

## Backyard bird count

Bland Shire Council residents are heading into their backyards, local parks and favourite outdoor spaces this week to help Bird Life Australia count one million birds for this year's annual Aussie Backyard Bird Count, which runs from 19-25 October 2015 during National Bird Week.

National Bird Week is shaping up to be another exciting and action-packed period for local backyards, which continue to attract a range of birds. Bland Shire Council has joined the action and signed up to support a more bird-friendly region.

Locals are encouraged to become citizen scientists and help put our region among the top counters in the country. With exceptional avifauna on offer, residents are not limited to their own backyard and can explore everything their extended

backyard has to offer.

Local counters will see live statistics and information on who is taking part nearby and the number of birds and species being counted locally and nationally through the Aussie Backyard Bird Count App and website.

Bland Shire Council is one of more than 40 Councils across Australia participating in the national count.

Last year more than 800,000 birds, including the colourful Rainbow Lorikeets which led the national tally, were spotted in backyards across the country.

To take part in the Aussie Backyard Bird Count, all you need is 20 minutes and the specially designed 'Aussie Bird Count' App available at the App stores and aussiebirdcount.org.au

### PUBLIC NOTICE

#### Roads Funding Proposal - Special Rate Variation

Bland Shire Council is currently seeking feedback from the community on a proposal to improve our local road network through a special rate variation.

Council is proposing a special rate variation (SRV) of 10 per cent per year for the next five years over and above the rate pegging limit (2.4 per cent in 2015-16) set by the State Government.

The proposal will raise an estimated cumulative \$11,254,898 over the next five years, including an additional \$614,835 in 2016-2017 and an extra \$4.12 million per year by 2020-2021 which will be spent exclusively on the local road network.

Council is experiencing a growing gap between the cost of providing services and facilities and the available funding to meet those costs.

Faced with the task of maintaining the second longest road network of any Council in NSW (3237 kilometres), frozen Federal grant funding and a long term "cap" set by the State Government - known as rate pegging - on Council's ability to increase income from rates to keep pace with the Consumer Price Index (CPI), Council is underfunded to be able to meet service levels or community expectations on rural roads in particular.

The SRV will enable Council to meet service levels on all roads.

Prior to formally considering making any formal application to the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART), Council has put forward two options for the community to consider in relation to a SRV.

**Option 1** proposes a rates increase above the rate pegging limit of 10 per cent per year over five years to improve the local road network. This would enable Council services to be maintained and current road infrastructure renewed to a satisfactory level and maintained in that condition. This increase includes the estimated 2.5 per cent rate peg.

**Option 2** is to increase rates only by the rate pegging limit set by the State Government each year (approximately 2.5 per cent) which will result in a reduction in service levels and deterioration of Council and community assets.

More detailed information about the proposal is available in the "Options to Improve Our Road Network" guide which will be posted to every ratepayer in the Bland Shire and is currently available at Council's Shire Street offices and for download at Council's website at www.blandshire.nsw.gov.au.

Any enquiries regarding the proposal should be directed to Council during business hours on 69722266.

#### How to have your say?

- Write to The General Manager, Bland Shire Council, PO Box 21, West Wyalong, NSW, 2671 or email council@blandshire.nsw.gov.au
- All ratepayers should have by now received the "Options to Improve our Road Network" handout in the mail. Fill in the reply paid sheet on the back and return to Council.



**Submissions close at 4pm on 12 November 2015.**

All feedback from the community relating to the SRV proposal will be presented to Council for consideration before it formally considers whether to apply to IPART for a SRV.

## Report on Bland Shire Council's future

The Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) assessment of the Fit for the Future submissions from New South Wales Councils was released by the State Government on Tuesday.

Bland Shire Council is among the 63 per cent of Councils who were assessed as being "not fit".

Of those 87 Councils assessed as not being fit for the future –

- 60 were assessed as not having sufficient scale and capacity, but did meet the financial criteria
- 18 were assessed as having sufficient scale and capacity, but did not meet the financial criteria, and
- Nine were assessed as not having sufficient scale and capacity and not meeting the financial criteria

#### Bland Shire Council Assessment summary

Scale and capacity – Does not satisfy

Financial capacity – Satisfies overall

Sustainability - Satisfies

Infrastructure and service management – Does not satisfy

Efficiency – Satisfies

#### What does this mean for the future of Bland Shire Council?

The State Government has announced that Councils have until 18 November to respond to the IPART report, including merger preferences.

The Government has also advised that there will be no opportunity for Councils to seek a review of the IPART assessment.

In a webcast involving the Premier, Mike Baird, Local Government Minister, Paul Toole and the head of IPART, Peter Boxall, on Tuesday it was made clear

that the State Government is looking for "unfit" Councils to explore merger options and indicate its preferred merger options by the deadline of 18 November.

At its monthly meeting on Tuesday night, Council resolved for the General Manager to prepare details of possible options for Council's consideration.

All options, including the possibility of mounting a further case to stand alone and/or be considered under the yet to be determined Rural Council model, will be formally discussed at a special Council meeting on Tuesday 10 November prior to lodging a submission.

The IPART report has identified Temora and Coolamon Shire Councils as potential merger partners. Council will also make initial contact with other neighbouring Councils for possible consideration prior to 10 November.

#### What this means for Council staff?

During the webcast, the Minister confirmed that there is no intention to amend the award, which means the jobs of current Council staff who work under the award are protected for three years.

After three years, a merged Council may elect to relocate or lay off some staff.

Contracted staff, of which there are three at Bland Shire Council (The General Manager and two directors), will not be protected and will have to reapply for positions if there is a merger.

#### What happens next?

After responses to the IPART report close on 18 November, the State Government has indicated that Councils will be informed of their fate prior to Christmas.

It is anticipated that the newly merged Councils will come into effect following the Local Government elections in September next year.

**Ray Smith**  
General Manager

### You may receive a call... About Bland Shire Council's future



Bland Shire Council has engaged Micromex Research to conduct a customer satisfaction telephone survey of 300 randomly selected Bland Shire residents seeking feedback from the community about the importance of and satisfaction levels with Council's current services and facilities.

The survey will also seek community opinion on a Council proposal for a special rate variation.

Starting from next week, local residents may be contacted by a Micromex representative and asked to participate in a 15 minute telephone survey.

Your feedback will help Council to plan for its short, medium and long term future and people who are contacted are encouraged to participate and provide honest feedback.

**For further information people are encouraged to phone Council on 6972 2266**

Office Hours: 8.30am - 5pm Monday to Friday

Library Hours: 10am-5pm Monday to Friday & 8.30am - 12noon Saturday

Phone: 026972 2266 Email: council@blandshire.nsw.gov.au

EMERGENCY NUMBERS - Council 0418 402 350,

Goldenfields Water 1800 800 917, Fire 000

