

**MEDIA RELEASE**

## **MID MURRAY BUDGET FOCUSES ON ECONOMIC GROWTH, COMMUNITY SERVICES AND FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY**

Promoting economic growth, delivering enhanced community facilities and services, boosting tourism and continuing to pursue financial sustainability are the focus areas for the Mid Murray Council for the coming financial year and into the next decade.

As the region continues to rebuild following the challenging impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Council has outlined its approach to recovery and increasing local prosperity in its *Draft 2021-22 Annual Business Plan and Budget* and *Draft Long Term Financial Plan 2021-22 to 2030-31*. Both documents will be released for community consultation this Thursday, 13 May.

The *Draft 2021-22 Annual Business Plan and Budget* follows the priorities set by the community and Council in the development last year of the Council's strategic plan, *Our Plan 2020-24*. It sets out the district's key projects, services and programs for the coming financial year, along with Council's plan to fund these.

Among the top projects in the *Draft 2021-22 Annual Business Plan and Budget* are:

- Development of an Economic Growth Strategy
- \$3.1m Stage 1 Murraylands Road upgrade
- Deliver health and wellbeing programs and services including implementing initiatives under the Mid Murray Our Town Mental Health Plan
- Develop a Mid Murray Reconciliation Action Plan
- Construction of the Murray Coorong Trail - Swan Reach to Nildottie (20km)
- Implementation of Council's Disability Access and Inclusion Plan
- Finalisation of the *PS Canally* restoration project
- Blanchetown Revitalisation Project
- Swan Reach Riverfront Master Plan – delivery of initial stages of adopted master plan
- Mannum Murray River and Heritage Tourism Project
- Astro Tourism Plan to promote the River Murray International Dark Sky Reserve
- Implementing the outcomes of Council's Representation Review.

Mid Murray Mayor Dave Burgess said the Council had worked hard during the uncertainty of 2020/21 to support the community, business and tourism sectors and would continue that work into the 2021/22 financial year.

"As we head towards 2021-22, we will continue to support our community and industries to rebuild following the impacts of the pandemic," Mayor Burgess says.

"Having a strong economy will be essential for that ongoing recovery, especially at a time when the global situation is still uncertain and there remain challenges for our tourism sector due to the lack of international visitors and the risk of intrastate travel restrictions should future outbreaks occur.

"With that in mind, we have been mindful of the financial pressures facing some people in our community and the need to continue to pursue financial sustainability and efficiencies in our operations when setting our budget.

"We have worked to strike a balance between affordability and the continuity of services, as well as providing stimulus through the delivery of new community infrastructure and future planning to increase economic growth opportunities."

Council has included changes to its rating system recommended through the recent Rates Review process in the *Draft 2021/22 Annual Business Plan and Budget*.

Under the *Draft 2021/22 Annual Business Plan and Budget*, the proposed combined general rate and new waste management charge increase is 3.5% from general rates raised in 2020/21, however, the percentage rate rise will vary across individual properties due to valuation and rating changes. A further 0.5% increase in revenue is expected to be generated from growth across the district.

Council will continue to offer support measures to ratepayers experiencing financial difficulty or hardship, including rate capping, postponement of rates for seniors, and assistance through its *Rates Hardship Policy*.

Achieving financial sustainability while also continuing to maintain and deliver a range of services, programs, infrastructure and initiatives for the community over the coming decade is at the heart of the Council's *Draft Long-Term Financial Plan 2021-22 to 2030-31*.

Mid Murray Council Chief Executive Officer Ben Scales says Council will keep working towards financial sustainability, while continuing to invest in its community.

"One of our challenges as a regional community is our large road network and our significant number of assets, including buildings, recreation facilities, wastewater infrastructure and marine infrastructure," Mr Scales says.

"This plan sets out a comprehensive approach towards maintaining and upgrading our assets to ensure they continue to meet the needs of our community, while also delivering the programs and services our residents need and expect. Financial sustainability remains a core goal for Council and we will continue to pursue efficiencies and savings wherever possible over the coming decade as they are achievable."

Public consultation on both the *Draft 2021/22 Annual Business Plan and Budget* and the *Draft Long-Term Financial Plan 2021/22 to 2030/31* will begin on 13 May 2021 and closes at 5pm on 2 June 2021.

Council has also prepared a *Draft Transport Asset Management Plan* and a *Draft Plant and Machinery Asset Management Plan* for community consultation. These plans will guide future investment into road maintenance and upgrading, as well as the operations, maintenance, renewal and upgrading of Council's plant and machinery assets. Public consultation on these draft plans opens on 13 May 2021 and closes at 5pm on 2 June 2021.

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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