MAYOR’S BUDGET ADDRESS 2026-2027

It is with much pleasure that I commence this Special Meeting of Council.

Today we will look to adopt the 2026-27 budget for Murweh Shire Council. Today's budget adoption is the culmination of many months of work by both our team of Councillors as well as our staff. Following several workshops with staff and Councillors, it is a privilege to be here with the relevant documents completed and ready for adoption.

Firstly, I would like to thank the Councillors for the manner in which you have approached the budget process over these last few months.

I would also like to thank the Council officers for your work and discussion to provide us with the information we require to move forward and adopt a budget which is the financial plan for the year ahead.

This year's budget has been built around a single, simple task: balancing the genuine needs of our community against the financial pressures that we, like every household and business in the Shire, are feeling at present. Rising costs of materials, contractors, insurance and finance are being felt in every Council budget across Queensland, and Murweh is no exception. Against that backdrop, we have worked hard to deliver a budget that continues to invest in the infrastructure and services our communities rely on, while being realistic about what our ratepayers can afford.

The 2026-27 budget totals $60.01 million, funded through a mix of rating and non-rating revenue and other funding sources. Council continues to actively pursue state and federal government funding to support projects across our communities, with capital grants and subsidies included in this budget amounting to $21.9 million.

The 2026-27 budget highlights include:

- Total operating expenditure of $33.36 million (excluding depreciation)
- Capital expenditure of $26.7 million
- Capital grant revenue of $21.9 million, with Council contributing $4.7 million of its own funds and $220,000 from plant disposal proceeds
- No new borrowings, with Council continuing to repay its existing loans ($227,642 in 2026-27)

Of the $26.7 million capital works program, 43% will build new assets for our growing communities This is almost entirely the Aurora Estate Stage 2 development. 28% is committed to the renewal of existing assets, and 29% will go toward upgrading what we already have. This is a deliberate balance. We know how important it is to keep building for the future of Murweh Shire, while also looking after the assets that already serve our community so well.

Key projects include:

- Aurora Estate Stage 2 Residential Development
- Charleville Sewerage Treatment Plant Upgrade
- Augathella CED Scheme Sewerage Treatment Plant Upgrade
- Wills Street, Charleville Refurbishment
- Rural Roads Reseal Program
- Charleville Airport Reseal Project

We are well aware of the financial challenges that many in our community are facing at present. With that firmly in mind, Council has held the general rates and charges increase for the 2026-27 year to 5%. For an average residential property on the minimum general rate, this increase equates to less than $2 per week. We believe this is a fair and responsible outcome, one that allows Council to keep pace with the rising cost of delivering services, while remaining mindful of the pressure many households are under.

Council will also continue to allow a ten percent (10%) discount on rates and charges levied, excluding interest, the fire levy and excess water charges, and pensioner remissions will remain at $400 per annum.

Government grants and subsidies continue to represent a significant share of Council's income, at 59% including flood damage funding, well above what is generated through rates, fees and charges, recoverable works, interest and other income combined. For the long-term sustainability of Council, we will continue to build our own-source revenue through fees and charges, works delivered on behalf of other parties, interest on cash reserves, and rental income from Council buildings.

On the expenditure side, this budget continues to deliver the essential services our community depends on, including maintenance of roads, water and sewerage infrastructure, and waste management, alongside our recreation, hall and library facilities. Of our operating expenses, 28.3% is spent on salaries and wages, 49.4% on materials, services and contractors, and 21.8% represents depreciation, reflecting the scale of the asset base Council is responsible for maintaining on behalf of the community.

Council remains committed to supporting the organisations and volunteers who do so much to enhance the liveability of our towns. We will continue to work with our not-for-profit, sporting, cultural and arts groups, and encourage them to keep partnering with Council on service delivery across our communities.

Council is continuing to build its cash reserves as a deliberate, ongoing priority. Our goal is to hold the equivalent of six months of operating cash in reserve, so that Council is genuinely in a position to absorb a shock — whether that is a sudden spike in fuel and bitumen prices, a natural disaster, or some other event we cannot yet foresee — without having to compromise the services our community relies on. This budget continues to build steadily towards that target, and it will remain a standing priority in the budgets that follow.

This budget reflects a Council that is being careful with ratepayers' money without stepping back from its responsibility to invest in the future of Murweh Shire. It keeps rate increases modest, it keeps borrowings at bay, and it keeps the projects that matter to our communities, from sewerage upgrades to road resealing to the next stage of Aurora Estate, moving forward.

I want to thank everyone who has contributed to this budget, and I commend the 2026-27 budget to Council for adoption.