

COMMUNITY  
ENGAGEMENT REPORT  
RESOURCING  
STRATEGY 2022-2026  
PROPOSED SRV FROM  
2024/25



# DOCUMENT CONTROL

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**Cover image:** Plantation Point Sunrise, Shoalhaven City, photo credit: Jordan Robins

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

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The Community Engagement Plan for the Resourcing Strategy 2022-26 and the options for a Special Rate Variation outlined how Council would engage with the community and key stakeholders regarding a decision to endorse an updated Resourcing Strategy, including a revised Long Term Financial Plan 2024-2034, and whether to submit an application to IPART for a Special Rate Variation (SRV). This report outlines the engagement methods used by Council, provides a summary of the responses from the community and identifies key issues for the Council to consider in making a decision regarding an application to IPART for an SRV.

Shoalhaven City Council completed an independent Financial Sustainability Review, completed by AEC Group, and resolved to proceed with public exhibition of the updated Draft Resourcing Strategies and to inform the community of options being considered by the Council – including an option for the preparation of an application to the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal to raise the general rate as outlined below. Consideration of financial sustainability and resource planning was a key component in drafting the corporate planning documents (Resourcing Strategy) that Council placed on public exhibition. In addition, Council also exhibited the Financial Sustainability Review Report prepared by AEC Group Ltd.

In response to the issues identified and recommendations made in the Financial Sustainability Review, Council reviewed the Resourcing Strategy 2022-2026, including the following sections:

- Workforce Management Planning Strategy
- Asset Management Strategy
- Information Communications Technology Strategy
- Long-Term Financial Plan (2024-2034)

At the Extraordinary Council Meeting on Monday 20 November 2023, Council decided to adopt the draft Resourcing Strategy for public exhibition and to proceed with notifying the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) that Council is considering an application for a permanent special rate variation.

The four sections that make up the Resourcing Strategy 2022-2026 are integrated with the financial impacts detailed in Council's Long-Term Financial Plan over 10 years. The Long-Term Financial Plan outlines three different scenarios regarding Council's financial sustainability, including varying levels of rating revenue and the associated operating result, cash availability and investment in assets. Each scenario presented represents a different outcome in terms of service levels provided to the Shoalhaven community.

Each scenario refers to the rate increase inclusive of rate-pegging. Rate-pegging for 2024/25 is determined by IPART annual and has been determined as 4.5%. A rate-pegging increase of 3.0% (inclusive of 0.5% growth) is assumed for each year thereafter. The Long-Term Financial Plan considers the three case scenarios as outlined below. The next section outlines the different scenarios.

## 1.1 SCENARIO ONE (BASE CASE)

The Base Model is a planned approach to the continued delivery of services and provision of infrastructure based on a revenue base that does not increase the general rates income above the projected rate peg (as set by IPART) and current service charges only increasing each year by the projected annual indexation.

The capital works program, being constrained by the cash generated from operations (including rates, grants, and charges) and financing (borrowings) activities, is below what is necessary to maintain the

current levels of service provided by the infrastructure. Assets such as roads, buildings and stormwater are expected to deteriorate over time, requiring future Councils to make decisions on rationalisation of assets when assets begin to fail. This is not considered to be a sustainable approach in the longer term.

## 1.2 SCENARIO TWO (ENHANCED ASSET INVESTMENT – ONE YEAR SPECIAL RATE VARIATION (SRV))

The Enhanced Asset Investment – 1 Year SRV (Scenario Two) entails an increased commitment to investing in the renewal and replacement of assets. This higher level of investment is designed to ensure the sustained functionality of our assets, while also factoring in the present capacity of Council. There is a substantially increased investment in roads, to address part of the backlog, as well as increased investment in buildings, stormwater, footpaths, open space, and maritime assets over the 10 years.

The Scenario Two is presumed to be funded through the introduction of a special rate variation in general rates, increasing the general rate in year 1 by 32% including the rate peg (a permanent increase) and general rate increase in the following years returning to the projected rate peg approved by IPART.

To guarantee that Council possesses the necessary financial resources to effectively respond to various disasters and unforeseen emergencies, there was a sustainable target of \$15 million set for unrestricted cash. Keeping the community at the forefront of everything we do, this decision serves as a financial safety net, ensuring that we have the financial capacity to execute timely responses, support affected communities, and provide vital services when they are most needed. While this results in a reduced investment in year 1 for buildings and open space, investment in these areas increases in year 2 to balance this.

The current investment in water and sewer assets continues in this scenario, however it will be important for this to be reviewed in detail, to ensure that the current pricing model enables adequate infrastructure investment to maintain the existing levels of service into the future.

## 1.3 SCENARIO THREE (ENHANCED ASSET INVESTMENT – THREE (3) YEARS SRV)

The Enhanced Asset Investment – 3 Year SRV (Scenario Three) entails an increased commitment to investing in the renewal and replacement of assets, as identified in Scenario Two, however this investment does not occur to the same level in the first few years, due to the reduced funding assumptions.

The Enhanced Asset Investment – 3 Year SRV scenario is presumed to be funded through the introduction of a special rate variation in general rates increasing the general rate over 3 years including the rate peg, 18% in year 1, 13% in year 2, and 8% in year 3, (a permanent increase year on year) and then returning the general rates increase to the projected rate peg approved by IPART.

In addition to the reduction of investment in both buildings and open space in year 1, an investment reduction across asset classes spanning the first 2-3 years is required. This reduction is temporary, with increased investment in later years, but initially affects transport assets (kerb & gutters, roads, footpaths), coastal management programs, Council's depots & administration buildings, library resources, and office furniture. There is an element of risk in the initial years of this scenario, and Council will develop mitigation plans to reduce this where possible.

This scenario does enable increased investment in outer years, above that provided in Scenario Two, especially in roads, bridges, stormwater, and open space.

As with Scenario Two, the current investment in water and sewer assets continues in this scenario, however it will be important for this to be reviewed in detail, to ensure that the current pricing model enables adequate infrastructure investment to maintain the existing levels of service into the future.

## 2. WHY WAS COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT REQUIRED?

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Council has expressed interest in applying to IPART for an SRV to commence from 2024/25. An expression of interest is not a decision to proceed with the SRV – Council still needs to make a resolution to submit the application to IPART.

A criterion used by IPART when considering an application is whether the Council can demonstrate that it has taken the necessary steps to ensure community awareness and engagement regarding the proposed SRV.

Council needs to ensure that the community has adequate opportunities to consider the proposed SRV increase, to provide feedback to the Council and for the Council to consider this feedback. The nature and extent of consultation should be appropriate, proportionate, and tailored to the purpose, extent and magnitude of the proposed increase, and the ratepayers who will primarily be affected.

Council needs to demonstrate it has:

- clearly communicated the full impact of the proposed rate increases to ratepayers;
- clearly articulated whether the SRV will result in either a temporary or permanent increase in the council's total income;
- clearly communicated what the SRV would fund;
- used an appropriate variety of engagement methods to ensure community awareness and input into the SRV process; and
- the community is aware of the need for and extent of the rate rise.
- Informed the community of what the likely actions Council would need to take if the SRV application is not applied for, or approved by IPART.

IPART will assess whether Council's consultation with ratepayers has been effective based on:

- the process the Council used to consult with and engage with the community about;
- the proposed SRV, including its timeliness;
- the content of the material used for consultation and its clarity;
- whether an effective variety of engagement methods were used to reach as many ratepayers as possible across all relevant rating categories to ensure the community is aware of the need for, and extent of, the proposed rate increases;
- whether the opportunities for input and feedback on the proposal made available to the community were effective;
- the outcomes from consultation and any Council response to community feedback; and
- how the IP&R documents set out the extent of the requested rate increases.

### 3. WHAT IS COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT?

Council is committed to our engagement practices of delivering communication aligned to Council's [Community Engagement Strategy 2022-2026](#) which is based on the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) principles in the Public Participation Spectrum.

The Table below outlines the different levels of input and influence the community may have over a particular project. It is our goal to give the people of the Shoalhaven as much say as the legislation, regulation, and practical realities of a given project allow. For this Community Engagement Plan, Council planned to Inform, Consult, and Involve the identified stakeholders.

**Table 3.1 – Council’s Engagement Framework**

	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Public participation goal	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives and/ or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/ or decision.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision-making in the hands of the public.
Promise to the public	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.

Source: SCC Community Engagement Strategy 2022-2026

**Table 3.2 How Council Engages**

Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Website &amp; social media</li> <li>• Advertisements, editorials, signs, letters, notices &amp; emails</li> <li>• Council meetings streaming</li> <li>• Customer contact centres and libraries</li> <li>• Translated communication material</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online Get Involved engagement portal</li> <li>• Project committees</li> <li>• Public exhibition and submissions</li> <li>• Community meetings (one-off)</li> <li>• Surveys</li> <li>• Drop-in sessions &amp; pop-up stalls</li> <li>• Council meetings</li> <li>• deputations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workshops</li> <li>• Webinars</li> <li>• Community meetings (ongoing)</li> <li>• Advisory committees</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advisory committees</li> <li>• Community and stakeholder reference groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community led events and projects</li> </ul>

Source: SCC Community Engagement Strategy 2022-2026

## 4. WHAT ARE THE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES?

The community engagement was based on the roles and responsibilities outlined in the Table below:

**Table 4.1 – Roles and Responsibilities**

Roles	Responsibility
Mayor and Councillors	Demonstrate commitment to community through effective engagement including liaison with community, collaboration, and contribution to engagement. Establish partnerships while representing and advocating for the best interests of the community.
Chief Executive Officer	Ensure compliance with legislative obligations in implementing the Councils decisions, oversee adequate delegation and endorse initiatives that are appropriate and inclusive.
Employees	Ensure planned processes are consistent, aligned with relevant regional, state and federal equivalents and delivered in alignment with Council's values. Report back on how data collected through engagement has influenced the decision. Regularly monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of processes.
Community	Openly and actively participate in a variety of engagement opportunities. Provide respectful contributions through various means to ensure the community's voice is heard in decision-making activities. Deliver feedback on practices or process where improvements are identified.

Source: Shoalhaven City Council

## 5. WHO DID COUNCIL ENGAGE WITH?

IAP2 considers the community to be any individual or group of individuals, organisation, or political entity with an interest in the outcome of a decision – they are often referred to as stakeholders. They may be, or perceive that they may be, affected directly or indirectly by the outcome of the decision. Internal Stakeholders (individuals who work for or with the decision-making organisation) are also part of the community and the community participation process should reflect their needs as well.

The Community, the Elected Representatives and Employees were identified as stakeholders for the Resourcing Strategy and SRV Community Engagement Plan.



**Table 5.1 – Stakeholder Identification**

Stakeholder identification	
Community	The proposed SRV is a community wide issue and will impact the community directly. The impact may be through increased rates and/or changes to service levels.
Elected Representatives	Councillors are an important connection point/source with our community.
Employees	Employees in most instances are also residents of the Shoalhaven Region and as such, are an important connection with our community.

Source: Shoalhaven City Council

## 6. HOW AND WHEN DID COUNCIL ENGAGE WITH THE COMMUNITY?

The Community Engagement Action Plan below outlined actions and timeframes of the completed engagement with the community.

**Table 6.1 – Community Engagement Plan**

Technique	Engagement Method	Timeframe
Inform the Community	A. Council website – homepage slider with link, news page	22 November 2023 – 24 January 2024
	B. Have Your Say website – ‘Planning for a Sustainable Future’ featured consultation with documents and links.	22 November 2023 – 24 January 2024
	C. Internal Communications - (intranet) for staff with links, online sessions with CEO and CFO for staff	16 November 2023 (CEO) CFO meet with several teams on various dates.
	D. Fact sheets	22 November 2023 – 24 January 2024
	E. Media releases	16 November, 21 November and 21 December 2023
	F. Printed promotional material available at customer contact points (fact sheets)	22 November 2023 – 24 January 2024
	G. CEO letter to all ratepayers (printed mailout and email)	
	H. Social media	5 December 2023
	I. Community e Newsletter	Through the public exhibition (22 November 2023 till 24 January 2024)
	J. Community noticeboards throughout region (Digital screens)	Publications issued 23 November and 21 December and 22 January 2024.
	K. Radio advertising – 2ST and Power FM	22 November 2023 – 24 January 2024
		11 December – 15 December 2023 and 17 January – 22 January 2024.

Technique	Engagement Method	Timeframe
Consult	A. Council Website and links to Have Your Say website – Online Survey & ‘Make a Submission’ TAB	22 November 2023 – 24 January 2024
	B. Written submissions accepted and compiled.	22 November 2023 – 24 January 2024
	C. Hard copy survey at key Council locations printed on request	22 November 2023 – 24 January 2024
Involve	A. Council Website and links to Have Your Say website – Online Survey and ‘Make a Submission’ TAB	22 November 2023 – 24 January 2024
	B. Written submissions accepted and compiled.	22 November 2023 – 24 January 2024
	C. Hard copy survey at key Council locations printed on request.	22 November 2023 – 24 January 2024
Collaborate	Executive Meeting with 24 <a href="#">Community Consultative Bodies</a> invited to attend (Council’s resident ratepayer representative groups endorsed by Council)	23 November 2023

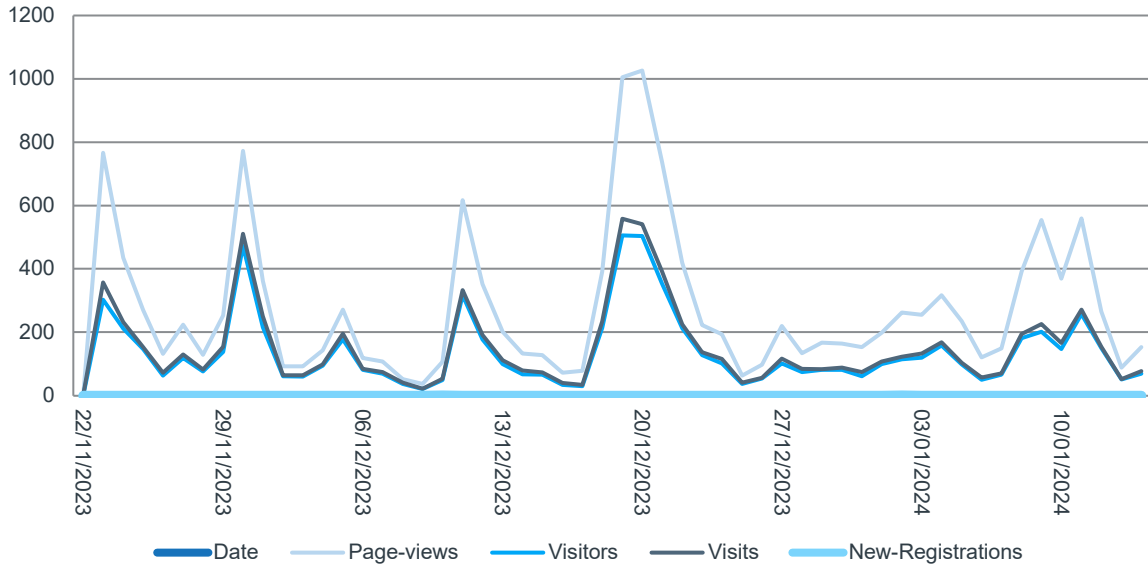
Source: Shoalhaven City Council

## 7. HOW MANY VISITORS WERE THERE TO COUNCIL’S SRV WEBSITE

The “*Planning for a Sustainable Future*” website for Shoalhaven was used by Council to communicate and inform community members of the updated Resourcing Strategy documents and SRV Options was visited approximately 8,992 times.

Of the total visits 7,095 are considered to be “Aware” – defined by taking further action on the website (for example, downloading a document, visiting FAQs, or visited multiple pages. In total 2,413 visitors to the *Planning for Sustainable Future* website were considered to be “Engaged” – defined by asking a question through the Council’s website.

**Figure 7.1 - Council's Planning for Sustainable Future Website Visitor Summary**



Source: Shoalhaven City Council

**Table 7.1 - Engaged Participants Summary**

Engaged Participants - 2,413			
Engaged Actions Performed	Registered	Unverified	Anonymous
Participated in Surveys	13	0	2,384
Asked Questions	3	13	0

Source: Shoalhaven City Council

**Table 7.2 - Informed Participants Summary**

Informed Participant – 3,748	
Informed Actions Performed	Participants
Downloaded a document	226
Visited the Key Dates page	105
Visited an FAQ list Page	294
Visited Multiple Project Pages	1,284
Contributed to a tool (engaged)	2,413

Source: Shoalhaven City Council

**Table 7.3 - Aware Participants Summary**

Aware Participants – 7,095	
Aware Actions Performed	Participants
Visited at least one Page	7,095

Source: Shoalhaven City Council Website

The Frequently Asked Questions on Council's website recorded the highest downloads (337), followed by the key dates (113) and Financial Sustainability Review Report (AEC Group) (105).

A smaller number of visitors viewed/downloaded the Resourcing Strategy documents:

- Resourcing Strategy Summary (81 views/downloads)

- Long Term Financial Plan (62 views/downloads)
- Workforce Management Strategy (40 views/downloads)
- Asset Management Strategy (38 views/downloads).
- ICT Strategy (23 views/downloads)

**Table 7.4 - Engagement Tool Summary**

Tool Type	Engagement Tool Name	Tool Status	Visitors	Contributors		
				Registered	Unverified	Anonymous
Survey Tools	Survey - SRV Options	Published	3,714	11	0	2,150
News Feeds	Survey - Service Review Program	Published	9	0	0	0
Q&A	Ask a Question	Published 22 November to 21 December	75	3	13	0
Survey Tools	Provide Feedback on the Financial Sustainability Review and Draft Resourcing Strategy	Published	862	2	0	234

Source: Shoalhaven City Council

**Table 7.5 - Engagement Widgets**

Widget Type	Engagement Tool Name	Visitors	Downloads /Views
Document	Special Rates Variation Factsheet	74	92
Document	Financial Sustainability Review	70	105
Document	Resource Strategy Summary	69	81
Document	Draft Long Term Financial Plan 2024-2034	53	62
Document	Draft Resourcing Strategy 2022-26	49	66
Document	Draft Workforce Management Strategy 2022-2026	35	40
Document	Draft Asset Management Strategy 2022-2026	33	38
Document	Country Mayors Association NSW - Rate PEG System Fails Local Government	22	26
Document	Letter to Residents	20	22
Document	Draft Information Communication Technology Strategy 2022-2026	19	23
Key Dates	Key Date	294	337

Source: Shoalhaven City Council

## 8. WHAT ARE THE COMMON ISSUES RAISED BY THE COMMUNITY ON COUNCIL'S WEBSITE?

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In total there were 468 responders who used the 'Make a Submission' form of the Council's website and 1,640 feedback comments (total responders were 2,175) on the Special Rate Variation and Financial Sustainability Review online survey.

The most common issues raised in the "Make a Submission" form on Council's website related to organisational management, staff performance and restructure. The community has expressed their concern on how Council has been managed and seeking a need to review management and staff performance. Some comments have requested for an organisational restructure resulting in reduction in positions, review of salary levels, audit of staff incompetencies and work ethics.

The second most common issue raised in the questions seeks better asset management and concerns around Council's infrastructure assets.

The third most common issue is affordability of increased rates when there is perceived cost of living concerns, including high interest rates and inflation on household goods and services.

Other issues raised include:

- Concerns with impact of increased rates on ratepayers, specifically pensioners
- Request to clarify or further explain the proposed SRV
- Concern regarding the design and integrity of the survey
- The current service delivery in terms of what is promised through Council's strategic documents
- Seeking response to why Council is in a poor financial position
- Requesting information about efficiencies savings and productivity improvements Council can achieve prior to seeking additional rate revenue
- Expressing views that Council should reduce expenditure rather than rely on increasing rates
- Concern with increased rates and a perceived lack of service provided
- Suggestion that Council should rationalise its assets, i.e. the number of Council office buildings and number of pools provided
- Requesting whether Council has applied to State and Federal Government for grant funding
- Council's use of contractors and consultants
- And requesting more accountability and ownership of the current financial position it is in.

Below is a table of summary of high-level topic (issue) tags for both 1,640 online surveys comments and 468 submissions. There was a total of 3,430 tags across the comments to identify the general themes relating to the issues.

**Table 8.1 - Issues Tagging Summary from Online Survey & Community Submissions**

Tags	Online Survey	Submissions	Total	% of TOTAL
Organisational Management, Staff Performance and Restructure.	731	152	883	25.7
Asset Management & Infrastructure	341	182	523	15.2
Cost of Living	365	87	452	13.2
Rates	158	227	385	11.2
Service Delivery	120	111	231	6.7
Governance	118	101	219	6.4
Financial Sustainability Review	130	23	153	4.5
Operating Efficiencies & Savings	51	102	153	4.5
Special Rate Variation & options	94	24	118	3.4
Others	75	44	119	3.5
Accountability	70	21	91	2.7
Contractors & Consultants	38	17	55	1.6
Development/Housing	43	5	48	1.4
	<b>2,334</b>	<b>1,096</b>	<b>3,430</b>	

Source: Shoalhaven City Council

## 9. WHAT WAS THE OUTCOME OF THE ONLINE SURVEY?

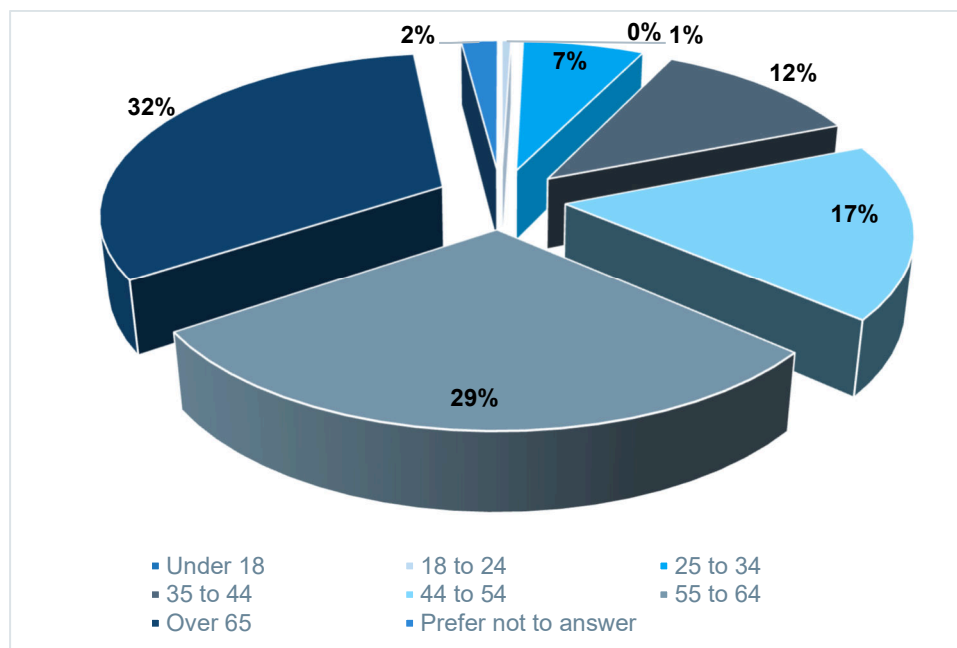
### 9.2 ONLINE SURVEY – NUMBER OF RESPONSES RECEIVED.

Council received 2,175 completed online surveys during the period 22 November 2023 – 22 January 2024. Based on 2022 based population of 109,611, Council received responses in the survey from approximately 2.0% of the population.

It should be noted that the responses are not a random sample of the broader population and therefore should not be considered to represent the broader community. The responses reflect the views of community members that were motivated to respond to the survey. Table 9.1 outlines that 61.6% of responses were from community members that were 55 years or older which is an overrepresentation compared to the whole community – according to Australian Bureau of Statistics people aged 55 or older make up 28% of the Shoalhaven population.

The responses outlined below should therefore be interpreted as views of a group of the community that were motivated to respond to the survey and not the broader community.

Figure 9.1 – Online Survey Breakdown by Age Grouping



Source: Shoalhaven City Council

Table 9.1 – Online Survey Breakdown by Age Grouping

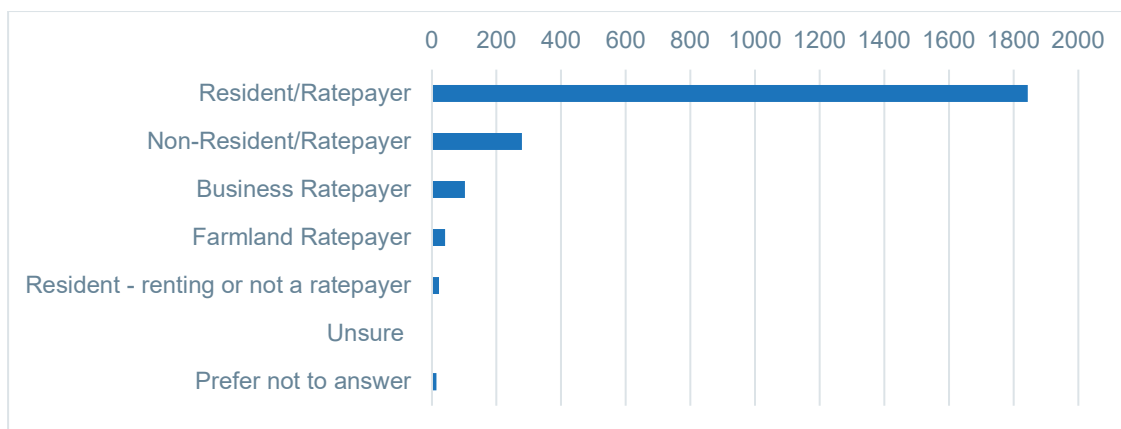
Age Groupings	Responders	%
Under 18	0	0.0
18 to 24	11	0.5
25 to 34	147	6.8
35 to 44	254	11.7
44 to 54	379	17.4
55 to 64	636	29.2

Over 65	704	32.4
Prefer not to answer	44	2.0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2,175</b>	

Source: Shoalhaven City Council

Figure 9.2 outlines that of the total 2,175 completed surveys online, 84.8% majority of the responses were from residential ratepayers, 4.7% from business ratepayers, 1.9% from farmland ratepayers and only 12.8% from absentee (non- ratepayers - primary dwelling is outside of the Shoalhaven region).

**Figure 9.2 - Online Survey Responder by Type**



Source: Shoalhaven City Council

**Table 9.2 - Online Survey Responder by Type**

Responders Type	Responders	%
Resident/Ratepayer	1,844	84.8
Non-Resident/Ratepayer	279	12.8
Business Ratepayer	103	4.7
Farmland Ratepayer	41	1.9
Resident - renting or not a ratepayer	22	1.0
Unsure	0	0.0
Prefer not to answer	15	0.7

Source: Shoalhaven City Council

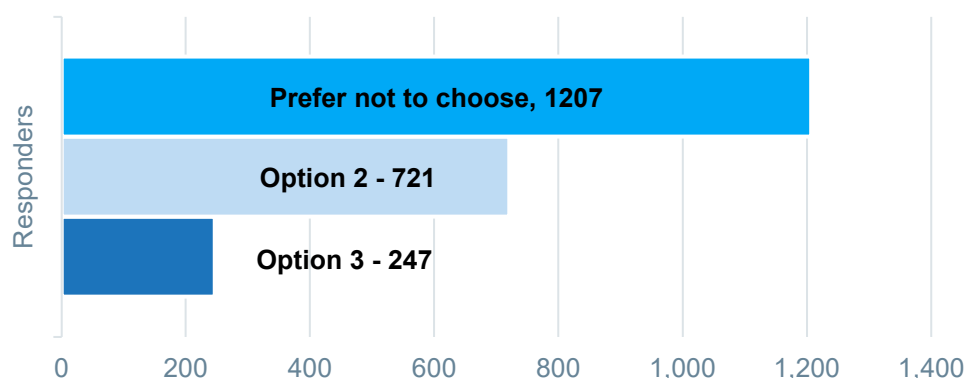
### 9.3 ONLINE SURVEY – PREFERRED OPTION

Of the total 2,175 responses the preferences were:

- 55.5% selected Option 3 (Prefer not to choose)
- 33.1% selected Option 2 (Staged Implementation of SRV over Three Years being a permanent 18% in 2024/25, 13% in 2025/26 and 8.0% in 2026/27 -including rate peg)
- 11.4% selected Option 1 (One Year SRV as a permanent 32% in 2024/25 - including rate peg)



**Figure 9.3 - Special Rate Variation Options Selection**



Source: Shoalhaven City Council

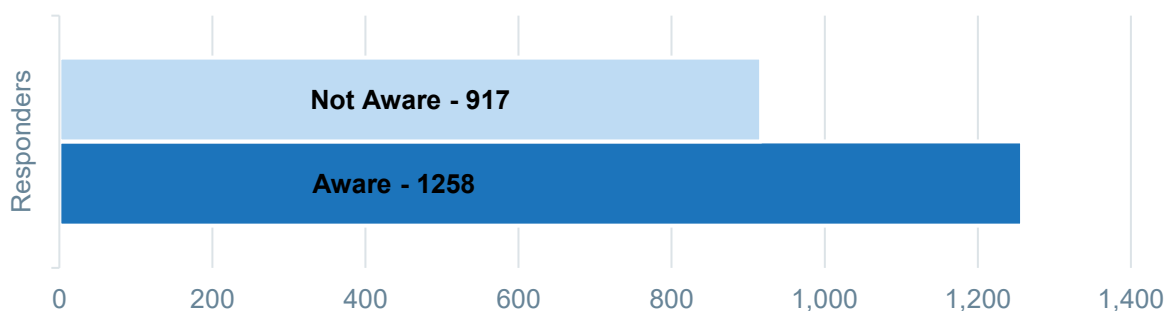
**Table 9.3 - Special Rate Variation Options Selection**

SRV Options	Responders	%
Option 1 – One Year SRV as a permanent 32% in 2024/25 (including rate peg)	247	11.4
Option 2 – Staged Implementation of SRV over Three Years being a permanent 18% in 2024/25, 13% in 2025/26 and 8.0% in 2026/27 (including rate peg)	721	33.1
Prefer not to choose	1.207	55.5

Source: Shoalhaven City Council

Of total responses, 1,258 (63.9%) of responders were aware of Council considering a Special Rate Variation prior to completing the online survey.

**Figure 9.4 - Awareness of SRV prior to Online Survey**



Source: Shoalhaven City Council Website

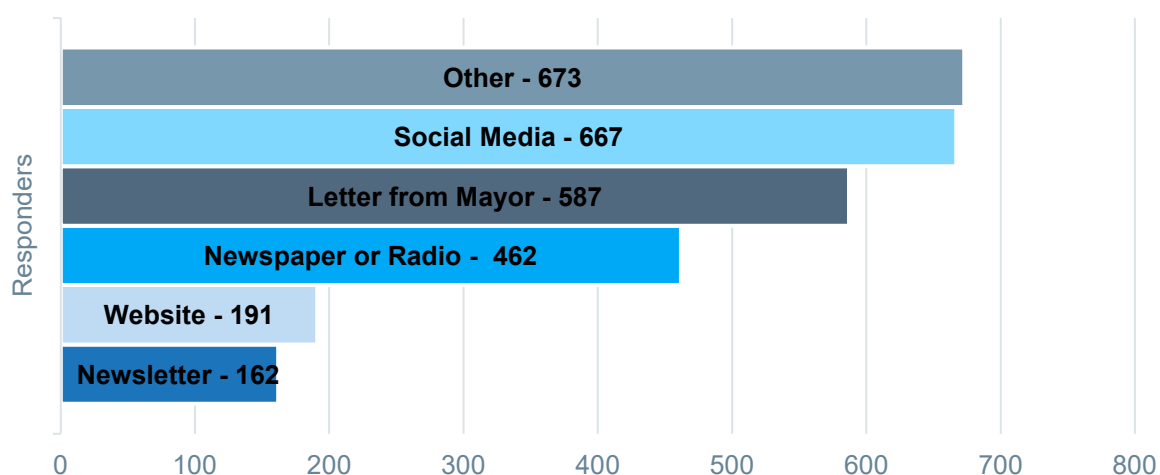
**Table 9.4 - Awareness of SRV prior to Online Survey**

SRV Awareness prior to Online Survey	Responders	%
Yes	1.258	63.9
No	917	46.5

Source: Shoalhaven City Council

Other sources (24.5%), social media (24.3%) and letter from CEO (21.4%) were the most common ways the responders were made aware that Council was exploring a Special Rate Variation.

**Figure 9.5 - How were the Community informed of the Special Rate Variation?**



Source: Shoalhaven City Council

**Table 9.5 - How were the Community informed of the Special Rate Variation?**

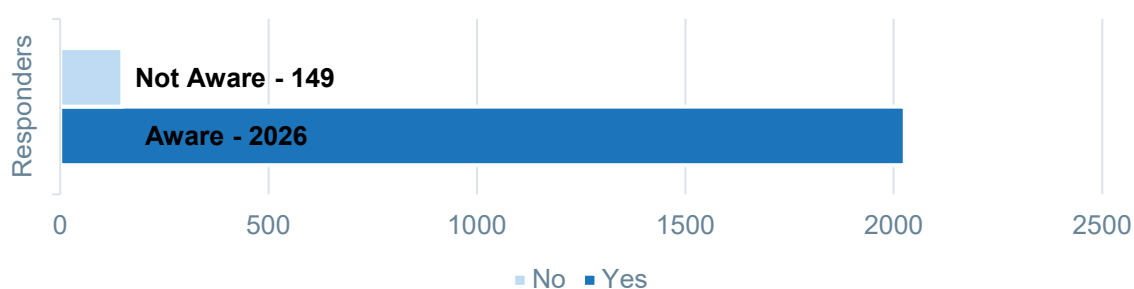
How were the Community informed of the Special Rate Variation?	Responders	%
Newsletter	162	5.9
Council's website	191	7.0
Newspaper or radio advertisement	462	16.8
Letter from the Mayor	587	21.4
Social media	667	24.3
Other	673	24.5

Source: Shoalhaven City Council

#### 9.4 ONLINE SURVEY – WERE RESPONDERS AWARE THAT COUNCIL’S RECENT FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY REVIEW?

A majority of responders (93.1%) indicated they were aware of Council’s Financial Sustainability Review undertaken by AEC Group Ltd (AEC).

**Figure 9.6 - Community's Knowledge of Council's Financial Sustainability Review**



Source: Shoalhaven City Council

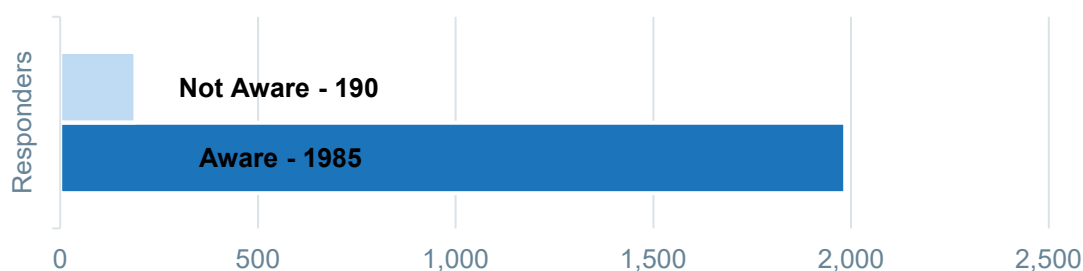
**Table 9.6 - Community's Knowledge of Council's Financial Sustainability Review**

Knowledge of Council's Financial Sustainability Review (FSR)	Responders	%
Yes	2,026	93.1
No	149	6.9

Source: Shoalhaven City Council

Of the responders, 91.3% (1,985) were also informed regarding the Financial Sustainability Review's key findings.

**Figure 9.7 - Community's Knowledge of Council's FSR Key Findings**



Source: Shoalhaven City Council

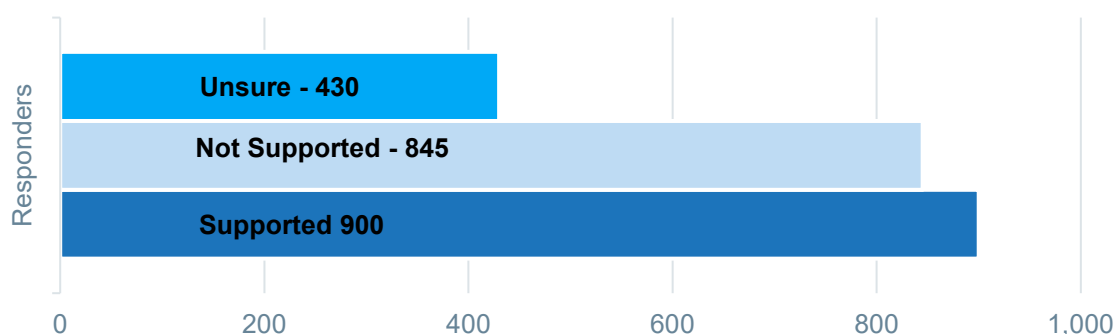
**Table 9.7 - Community's Knowledge of Council's FSR Key Findings**

Knowledge of the FSR Key Findings	Responders	%
Yes	1,985	91.3
No	190	8.7

Source: Shoalhaven City Council

There was almost an even split in terms of responders' acceptance, rejection, or uncertainty about the FSR's recommendations. Although most of the responders (41.4%) supported the recommendations as provided by AEC through the Financial Sustainability Review which was completed in November 2023.

**Figure 9.8 - Community's Support of FSR Recommendations**



Source: Shoalhaven City Council

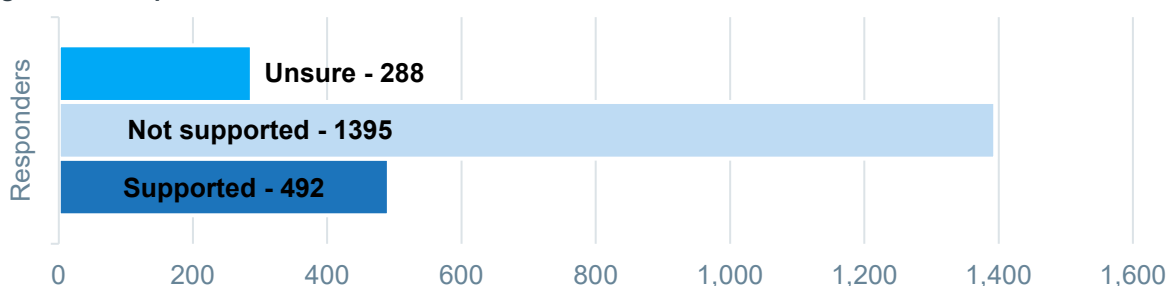
**Table 9.8 - Community's Support of FSR Recommendations**

Support of FSR Recommendations	Responders	%
Yes	900	41.4
No	845	38.9
Unsure	430	19.8

Source: Shoalhaven City Council

Out of the 2,175 responders, 1,395 (64.1%) did not agree with the conclusion of the FSR Report that Council required to increase its General Rates in addition to the operational savings and productivity improvements.

**Figure 9.9 - Proposition of General Rates Increase**



Source: Shoalhaven City Council

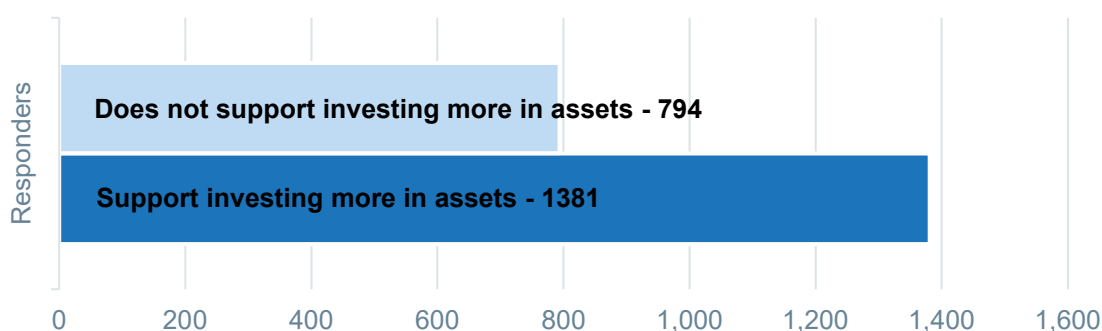
**Table 9.9 - Proposition of General Rates Increase**

Proposition of General Rates Increase	Responders	%
Yes	492	22.6
No	1,395	64.1
Unsure	288	13.2

Source: Shoalhaven City Council

There was a clear support of AEC's recommendation that Council must invest more in renewal of existing assets to prevent further deterioration of Council's infrastructure assets. 63.5% responders agreed with this conclusion whilst 36.5% was not in favour of this conclusion.

**Figure 9.10 - View of Investing More in Asset (Infrastructure) Renewals**



Source: Shoalhaven City Council

**Table 9.10 - View of Investing More in Asset (Infrastructure) Renewals**

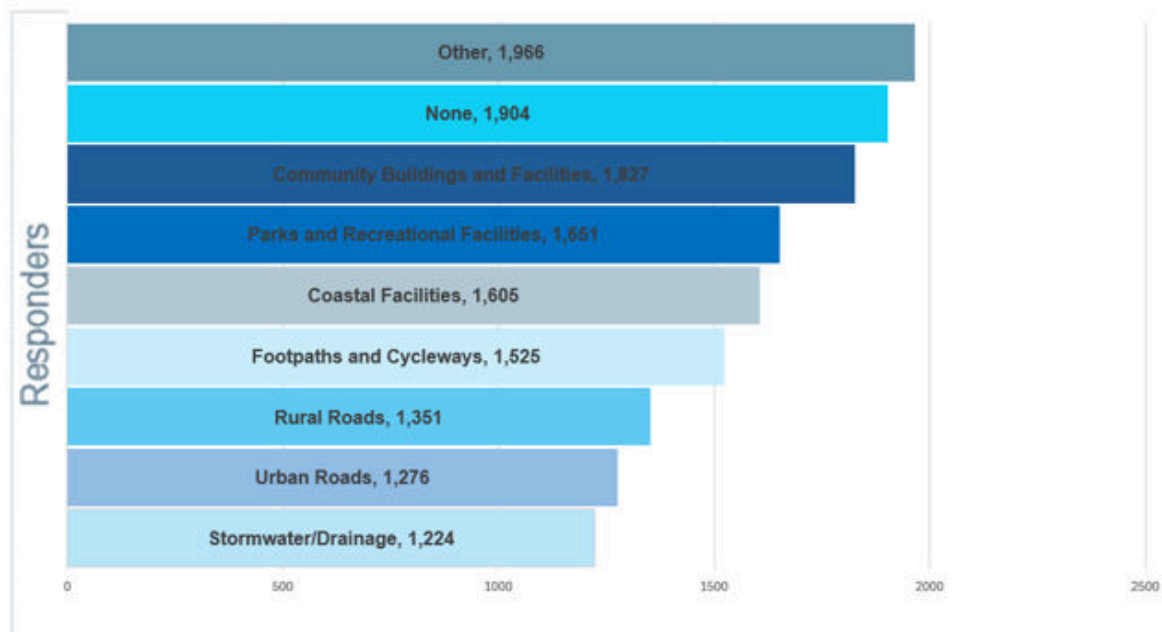
Invest in Renewal of Infrastructure Assets	Responders	%
Yes	1,381	63.5
No	794	36.5

Source: Shoalhaven City Council

The Community was also asked about the assets that they thought Council should invest more into. The Other Category had the most votes with 1,966 responders selected this. In ‘Please Specify’ was used by the responders to express their view on current situations. There were a few responders suggesting investment in more green bins, nature reserves and aging water and sewer infrastructure.

The second top selection was the community suggesting that Council did not need any further investment in any assets (14.7%). Third in the selection was community buildings and facilities (14.1%).

**Figure 9.11 - Asset Classes Community wants Council to Invest in**



Source: Shoalhaven City Council

**Table 9.11 - Asset Classes Community wants Council to Invest in**

<b>Assets To Invest In</b>	<b>Responders</b>	<b>%</b>
Other (please specify)	1,966	15.1
None (Council does not need to invest any more in assets)	1,904	14.7
Community Buildings and Facilities	1,827	14.1
Parks and Recreational Facilities	1,651	12.7
Coastal Facilities (e.g. beach access and protection)	1,605	12.4
Footpaths and Cycleways	1,525	11.8
Rural Roads*	1,351	10.4
Urban Roads	1,276	9.8
Stormwater/Drainage	1,224	9.4

Source: Shoalhaven City Council (\*amended 21/5/24 as incorrectly displayed in original January 2024 report version)

## 9.5 WRITTEN SUBMISSIONS

In total, 468 submissions were received by hard copy or sent as an email. Council have collated it all and will respond in due course. A full collated listing of submissions will be provided to the Councillors as part of the 29 January 2024 Council meeting.

## 9.6 PETITION

Council has not received any petitions before close of business 22 January 2024.

# 10. REPORTING BACK AND CLOSING THE LOOP

Council committed, following completion of the engagement, to:

- Collate and analyse what the community told us (this report);
- Report back with results to the community;
- Inform the decision makers (Councillors);
- Inform the community of the decision;
- Explain how the decision was made and the influence of community input; and
- Evaluate the engagement process.

The outcome of the community engagement and subsequent relevant decisions will be communicated through a variety of methods including:

- Councillor briefings;
- Facebook updates and information posted on Council's social media;
- Website updates;
- Media releases; and
- Reports to Council, including seeking endorsement for lodging an SRV application.

# APPENDIX A – COMMUNICATIONS IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

## Financial Sustainability Review and Special Rate Variation Communication Implementation Plan

DATE	CHANNEL	AUDIENCE	DETAILS
13 Nov	Email	Senior Leadership	Invite SLT to meeting
15 Nov	Customer Service	Council customers	Provide Customer Service with talking points/scripts.
15 Nov	Email	All Staff	Invite all staff to discussion – from CEO
16 Nov	Website	Community	Business paper published
16 Nov	In person/ Teams	All staff	Meet online and in person to talk about financial status, report going to council, answer questions. – CEO and Directors
16 Nov	Email	All staff	Follow-up email about financial status and next steps.
16 Nov	Media Release	Journalists	Announcement of Report going to Council
21 Nov	Media release	Journalists	Promote outcome of Council meeting and opportunity for community feedback
21 Nov	Email	All staff	Information about outcome of meeting and next steps
21 Nov	DL Flyers	Staff	Provide staff with DL flyer re: SRV – particularly libraries, recreation facilities, outdoor staff.
21 Nov	Website	Community	Publish information on Get Involved platform and provide feedback opp.
22 Nov	Social media	Community	Promote consideration of SRV.
22 Nov - 24 Jan 2024	Digital screens	Community	Promote consideration of SRV.
23 Nov	In person	CCBs	Presentation by AEC and Directors to CCBs at Executive Meeting
23 Nov	Newsletter	Community	Information about SRV
25 Nov	Staff newsletter	Staff	Latest update on SRV
5 Dec	Letters	Ratepayers	Information from CEO about SRV and financial sustainability, service level reviews.
8 Dec	Media release	Journalists	Announce consultation regarding service level review.
11 Dec – 15 Dec	Radio adds– 2ST and Power FM	Community	Information about SRV proposal and how to have your say.
19 Dec	Social Media	Community	Promote opportunities to have your say.
21 Dec	Media release	Journalists	Announce two-week extension for community feedback.
11 Jan	Social Media	Community	Promote opportunities to have your say.
17 Jan – 22 Jan	Radio adds– 2ST and Power FM	Community	Information about SRV proposal and how to have your say.

DATE	CHANNEL	AUDIENCE	DETAILS
25 Jan	Media release	Journalists	Details of report to Council.
30 Jan	Email	Staff	Update on Council decision and next steps
30 Jan	Media release	Journalists	Decision of Council.

## MEDIA MONITORING

Date	Media coverage	Reach
16 Nov	2ST – Morning Show – interview with CEO	70,000*
16 Nov	I98FM news – SRV proposal and FSR	70,000*
16 Nov	Milton Ulladulla Times – SRV proposal and FSR	7,470
17 Nov	Channel Seven Prime News – SRV proposal and FSR	11,800
17 Nov	Power FM – Radio news – SRV proposal	55,000
17 Nov	ABC Illawarra – News – SRV proposal and FSR	42,400
17 Nov	2ST – Online news editorial – SRV Proposal	11,200
17 Nov	Daily Telegraph – SRV Proposal	2.76M
17 Nov	Ten Illawarra TV – News – SRV proposal	16,100 + 6,380 + 6,980
20 Nov	2ST and Power FM – News bulletins - multiple	70,000*
20 Nov	2ST – Morning Show – Proposed SRV	70,000*
20 Nov	Daily Telegraph – Proposed SRV	2.76M
20 Nov	South Coast Register – Proposed SRV	35,400
21 Nov	Daily Telegraph (online) – SRV proposal	2.76M
21 Nov	ABC Illawarra Radio – Mornings – Talk back	31,400
21 Nov	Milton Ulladulla times – SRV proposal	7,470
21 Nov	Ten Illawarra News – SRV proposal	5,190
21 Nov	ABC Illawarra Radio – News – SRV Proposal	24,100
21 Nov	Win TV News – Proposed SRV options	14,300
21 Nov	Ten Illawarra TV News – Proposed SRV x 2 bulletins	8,500 + 12,500
22 Nov	South Coast Register/Milton Ulladulla Times – promotion of SRV and Draft Resourcing Strategy on exhibition	35,400
23 Nov	SCC Facebook Post	3,490
23 Nov	2ST – Morning show - SRV proposal	70,000*
24 Nov	Sth Coast Register – Chair of County Mayor's Assoc. defends proposed rate rise.	35,400
27 Nov	2ST and Power FM– News – Chair of Country Mayor's Assoc defends Council's need to increase rates.	70,000*
27 Nov	Ten Illawarra TV – Proposed SRV	12,500
11 Dec	South Coast Register – Service Level reviews	20,200
11 Dec– 15 Dec	Radio advertising – 18 spots	70,000*
15 Dec	2ST Morning Show – Promote SRV and lodging a submission	70,000*
19 Dec	SCC Facebook – Promotion of Service Level Reviews and online surveys for SRV	8,943



Date	Media coverage	Reach
2 Jan	Milton Ulladulla Times – Promote feedback closure timeframe for draft Resourcing Strategy and SRV options.	16,600
4 Jan	ABC Illawarra Morning Show – Interview with Cr Evan Christen about Council’s financial position, proposed SRV and feedback timeframe.	31,400
10 Jan	2ST – Breakfast Show – Promote feedback closure timeframe for draft Resourcing Strategy and SRV options.	70,000*
11 Jan	SCC Facebook – Promotion of financial sustainability review and proposed actions, including SRV	14,059
16 Jan	South Coast Register – Promote feedback and updated closure date	19,900
17 Jan– 22 Jan	Radio advertising – 18 spots	70,000*

\*Estimated number based on information provided by the broadcaster and not survey information.

# APPENDIX B – COMMUNICATIONS SNIPPETS

**shoalhaven**  
City Council

## Have you heard about the proposed rates increase?

Council is considering a Special Rate Variation as one of a range of measures to ensure it can continue to provide maintenance and services across the city in the immediate and long term.

Consecutive natural disasters and the COVID pandemic during the last five years has significantly depleted Council's cash reserves and increased operational costs.

Increased costs due to inflation has increased the gap between income and expenses, impacting the ability of Council to fix roads, footpaths and buildings to a suitable standard.

In November, Councillors voted on a range of measures to achieve financial sustainability.


These include:

- Consider two options for a special rate variation
- Review fees and charges and potential asset sale
- Ongoing productivity and efficiency measures in our operations.

### Have your say

Use the QR code to review the Long Term Financial Plan and complete the survey.

Council@shoalhaven.nsw.gov.au and type 'SRV Feedback' in the subject line.



CEO, PO Box 42, Nowra 2541.  
Submissions close 5pm, 10 January.

Scan here

Based on an average residential rate charge of \$1459.40 in 2023-24. The table below shows the impact of the three rate rise options and average total difference in rate charges.

Option	Annual Rate per \$1000 of rateable value	Compliance increase after 3 years	Average \$ increase 2025/26	Average \$ increase 2026/27	Average total \$ impact on residential rates
Base case (Rate per \$1000 only) Council is at high risk of not being able to maintain infrastructure. Significant reduction in service levels.	3%	9.27%	\$44	\$45	\$195
Option 1 (one year SRV) Achieve financial stability Renewal and replacement of assets, buildings, roads and infrastructure. Capacity to respond to unplanned events such as natural disasters and maintain service levels.	3.2%	40%	\$457	\$58	\$595
Option 2 (three year SRV) Delay Renewal and replacement of assets until year 3. The option considered financially sustainable.	1.9%	13%	\$263	\$24	\$643

**What options are being considered?**

The breakdown of total impact for Farmland, Business and Residential rates is available in the fact sheets on Get Involved: [getinvolved.shoalhaven.nsw.gov.au/srv](http://getinvolved.shoalhaven.nsw.gov.au/srv)

[shoalhaven.nsw.gov.au](http://shoalhaven.nsw.gov.au) f @




Scan here to have your say

## Planning for a sustainable future

### Have you heard about the proposed rates increase?

Council is considering a Special Rate Variation as one of a range of measures to ensure it can continue to provide maintenance and services across the city in the immediate and long term.

Following an extensive review, Council is currently considering a range of measures to achieve financial sustainability.

These include:

- Considering two options for a special rate variation
- Review of fees and charges and potential asset sale
- Ongoing productivity and efficiency measures in our operations.

Council has made changes to our Resourcing Strategy based on the recommendations coming out of the Financial Sustainability Review and the special rate variation scenarios. The Draft Resourcing Strategy is currently on exhibition and you can provide a submission or fill in the survey on the Special Rate Variation proposals. Submissions close 10 January 2024.

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City Council

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Newslocal > The South Coast News

## Shoalhaven Council to propose 44 per cent rate rise to address financial woes

A south coast council in the midst of a financial disaster has proposed to raise rates by 44 per cent in a bid to turn the tides, in what has been described as a "tough decision".



Tom McGann [Follow](#)

@tom\_mcgann 2 min read November 17, 2023 - 11:38AM The South Coast News

3 comments

A south coast council in the midst of a financial disaster has proposed a "tough" decision to raise rates by 44 per cent in a bid to turn the tides.

A review by AEC Group, which specialises in economic and regional development, has found Shoalhaven Council is not "financially sustainable" and has recommended a special rate variation [SRV].

An extraordinary meeting will be held on Monday to consider a series of recommendations, with one option being a special rate variation [SRV] of 44 per cent across three years.

The review found disasters such as bushfires, floods and Covid-19 had "significantly impacted" the council's revenue base.

The report also found Shoalhaven Council was operating at a major deficit and, if council didn't implement changes, it would run at a financial loss for the next decade.

Recommendations also included exploring opportunities to sell under-used assets and that no new infrastructure is taken on without a full business case in place.

Shoalhaven Greens mayor Amanda Findley said while the proposed rate hike was tough, it needed to be done.

"I totally understand it is tough times indeed and like many households, councils have to pay more for everything also," she said.

Newslocal > The South Coast News

## Shoalhaven Council to discuss rate hike and financial disaster in meeting

A regional council facing financial catastrophe will discuss its current situation and a possible 44 per cent rate hike in an extraordinary meeting on Monday night.



Tom McGann [Follow](#)

@tom\_mcgann less than 2 min read November 20, 2023 - 3:04PM The South Coast News

2 comments

A vote to shift the financial woes of Shoalhaven Council is hours away with Kiama MP Gareth Ward labelling a proposed 44 per cent rate hike as "outrageous".

The independent MP has launched a petition in opposition to the potential rate increase for Shoalhaven residents, telling this publication on Monday afternoon it has been signed by 1700 people.

Shoalhaven Council's "dire" financial situation will be discussed at an extraordinary meeting on Monday night, which could end with the proposed special rate variation of 44 per cent over three years going to public exhibition for 28 days.

"We are a long way off from administration, but they want us to course correct now and restore our strategic reserve to avoid being in that situation," Shoalhaven Liberal councillor Paul Ell said.

The situation comes after a review by the AEC Group, which specialises in economic and regional development, found [Shoalhaven Council was not "financially sustainable" and suggested the regional council would be running at a deficit for the next decade.](#)

## Feedback period on council's resourcing strategy extended

By Staff Reporter

Updated January 2 2024 - 9:46am, first published January 1 2024 - 9:43am



Shoalhaven City Council has extended its resourcing strategy community consultation period so more people can have their say.

The closing date for submissions to the updated draft resourcing strategy 2022-26 including the long-term financial plan 2024-2034 has been extended by two weeks.

The extension will allow the community more time to provide feedback about the strategies proposed to sustain the operations and services that council provides in the immediate and long term.

The community can now make submissions about the updated draft Resourcing Strategy 2022-26 and its suite of documents [including the Long-Term Financial Plan, Workforce Management Planning Strategy, Asset Management Strategy and Information Communication Technology Strategy], the proposed options for a Special Rate Variation and Council service levels by 5pm, Wednesday January 24.

Go to council's Get Involved website [Planning for a sustainable future | Get Involved Shoalhaven \(nsw.gov.au\) to take part.](#)

Since the community consultation period began on Thursday, November 23, council has received 1,036 completed survey responses and 48 written submissions about the SRV options and the draft Resourcing Strategy documents.

So far, 342 surveys have been completed as input for the service-level review process.

A report will be provided back to council on January 29 2024, where it will consider the proposed efficiency measures and Special Rate Variation options and determine if it proceeds with an application to IPART by its deadline of February 5 2024.

Council's Chief Executive Officer, Stephen Dunshea, said it was important to give more people the chance to make comments on such important issues.

"Council appreciates the feedback that is coming in through submissions to date and in response to a number of requests for further time to make a submission, including representations from local members of parliament on behalf a ratepayers. I have agreed to extend the timeframe for community feedback into these incredibly important decisions that the Council need to make to secure the financial stability of the organisation," Mr Dunshea said

"Recognising that this is a difficult time of the year for many to consider the implications of these decisions, we are willing to accommodate this extension."

Meanwhile, at its extraordinary [meeting](#) on November 20, council endorsed a number of actions to improve the financial sustainability of the organisation in response to a comprehensive independent financial sustainability review.

The review identified that the impacts of consecutive natural disasters and the COVID pandemic during the last five years had significantly depleted revenue and increased operational costs.

Additionally, the unprecedented rises in inflation have further increased the gap in its revenue and expenditure, through additional costs of construction and operating costs.

Council, as some of the measures to improve its financial position, decided to review its levels of service delivery, rationalise land and facilities assets and meet a \$3 million efficiency target over four years.

It also resolved to engage with the community about levels of service and proposed options for a Special Rate Variation [SRV].

## Shoalhaven Council considering a 32 per cent rate rise next year

By Glenn Murray  
Updated November 17, 2023 - 11:59am, first published November 16, 2023 - 3:28pm



Shoalhaven Council CEO Stephen Durozha says increased rates will allow the council to get more crews out repairing and maintaining roads. File photo.

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Shoalhaven residents are staring down the barrel of a massive rate rise next year as Shoalhaven Council looks for ways to recover from years of natural disasters.

The council is holding an extraordinary meeting on Monday, November 20, to consider options including a 32 per cent rate rise in 2024/25, followed by smaller rises to equate to rates jumping by 40 per cent over three years.

Other options will be discussed at the meeting, both of which include rates jumping by 18 per cent next financial year.

One of the options includes a further 18 per cent rate rise the following year, while the other has a 13 per cent rate rise in 2025/26, and an eight per cent rate the following year.



### Shoalhaven City Council

Published by Caitlin Lewis · December 19, 2023 at 4:37 PM

**HAVE YOUR SAY VIA SURVEY:** As part of our financial planning, we want to know what Council services are important to you, as well as where you think we could reduce what we offer. The range and standard of services that we deliver to the community is beyond what the current budget allows and we are reviewing them to ensure they align with the needs of the community and what we can afford.

We provide over 80 direct services to ratepayers, visitors and the wider community, including building roads, footpaths and cycleways through to libraries and swimming pools as well as services we are required by legislation to perform like food safety inspections and assessing development applications. Go to the survey to have your say and your feedback will be an important consideration as we work towards a financially sustainable future:  
<https://getinvolved.shoalhaven.nsw.gov.au/.../services...>

### Shoalhaven City Council

Published by Meltwater Engage · 5d

There's still time to give your feedback to our surveys about the actions we need to take to ensure we can continue to provide services, maintenance and works for everyone in the Shoalhaven. So far, we've had 1,624 surveys submitted about the updated draft Resourcing Strategy - including the proposed options for a permanent Special Rate Variation - and 482 responses to the Service Review survey. Survey now closes 24 January. Find all the information, FAQs and survey links here [bit.ly/48F8Q4Q](https://bit.ly/48F8Q4Q)



See insights and ads

Boost post

44

112 comments 19 shares



### Shoalhaven City Council

Published by Meltwater Engage · November 23, 2023

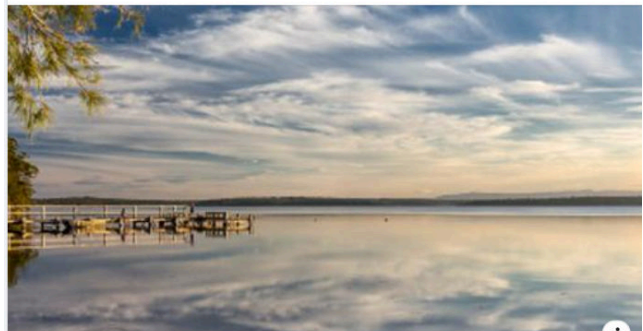
Our survey is open and the community is invited to have their say on Council's financial sustainability.

Earlier this week, Council endorsed a number of recommendations from an independent expert review of Council's finances. The range of measures include:

- Consider two options for a special rate variation
- Review fees and charges and potential asset sale
- Ongoing productivity and efficiency measures in our operations.

Head to our Get Involved page where you will find:

- ✓ A Resourcing Strategy which outlines how Council will manage its finance, assets and people to achieve the community's vision and goals (now on exhibition)
- ✓ Comprehensive FAQ and fact sheets
- ✓ A survey and the chance to have your say



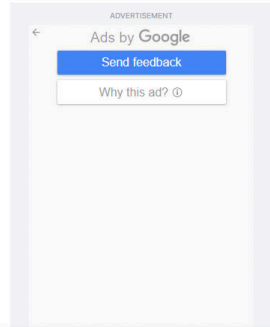
GETINVOLVED.SHOALHAVEN.NSW.GOV.AU

### Planning for a sustainable future

Council is facing significant financial challenges in the immediate and long term if we are goin...

# Here is your chance to help guide council's financial sustainability

By Staff Reporters  
Updated December 11 2023 - 5:36pm, first published 10:30am | 0 Comments | [Social Media Icons]



People can have their say on the services provided by Shoalhaven City Council to help guide decisions about achieving financial sustainability into the future. Picture supplied

People can have their say on the services provided by Shoalhaven City Council to help guide decisions about achieving financial sustainability into the future.

The Service Review Program follows an independent, expert review of council's finances which shows a forecast annual budget shortfall and recommends a range of measures to achieve financial sustainability.

Council, [at a recent meeting](#), resolved to implement a number of strategies in response to the independent review.

Strategies include:

Achieving a target of \$3 million in efficiency savings over the next four years

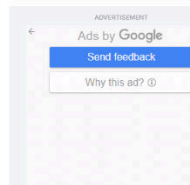
Reviewing service levels as part of an ongoing Service Review Program, and

To consider proposed options for a [Special Rate Variation](#) to be determined next year.

The Service Review Program, as Council moves towards a sustainable future, will play an important role in managing its budget.

# There is still time to have a say on council's resourcing strategy

By Staff Reporter  
Updated January 16 2024 - 9:32am, first published 8:05am | 0 Comments | [Social Media Icons]



Deputy Shoalhaven Mayor, Cr Evan Christen, makes a point during a debate about rate rises and calls for public comment on services. File picture by Glenn Ellard.

There's still time to give your feedback about the actions Shoalhaven City Council needs to take to ensure we can continue to provide services, maintenance and other works for everyone in the Shoalhaven.

The community can now make submissions about the updated [draft Resourcing Strategy 2022-26](#) and its suite of documents (including the Long-Term Financial Plan, Workforce Management Planning Strategy, Asset Management Strategy and Information Communication Technology Strategy), the proposed options for a Special Rate Variation and Council service levels by 5pm, Wednesday January 24.

Council, so far, has received 1,624 surveys submitted about the updated draft Resourcing Strategy - including the proposed options for a permanent Special Rate Variation - and 482 responses to the Service Review survey.

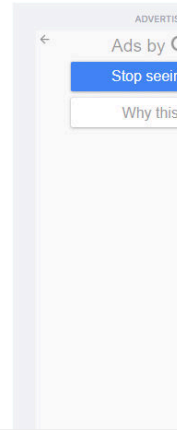
# Draft resourcing strategy and financial plans online from Thursday, November 23

GE

By Glenn Ellard  
Updated November 28 2023 - 9:20am, first published November 22 2023 - 9:24am



Shoalhaven Council's offices. File photo.



Shoalhaven residents have a chance to comment on Shoalhaven Council's possible rate rise from Thursday, November 23.

That is when the updated draft resourcing strategy 2022-26, including the long-term financial plan, workforce management planning strategy, asset management strategy and information communication technology strategy will be available for review online at [www.getinvolved.shoalhaven.nsw.gov.au](http://www.getinvolved.shoalhaven.nsw.gov.au).

The public exhibition follows council endorsing a number of recommendations to secure the organisation's financial sustainability.

The recommendations stemmed from an independent expert review of council's finances to determine the overall income and expenditure needed to maintain and provide services across the city in the immediate and long term.

The report estimated that there was a \$25 to \$35 million annual shortfall in the budget that needed to be addressed, and cautioned inflation would continue to increase the deficit if it was not corrected.

Also, the net cost of a series of natural disasters that have hit the Shoalhaven in recent years, combined with financial relief and support provided to the community during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, had reduced council's unrestricted or available cash position by \$14.6 million.