

Council wants nine cents a day

Eve Sinton

Council is seeking community support for a rates restructure to allow it to improve public works and services in Byron Shire.

But convincing the community is only half the battle. NSW Minister for Local Government Harry Woods has pegged Council rates statewide to a maximum increase of 3.3% for the coming financial year. Council wants around 10% more than this each year for four years.

'The [3.3%] decision represents a fair balance between the needs of local councils to deliver good services and the needs of the ratepayers of NSW,' Mr Woods said.

Meanwhile, Council's general manager Robyn Read and mayor Tom Wilson are approaching community groups with their 'Nine cents a day for Byron Bay' campaign.

'What we are looking for from community groups is their support to inform their

members of the advantages to them of increasing Council's rates by 9 cents a day,' Mayor Wilson said. Extra funds will give Council the opportunity to address many concerns expressed throughout the community, from the need to improve road works and drainage, through to sporting fields.

'If we are to be able to provide an adequate level of service and infrastructure throughout the Shire which everyone is demanding, we need to introduce a series of

rate increases over a four-year period, combined with a redistribution of the rate burden to place a higher premium on business properties,' Cr Wilson explained.

Council says that to date, community feedback has supported businesses paying a higher rate increase than private individuals, and this is reflected in the proposed changes.

The project is part of Council's efforts to bring the Byron Shire base rating and differential rating arrangements into line with other councils in the region, and to make sure that the rates that are paid 'properly reflect the Shire's expenditure requirements'.

Cr Wilson and Ms Read have already met with representatives of the Minister for Local Government to discuss the strategy.

The '9c a day' payment refers to a residential rate increase in year one, while a business (outside Byron Bay) will attract a 38c increase in that year if the rate increase of 5% is granted as well as the Ministerial rate 'pegged' increase.

In January Council agreed in principle to bring the rates base in line with adjoining shires such as Tweed and Lismore by increasing the average rates per property, over a period of four years, by 10% per annum above the rate pegging limit.

Council plans to increase the differential for business properties throughout the Shire over a period of four years; to consider a regional position on the issue of equitable rating of multiple occupancies; to hold discussions with the Department

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■ More than 90,000 first home buyers in NSW have received \$938 million in state and federal government financial assistance in the 21 months from July 1, 2000 to March 31, 2002. Liverpool in Sydney scored the greatest amount by postcode area. Grants paid in March this year alone accounted for over 16% of the total with 14,000 first home buyers reaping the benefits. The federal government's \$3000 new home buyer grant is due to end on June 30 but the \$7000 first home buyer grant will remain.

9c a day

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of Local Government to gain acceptance for the rate recovery strategy; to develop a community education strategy on the shire's historical rating disadvantage and to receive a report on the methodology and implications of reducing the percentage of properties on the minimum rate to a level comparable with industry standards.

Members of Council staff will be available to explain the proposed changes to meetings of community groups, and answer any questions arising.

Anyone wanting a copy of the community letter of explanation of the proposed rates change may contact Melissa Moore at Byron Shire Council on 6626 7120.

*Set this
up
2 copies 24/4/02
1 to Graham*

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