



# Budget gets Council back on track

## Mayor Helen Blackburn

The new Council has handed down a budget which prioritises essential services and gets Bundaberg Regional Council back on track, just 12 weeks after being sworn in.

Mayor Helen Blackburn said budget deliberations had been the main focus of the first three months with an urgent need to prioritise the reduction of the forecast \$17 million operating deficit.

“In a difficult economic climate, we’ve delivered a moderate rates increase out of necessity to begin repairing the budget,” Mayor Blackburn said.

“The new Council’s commitment to reducing costs has resulted in a more than \$5 million reduction from the projected deficit with common sense savings found to prevent an even higher rates increase.

“Our finance team provides scenario modelling which puts this into perspective – if we didn’t identify these savings to the budget, our community was facing a 15% rates increase.

“It was clear to me that we could not continue down the same path.

“I wasn’t able to achieve every goal I had set in this first budget and it’s difficult to have to pass on a rates increase to locals, although the Councillors and I are squarely focussed on continuing to reduce costs and find efficiencies within the organisation.

“These savings won’t happen overnight but will pay dividends to ratepayers in the years to come as we get back to basics.

“We’ve made some difficult decisions, cut back on capital project spending and focussed on essential services like roads, rubbish and community services to minimise the impact of any rates increase on residents already dealing with the rising cost-of-living.

Mayor Blackburn said the capital budget prioritised essential maintenance and upgrades while taking a considered approach to existing and continued investments.

“There are no new borrowings projected for this financial year.



“We’re not putting any more money on the credit card, reducing the burden for ratepayers.”

## Highlights of the 2024-25 capital program include:

- \$5.2 million to reimagine a scaled-down ANZAC Park redevelopment ensuring we can return memorial services to this significant location as soon as possible and lay the foundations for more significant redevelopment in future budgets when Council is in a financial position to do so and after conducting meaningful consultation with the veteran community.
- \$4.75 million to continue the Coastal Sewerage Diversion project which will make the most of the Rubyanna Wastewater Treatment Plant and facilitate growth along the coastal strip. Funding: Building Our Regions
- \$3.6 million in flood upgrades to Duckpond Road to significantly reduce the isolation time for impacted residents in that area. Funding: Queensland Reconstruction Authority’s Local Recovery and Resilience Grants program
- \$6 million for sand nourishment and a rock wall at Woodgate Beach for crucial erosion prevention. Funding: North Queensland Natural Disasters Mitigation Program
- \$27.5 million for the finalisation of the Bundaberg Aquatic Centre which will provide the community with three new pools for a range of uses from learn-to-swim and rehabilitation to training and competition.

Council has also limited the impact of significant movement in the Valuer-General’s latest valuation for individual ratepayers by introducing a 20% cap on residential and agricultural rates in its 2024-25 budget.

Mayor Blackburn said, with 99.7% of properties in the region impacted by property value increases, the introduction of capping would benefit a number of ratepayers in the residential and agricultural categories.

“What we want to do is ensure ratepayers in these categories don’t experience a repeat of previous experiences where a couple of individual properties were impacted far in excess of their counterparts,” Mayor Blackburn said.

“Local property owners already know there was significant movement in the valuations this year which, without the introduction of the cap, could have seen some ratepayers experience significant increases.

View the full Bundaberg Regional Council 2024-25 budget document at [bundaberg.qld.gov.au](http://bundaberg.qld.gov.au).