

**-FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE-**

**4 February 2021:**

**We Listened!**

Cootamundra-Gundagai Regional Council (CGRC) has resolved to apply for a lower Special Rate Variation (SRV) than originally proposed after listening to the community through its extensive community engagement activities.

The application, which will be submitted to the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) by close of business Monday, 8<sup>th</sup> February 2021 calls for a 53.5% cumulative increase over just four years, inclusive of the assumed rate cap. The proposed permanent increases would be levied as follows:

2021/22: 20.0%  
2022/23: 16.0%  
2023/24: 5.0%  
2024/25: 5.0%

In response to strong community preference Council has requested the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) considers using its powers under s508A (4) of the Local Government Act, 1993 (the Act) to add a condition to the approval instrument requiring Cootamundra-Gundagai Regional Council (or emergent Councils should the de-amalgamation proceed) to re-engage with the community through a postal survey proximate to May 2022 before passing on the final three parts of the SRV. This request respects the community's wishes to retain a voice after Council has demonstrated efficiencies and after the Minister has provided advice of the Boundary Commission's decision.

"The community has made it very clear that they desire a further consultation, however, that they want to avoid the high pecuniary and emotional costs of a further full SRV application. A postal survey therefore appears to be the most efficient way to satisfy the community's wishes," according to Professor Joseph Drew, who undertook the community engagement sessions on behalf of CGRC.

"All of the engagement activities revealed that the community wanted Council to cut costs even further and thus reduce the burden on taxpayers," he said.

"Professor Drew with the backing of Council promised that he would really listen to the community and take on board suggestions made at the various events. Today Council has delivered on this promise," CGRC mayor Cr Abb McAlister said.

"We have confidence that IPART will respect the strong preference of the community for this proposal and approve an SRV that includes a mandatory re-engagement through a postal survey with ratepayers prior to May 2022."

Professor Drew thanked all in the community who had given up their valuable time to help Council put forward a proposal that met most people's criteria.

"What Council has applied for is the best compromise possible given the wide range of feedback received from the community and I hope that everyone can see that we have done all that we can to satisfy the various needs and objectives of different people," Professor Drew said.

Mayor McAlister concluded by stating "we are really sorry to have had to put this rate increase onto our community, but it was an unavoidable consequence of the amalgamation that none of us wanted. I sincerely thank everyone in the community for their help and understanding regarding this special rate variation."

**-END-**

