

**MEDIA RELEASE**

## **BUILDING STRONG ECONOMY, MAINTAINING FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY KEY IN MID MURRAY BUDGET**

Planning to build a strong regional economy, a focus on financial sustainability, delivering improved community facilities and services and increasing the Mid Murray's tourism potential are among the priorities for the district's Council in the coming financial year.

The Mid Murray Council released its *Draft Annual Business Plan and Budget 2022-23* and *Draft Long-Term Financial Plan 2022-23 to 2031-32* for community consultation on 12 May 2022.

The *Draft Annual Business Plan and Budget 2022-23* is underpinned by Council's strategic plan, *Our Plan 2020-24*, and its four Asset Management Plans. It outlines the key projects, services and programs proposed for the coming financial year, along with Council's plan to fund these.

Amid significant financial pressures and the growing impact of inflation on operational costs, the Council has proposed a 6% average general rate increase. It will also continue to work to identify efficiencies and cost cutting measures to meet the global and national financial uncertainty expected in the year ahead.

Mid Murray Mayor Dave Burgess said Council had carefully considered both the financial challenges facing its own operations and those of the Mid Murray community in setting the draft budget.

"In the past year alone we've seen significant cost of living increases – from the CPI of 1.5% we initially budgeted for to over 5%. The cost of items like fuel and construction materials have risen dramatically. That, combined with reduced rate increases over recent years to support our community from the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, has placed additional strain on Council's sustainability and long-term financial planning," Mayor Burgess said.

"While we understand that households and businesses are facing increasing costs, Council can no longer carry that cost burden without increasing rates or cutting necessary services and infrastructure spending. While we are aware of, and sympathetic to, our community's financial situation, we need to deliver responsible and sustainable financial management, as well as pursuing initiatives to facilitate a strong community.

"We will be looking at ways we can increase efficiencies and reduce costs without impacting on the delivery of essential services that our community relies on, and without jeopardising the capital investments we are making that will strengthen our local economy and support local businesses as they continue to recover into the future.

"We will also continue to offer relief options for ratepayers who are struggling under our *Rates Hardship Policy* and offer rates postponement for State Seniors Card holders on their principal place of residence."

In preparing its *Draft Annual Business Plan and Budget 2022-23*, Council has budgeted for a 3% CPI increase in line with Federal Government projections, along with an additional 1% to cover the associated cost increases from the current financial year due to the unexpectedly sharp CPI rise over the past year. A further 2% is included in line with the Council's *Draft Long-Term Financial Plan 2022-23 – 2031-32* to ensure the Council remains financially sustainable into the future. The total 6% general average rate increase is equivalent to an overall average of an additional \$84 per existing assessment for the year. However, the actual increase payable for any individual property may be more or less than this, depending on the value and movement in the capital valuation of each property.

Economic recovery continues to be a focus for the Council in the coming year, with a number of projects designed to stimulate local businesses and build a robust tourism sector.



Priority projects in the in the *Draft 2022-23 Annual Business Plan and Budget* include:

- The sealing of Murraylands Road from Morgan sealed end towards Blanchetown (8kms).
- Implementing Council's inaugural *Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan*
- Stage 3 construction of the Murray Coorong Trail and seeking new funding opportunities in partnership with neighbouring Councils for future stages
- Development of a Truro Township masterplan
- Implementation of Regional Public Health plan priorities
- Implementing a One Number Customer Service system and e-communication to rate-payers to improve Council's customer experience and communication
- Development of a Mid Murray Council Growth and Economic Development Strategy
- Implementation of the Astro Tourism Strategy for the River Murray International Dark Sky Reserve
- Progression of the Wongulla CWMS project
- Delivery of Mannum Waterfalls open space plan and Marine facilities Asset Management Plan
- Partnering with stakeholders to develop a strategic plan for Ngaut Ngaut Conservation Park
- Completion of PS Canally restoration project and the Mannum Murray River Heritage Tourism project
- Delivery of priority stages of the Swan Reach Riverfront masterplan

"The *Draft Annual Business Plan and Budget 2022-23* includes priority projects that will deliver improved facilities and services for our community, while also creating opportunities for our business and tourism sectors in their recovery period," Mayor Burgess says.

"By implementing our River Murray International Dark Sky Reserve Astro Tourism Strategy, along with major infrastructure projects including progressing the development of the Murray Coorong Trail network, the completion of PS Canally restoration project and the Mannum Murray River Heritage Tourism project, and the roll-out of the Swan Reach Riverfront Master Plan, Council will build on the tourism strengths of our district to offer enhanced experiences and facilities to encourage increased visitation.

"Initiatives such as the development of a Truro Township Masterplan, a Mid Murray Growth Strategy and Economic Development Strategy will create plans to support economic growth and resilience for our district into the future.

"Despite the economic pressures in the year ahead, with careful planning and spending the future for Mid Murray looks bright."

Any ratepayer experiencing financial challenges is encouraged to contact Council to discuss support options that may assist, such as rate capping, postponement of rates for seniors, and assistance through the *Rates Hardship Policy*.

Public consultation on both the *Draft Annual Business Plan and Budget 2022-23* and the *Draft Long-Term Financial Plan 2022/23 – 2031/32* will begin on 12 May 2022 and closes at 12 noon on Thursday, 2 June 2022.

For information, or to have your say, visit: [www.mid-murray.sa.gov.au](http://www.mid-murray.sa.gov.au).

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**MEDIA CONTACT:**

Mid Murray Council Chief Executive Ben Scales

P: (08) 8569 0100 | E: [postbox@mid-murray.sa.gov.au](mailto:postbox@mid-murray.sa.gov.au)