

2024/25 MAYOR'S BUDGET SPEECH

Proudly playing our part

Conducted by Mayor Matt Burnett, Tuesday, 16 July 2024 at 9am
Gladstone Regional Council Civic Centre, 101 Goondoon Street, Gladstone



Good morning to my fellow Councillors, Council employees, members of the gallery, media, ladies and gentlemen, and those watching online via our live stream.

Today, I am proud to be here alongside my fellow Councillors to

adopt Gladstone Regional Council's 2024/25 Budget and Operational Plan, the first budget of the current Council term.

I would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of this land, the Bailai, the Gurang, the Gooreng Gooreng and the Taribelang Bunda people.

I would also like to pay my respect to Elders both past, present and emerging.

Built upon the solid foundation of Council's previous term, our comprehensive \$349M Budget aims to be responsive to community needs, responsible in how we manage the community's finances, and one that places further emphasis on core service delivery.

Council has listened to the community and heard very clearly that an increased focus is needed on our parks, drainage areas and roads.

Because of this, we have dedicated around 80% of our budget to delivering the fundamental things we rely on each day like roads, bridges, water, waste and sewerage, and our fantastic outdoor areas.

We have also invested in several civic pride initiatives ranging from beautification projects, major event attraction, increased investment in biosecurity, and much more.

By having an increased focus on these core services, we are playing our part in making our communities a fantastic place to live, work and play.

The theme for this year's budget – Proudly playing our part – complements a reinvigorated focus on delivering for the community.

This theme acknowledges that when we work together, we unlock knowledge and strengthen our understanding of the role we play in achieving great outcomes for both Council and our community.

Council's Key Services investment in 2024/25 includes (but not limited to):

- \$103.9M on Roads, Bridges, Footpaths and Drainage
- \$56.2M on Sewerage Services
- \$55.9M on Water Services
- \$27.0M on Waste Services
- \$24.6M on Parks and Environment
- \$9.2M on Arts, Culture and Entertainment
- \$6.0M on Community Development and Support.

Council's \$349M Budget includes a \$107M Capital Works program that will fund projects related to roads and drainage, water and wastewater, parks, footpaths, sport and recreation.

This program has been supported by both the State and Federal Governments to the value of \$50M, and further demonstrates our effectiveness in seeking specific funding for our capital project expenditure from other tiers of government, and importantly, not from ratepayers.

This investment will deliver key capital projects in 2024/25 including (but not limited to):

- \$21.5M to restore damaged road infrastructure
- \$11.9M for Lowmead Road safety and sealing upgrades
- \$7.6M on Stage 2 replacement works at the Gladstone Wastewater Treatment Plant
- \$2.4M for further safety improvements to Turkey Beach Road
- \$1.6M for the Agnes Water Skate Park, and much more.

This year's budget was not without its challenges, as Council – and the entire nation – continue to tackle the cost pressures associated with inflation.

We are also seeing asset pressures, particularly in our waste, water and sewerage networks, due to the combined effects of regulatory and environment changes, and unit price increases.

We recognise the challenging environment that we are operating in and have delivered a budget that is responsible and sustainable for the long term.

To achieve sustainability, Council has once again reduced its interest-bearing debt.

And, for the 12th consecutive year – my ninth as Mayor – we have no new borrowings.

Our focus on reducing existing debt will see interest-bearing debt decrease to \$80.7M by June 2025, a reduction of \$6.2M.

This continued reduction of debt across multiple Council terms represents responsible financial management on behalf of the region's ratepayers.

When looking at rates, fees and charges for the new financial year, rates for the average residential ratepayer will rise by just 4.2% in 2024/25.

It is important to note that while there have been no property revaluations during the past year, Council has undertaken a holistic review of its rating structure.

This review of the general rate has been done to make sure the rating system is split between properties in an equitable manner.

To do this, we have reset all categories with particular emphasis on residential categories by implementing five levels of valuation banding, along with a review of the alignment of our higher-density residential categories.

Commercial and light industrial land uses will see a 4.9% increase in the general rate, with major industrial land uses seeing a 7% increase.

Council's costs associated for waste disposal, transfer station operation and recycling have also had significant cost pressures applied during recent years.

As a result, it has been necessary to increase service charges by 8.2%, which is \$5.76 per day for collective utility charges.

In October, Council will introduce a user-pays fees structure for all domestic general waste and green waste disposal services, attracting a small gate fee at Council's Waste Facilities.

Our water networks have come under increasing cost pressure with material and asset costs increasing, and due to this, it is necessary to increase the base network access costs for water by \$50 per annum in the Lake Awoonga scheme, and \$60 per annum in the Agnes Water, Miriam Vale and Bororen schemes.

And, as always, Council will continue to support our pensioners in the best way we can by offering eligible pensioners a rates remission of \$320 per annum, an increase of \$10 from last year, in addition to the State Government pensioner concession of \$200.

At Gladstone Regional Council, we will continue to ensure the community is well positioned to capitalise on the emerging industries and opportunities within the Gladstone State Development Area.

We will continue to be responsible in how we guide our community through this economic transition as we transform from the industrial capital of Queensland to the renewable energy superpower of Australia.

Overall, Council's 2024/25 Budget and Operational Plan aims to be responsive to our community's needs with a deliberate focus on our core services.

We know the Gladstone Region's future is bright and we look forward to proudly playing our part in driving our region forward with continued success for the year ahead.

I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to making this budget possible.

My fellow Councillors and I look forward to working together to serve the region we call home, and I commend this Budget to you all.

Thank you.



Matt Burnett
Mayor Gladstone Regional Council