

MAYOR'S BUDGET MESSAGE

Your Douglas Shire Council has delivered.

I am delighted to present the 2019-20 Annual Budget – my seventh as Mayor of Douglas Shire and perhaps the most important for our community.

We have done it.

We promised we would give the people of Douglas Shire a financially sustainable local government and we have delivered.

I am proud to say we aim to report an operating surplus of \$179,332 this time next year.

The foundations are set for future generations to enjoy the benefits of a strong and capable Douglas Shire.

In June 2014, I put forward a five-year plan for this Council to achieve financial sustainability after recording a \$5.2 million deficit due to accounting for de-amalgamation costs.

Reaching financial sustainability has been this Council's number one priority, and I am immensely proud that we have been successful in achieving that priority.

Remember that back in 2013, the forces against de-amalgamation said "we would go broke, never get any grants and not survive on our own". Well I am thrilled to say that we have proved them wrong.

My fellow Councillors and 160-odd staff have chipped away at that deficit for the past five years, punching well above our weight to deliver key projects and maintaining a high level of service.

In the past four years, we have delivered three record capital works programs and shaken off loan borrowings to achieve a debt-free status.

We have persevered through many challenges, highlighted recently by one of the toughest wet seasons experienced for some time.

Despite this, the 19-20 budget contains a 1.8% general rate rise – the lowest for as long as I can remember.

For a Residential 1 category that receives the minimum general rate and utilities charges, this equates to an increase of \$1.15 per week.

This low rise will ease cost-of-living pressures, while allowing Council to invest in essential infrastructure, provide a high level of service and deliver some fantastic projects for the community.

In the next 12 months, your Council will inject a further \$15.34 million worth of projects and plans to achieve about 40 operational initiatives.

Council is continuing to invest in our road network, strengthen our disaster resilience and improve our water security.

I am pleased to announce that a \$1.05 million road reseal program under a \$5.6 million civil works program that will drive improvements on our region's network.

The program features numerous projects for Mossman and for the Daintree area, such as an engineering assessment of the road and slope stability of the Alexandra Range and \$450,000 culvert at Tara Hills Rd in Mossman.

We will spend more than \$1 million on projects aimed at strengthening disaster resilience in the Douglas Shire, projects that increase our ability to inform residents and allow the region to persevere through extreme weather.

The Daintree River project will feature an automatic river level gauge and two flood cameras that stream images to the Douglas Dashboard. Council will aim to install rain gauges in the very Upper Daintree and Bloomfield River.

Rain gauge instruments and river level monitors will also be installed in Port Douglas, Craiglie and Mossman to improve the accuracy of local weather information.

Council is also looking beyond the next 12 months and laying the foundations for an exciting period of economic growth and a more significant roll out of major projects for residents.

These include the Port Douglas CBD Blueprint, Mossman 2025 Plan, the Daintree Community Plan, new Daintree River Ferry Contract, Macrossan Street improvements, Murphy Street renewal and water park options, just to name a few.

Investment in tourism marketing and environmental initiatives will continue to steer Douglas Shire towards becoming Australia's leading sustainable tropical destination.

With spectacular natural areas such as the Daintree Rainforest, Great Barrier Reef and Mossman Gorge at our fingertips, this is a no brainer.

We must be the custodians of our precious World Heritage sites.

Council will inject \$810,000 into tourism and events over the next 12 months, securing the operation of promotional powerhouses Tourism Port Douglas Daintree (TPDD) and Port Douglas Carnivale.

Council will offset its carbon footprint for the next three years in a major step toward making our region the number one ecotourism destination.

Council is investing in the future. We are also laying the foundations to grow sports and recreation with fresh focus on lifestyle projects, public spaces and streetscapes will give back to the local community.

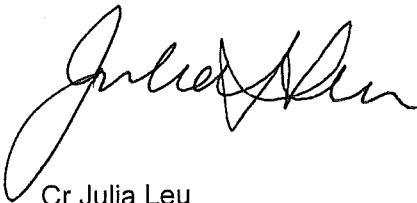
Masterplans for the Port Douglas Sports Complex and Mossman Showgrounds, as well as a \$400,000 design to turn the Mossman pool into multi-purpose sporting precinct, tourist site and wellness centre, is putting the wheels in motion for an exciting few years ahead.

In particular, Port Douglas has received a handful of big-ticket items aimed at reinvigorating streetscapes and upgrading key public spaces.

I'd like to thank Councillors for their cohesive approach to preparing this year's budget.

I also acknowledge our dedicated staff for their unwavering commitment to the community.

Councillors, it is my pleasure to present the 2019/20 Douglas Shire Council budget to you for adoption.



Cr Julia Leu
Mayor
Douglas Shire Council