

## RATES LOWERED, FINANCIAL REVIEW PLANNED AS MID MURRAY MAKES BUDGET CHANGES

The Mid Murray Council has committed to reducing the financial impact on its ratepayers and a rigorous review of its long-term finances following extensive community consultation.

Mayor Dave Burgess said Elected Members and Senior Management had heard the concerns of ratepayers during public feedback on its *Draft 2019/20 Annual Business Plan* and *Draft Long Term Financial Plan*.

Councillors committed to reducing the average residential rate increase from the original proposed 3.6% to a maximum of 2.9% after hearing from speakers at a public meeting on Tuesday, 11 June and reading through the written submissions provided as part of the consultation process.

"It's encouraging to see our community so engaged and willing to contribute to the discussion about our future direction as a Council," Mayor Burgess says.

"The views of our community have been heard by the Council in our decision to act on updating the *Draft 2019/20 Annual Business Plan* and lowering the proposed rate rise to reflect those concerns.

"We understand that families, farmers and pensioners are struggling under the rising cost of living, as well as facing other pressures including the recent drought.

"While the financial sustainability of the Council remains a priority for Elected Members and staff, we have listened to our community and acted.

"We are committed to identifying efficiencies in line with the expectations of our community during this challenging time, while also delivering key services and projects."

Council's Senior Management are reviewing the *Draft 2019/20 Annual Business Plan* to determine where savings can be made before a revised plan is presented to Elected Members for adoption at their July meeting.

Mid Murray Chief Executive Officer, Ben Scales, said while the current focus has been on the budget for the coming financial year, the Council was also committed to reviewing its Long Term Financial Plan, which includes a debt reduction strategy, to ensure the organisation achieves its objective of sustainable prosperity.

"Our role is to find efficiencies in all areas of Council business, and over the next 12 months we'll be working on a full review of all Council services and operations," Mr Scales says.

"This will be one of my main priorities as the new CEO.



“While this reduction in income in the current budget may affect some services and capital projects, we will be working hard in the coming weeks to determine where we can make budget savings in order to minimise the impact on the community.

“As we prepare our new Long Term Financial Plan over the next year, Council and the community will need to have a conversation about the projects and services that are priorities, and where we can make savings to ensure the Council reduces its level of debt and remains financially sustainable into the future.

“The balance of creating sustainable prosperity for our community is certainly a challenge, but one that our team is committed to and working towards.”

Council will communicate details of changes to the *19/20 Annual Business Plan and Budget* to the Mid Murray community as they become available.

- ENDS –

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## MEDIA STATEMENT

Mid Murray Councillors unanimously agreed on Tuesday, 11 June that Council will prepare a revised *Draft 2019/20 Annual Business Plan and Budget* for consideration with a maximum 2.9% increase in the general residential rate.

Mid Murray Council CEO Ben Scales made the following statement:

*"This follows extensive community consultation and concerns from ratepayers who are struggling under the rising cost of living and the recent drought.*

*"Senior Management are now working to identify where those savings can be found within the proposed budget. As yet, no decisions have been made on which projects or services may be affected. This is a process that will require input from both Senior Management and Elected Members and may take several weeks.*

*"A revised Draft 2019/20 Annual Business Plan and Budget will be presented to Councillors for consideration and adoption at the July meeting.*

*"In line with the Council's decision, Senior Management will focus on preparing the new Draft 2019/20 Annual Business Plan and Budget with a target average residential rate increase of no more than 2.9%. However, with the review process still to be completed, the final figure has not yet been officially determined. The community can be assured that it will be no higher than 2.9%."*

- ENDS -

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