

MEDIA RELEASE

File: 07/03/0007

Date of Issue: Tuesday 15 August 2017

Contact: Jo Shannon 02 6071 5100

Council's budget adopted

More than \$6.7 million in capital works and a focus on community services headlines Towong Shire Council's 2017-18 Budget, which was adopted today.

Highlights from the 2017/18 Budget adopted at today's Council meeting include:

- A four year town improvement and beautification program with construction works scheduled for Walwa and Granya in 2018
- Delivery of the Great River Road project
- Construction of the Upper Murray Events Centre
- Completion of the National Stronger Regions funded Tallangatta foreshore upgrade
- Continued roll out of the Destination Tallangatta Towong Street streetscape improvements
- Delivery of the Eskdale Netball Court upgrade
- Continued pursuit of extended child care services

In approving a 5.55% rate increase, Council acknowledged that it had cut services too hard in previous years.

Towong Shire Council Mayor Cr David Wortmann said the higher rate cap that has been approved by the Essential Services Commission will now enable Council to deliver more for the Towong Shire community.

"In light of feedback from our residents and ratepayers around Council services we don't want to further reduce services or infrastructure delivery and maintenance," Cr Wortmann added. "Council — having heard the strong views of the community during our recent Community Workshops — believe that a number of items that were reduced or cut during the 2016-17 budget process should be reinstated, requiring that some expenses are added back into the 2017-18 budget.

Late amendments to the budget adopted by Council include:

- Extending the swimming pool season by two weeks
- Reviewing library services and providing a level of funding for service solutions for remote community members
- Increasing the budget available for books and resources in the Corryong and Tallangatta libraries
- Bringing forward the renewal of playgrounds across the Shire

In developing the budget Council has demonstrated to the Essential Services Commission that the rate increases over the next four years were necessary to provide a modest level of services and infrastructure renewal. In approving the higher rate cap, the Essential Services Commission was "satisfied that the higher

caps are appropriate because the application demonstrates a long-term funding need to deliver services at existing levels and maintain financial sustainability”.

“The Essential Services Commission decision validates our position that additional revenue is required to deliver services, renew extensive infrastructure across our Shire and remain financially sustainable. We believe that increased government funding is essential for small rural Councils such as Towong to be able to continue to deliver services to rural communities and we will continue to advocate for greater financial support.”

“We support rate capping and firmly believe that residents in rural communities shouldn't be burdened with excessive rates to pay for essential services and infrastructure,” Cr Wortmann said. “But it means that State and Federal Governments need to help make up the shortfall and better support small rural councils.”

“Council has focused on ensuring it operates as lean as possible. It is now time for the State Government to acknowledge the extensive work done by rural councils like Towong and provide a more sustainable solution to service delivery in rural communities.”

“With a projected operational expenditure budget of just over \$14.7 million and capital expenditure of \$6.7 million, Council is continuing to direct funding into community assets, roads, projects and services, while ensuring that our organisation operates efficiently and effectively to meet our community’s needs and expectations,” he said.

“Council has been disciplined and responsible in delivering this Budget, and our Capital Works Program will provide a host of new projects that will have major benefits to our community, both now and into the future.

The 2017/18 Budget will be available in coming days on Council’s website www.towong.vic.gov.au or from Council’s offices in Corryong and Tallangatta.

-ends-