

# MEDIA RELEASE

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## LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY, FARMING SUPPORT AND RURAL ROADS ARE PRIORITIES FOR COORONG PLAN

Reducing the impact on drought-affected ratepayers and maximising the sustainable delivery of infrastructure and services are priorities for the Coorong District Council heading into the new financial year.

The concerns of residents, primary producers and businesses who are struggling financially is balanced with the need to deliver essential services as efficiently as possible in the Council's *2019-20 Draft Annual Business Plan and Budget*, which was released for community engagement this week.

Mayor Paul Simmons says primary producers already battling the drought and now hit by a surge in property valuations, which are not determined by the Council, will face some rate relief thanks to rate capping changes to be introduced under the draft plan.

"Primary producers are facing substantial valuation increases, with an average rise of 16 per cent and many looking at a jump much higher than that," Mayor Simmons says.

"Previously the Council's rate capping limit for primary producers was 20 per cent, but in light of the current situation facing many farming businesses, this will be cut to 10 per cent in line with the existing rate cap for residential properties.

"Primary producers are a significant contributor to our regional economy, with 40 per cent of people employed in the district working in the sector - so it's vital we continue to support them."

In line with its focus on reducing the impact on ratepayers, the Council plans to keep the 2019/20 average net general rate increase at a conservative 3 per cent.

"We know things are challenging for many in our community and we don't want to add to that financial strain, so we have proposed a minimal rate increase," Mayor Simmons says.

The Council's long-term financial sustainability is also a strong focus. With modelling showing continued low rate rises is economically unsustainable in the long term, the Council will investigate ways to strengthen its bottom line.

It will develop a new Strategic Management Plan within the next 12 months, conduct a comprehensive review of existing costs and services with a view to improving efficiency, and undertake a Rating Review to determine the most equitable way to set rates in the future.

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“While this Draft Annual Business Plan sets an operating deficit of \$1.422 million, we are confident that the service review process will help us cut costs by a further \$260,000 over the coming year and return the Council budget to surplus within four years,” Mayor Simmons says.

A \$4.837m capital works program will continue the Council’s strong focus on improving local roads, as well as delivering projects to boost the region’s tourism and economic potential.

Priority projects include the completion of the Kulde Road upgrade while \$500,000 is set aside for increased service standards on unsealed roads.

“Roads have been a significant focus for many people in our community and we are responding to this demand,” Mayor Simmons says.

With the assistance of over \$2m in external grant funding, the Council also looks forward to delivering major economic, tourism, recreation and environmental projects.

“In order to remain both progressive and sustainable, we have increased efforts to secure grant funding for the delivery of major projects wherever possible,” Mayor Simmons says.

“Any new projects this year must come with external funding support in order to balance our priorities of delivering new infrastructure, while also maintaining responsible rate increases.”

Thanks to \$1m in grant funding from the Federal Government, the Council will deliver a further seven kilometres of the Murray Coorong Trail and the upgrade of the Meningie North Jetty. Both projects have the potential to significantly increase tourism activity in the district.

A further \$370,000 in grants will deliver water security projects for local famers, with \$125,000 for an upgrade at Tailem Bend’s Dickson Reserve and \$613,000 for a range of land management projects through Council’s Coorong Tatiara Local Action Plan program.

The *2019-20 Draft Annual Business Plan and Budget* is available on the Council’s website and consultation is open until 4 June 2019. Residents can have their say online or attend one of the Community Information Sessions being held across the district. Two sessions have already been held in Tailem Bend and Peake, with the final two to be held in Tintinara (20 May) and Meningie (22 May). Both senior staff and Council Members will be in attendance to answer any questions in relation to the plan.

To find out more, visit [www.coorong.sa.gov.au/annual-business-plan](http://www.coorong.sa.gov.au/annual-business-plan).

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