Council will apply a 30% limitation across all rating categories (excluding feedlots). This means that any property that experienced a significant increase in their land valuation in the 2022/2023 revaluation may experience an increase in their general rate of up to 30% for 2023/2024. If you disagree with your land valuation you can contact the Valuer General to dispute the valuation. <https://www.qld.gov.au/environment/land/title/valuation/about/dispute>.

Council will continue to offer a 30 day discount period of 10% for the August 2023 and February 2024 rate levy. It is proposed to continue the relief from the accrued interest on outstanding rates for those who enter and honour their payment plans.

Resident/Commercial/Industrial

This year the average residential, industrial and commercial property will see an increase just under CPI of 5% in general rates (subject to limitations).

Utility charges will increase with Water and sewerage up by 6% and cleansing (waste) base charge up by 14.5%. The rise in waste cost represents the move to full cost recovery and the increasing compliance requirements from the Environmental Protection Authority at our landfills. A 7% increase representing CPI will apply to our waste collection service.

River Water Charges – St George – Residential and Rural Residential only

Council has adopted a scale of excess charges on water allocations for river water in St George. This will impact those properties that use in excess of the allocation of 1500KL per annum or 1794KL for the rural residential water charging area.

Rural

Rural categories will continue to move to a single rural rate by 2025/26. Rural categories may see a movement in their general rate according to the seven year rural rating strategy and their land valuations. Limitations of 30% will apply to all rural categories (excluding feedlots).

Urban Animal Special Charge

The urban animal special charge will increase from \$21 to \$23 for all residential category 4A and 4B properties contributing to our compliance services for animal management.

Environmental Special Charge

The environmental special charge applies to all properties outside each township that utilise our landfills (ie.outside of the general waste collection area). The environmental special charge has increased by 14.5% consistent with the increasing costs of compliance.

Mungindi

Residents in Mungindi will see changes to waste utility charges in line with Moree Plains Shire Council including a 5% administration fee across all categories. Water charges will remain the same as previous years for Mungindi.

Concessions

Pensioners will continue to receive a maximum concession of \$170 per annum for qualifying properties. Community Rates Support will be applied for eligible community and sporting groups.

Fact sheets on all rating changes can be viewed on Council's website at www.balonne.qld.gov.au/rates

Closing Remarks

I acknowledge the need for Council to balance the cost of its services and the increasing cost of living for many of our ratepayers. Some of these costs are imposed on Council such as the increasing environmental compliance on our landfills, the cost of supply and delays in the supply chain or inability to obtain contractors in a timely manner.

Today we hand down a budget with a net operating surplus result of \$1.372m (excluding capital revenue). This is one of our largest budgets in recent years with a total revenue of \$108.67m and expenditure of \$90.17m. The good news is that our nine-year forecast indicates net surplus results from recurrent operations as we work towards financial sustainability. The budget will help stimulate our local economy creating work and improving

livability as we roll out the funding programs. Council is committed to delivering the best outcomes for our community and continues to work hard at a Regional, State and Federal levels to represent the interests of our Shire.

Thank you to our councillors, executive team and staff who have contributed to developing the budget, rating strategies and operational plan.



Cr Samantha O'Toole

MAYOR

Tabled at the Special Council Meeting to adopt the budget on Tuesday 29 June 2023.