

# MAYOR'S BUDGET SPEECH 2018/19

## DOUGLAS SHIRE COUNCIL

Good morning everyone.

I am delighted to present the Douglas Shire Council Budget – my sixth as Mayor of Douglas.

Douglas continues to be a great place to live, work, visit and invest – friendly and safe and celebrated for its unique environment, diversity and laid back lifestyle.

In June 2014, I outlined a 5 year plan to achieve financial sustainability in the 2019/20 financial year, after recording a \$5.2 million deficit due to accounting for de-amalgamation costs.

**Financial sustainability** is this Council's top priority so future generations can enjoy the benefits of a strong and capable Douglas Shire and I'm very proud to say we are well on the way to a budget surplus next year.

This budget sets the scene for the final stretch of five-year journey to financial sustainability, and puts Council in a position we have fiercely strived for since 2014.

The last 4 ½ years have been a remarkable journey and I can confidently say the new Douglas Council has been an outstanding success. In the past three years we have delivered **three record capital works programs** worth almost \$50 million and shaken off loan borrowings to achieve a **debt-free status**.

This year, we have worked through several challenges, such as unexpected changes by the Queensland Valuer-General to rural land valuations. Council has worked hard to minimise the impact of shire-wide land revaluations, including changes to the rural production category.

Despite these land valuations, Council has been able to keep 75% of properties general rate increases at 3.9% or lower. For a residential 1 category that receives the minimum general rate and utilities charges, this equates to \$2.22 per week.

This will allow Council to continue its **investment in essential infrastructure** and provide an impressive suite of fresh projects that heads a **strong \$16.49 million capital works program**, the second highest on record.

Major capital works investments over the next 12 months features major infrastructure such as the \$3m Noah Creek Bridge renewal, \$1.3m Craiglie Reservoir roof replacement, \$460,000 to repair the Sugar Wharf and \$250,000 to refurbishment the Flagstaff Hill Communications Tower.

A significant \$3.8m investment has also been earmarked to improve water security with \$1.17m towards water reticulation works and upgrades to the water treatment plants for Mossman (\$974,000), Whyanbeel (\$140,000) and Daintree (\$92,000). This will be a great 12 months for Douglas Shire to move forward in water security, especially with the new Port Douglas Water Supply Reservoir Project ready in a few months.

Council will complete repairs to Flagstaff Hill Walking Trail (\$200,000), design a drainage rectification program for Ribbon Avenue (\$120,000) and replace the decking on a pedestrian bridge at Hutchinson's Creek (\$115,000).

Ratepayers can also even expect more projects with \$970,000 secured for Round 2 of Works For Queensland project.

Council is also spending \$2.68m on the Diggers Bridge Replacement Project, a complete culvert renewal on Upper Daintree Road (\$270,000) and \$250,000 on the gravel re-sheet program.

Council has also invested in **infrastructure that provides recreational opportunities, and encourages us all to be healthy and active.** The investment is part of a handful of projects in community spaces that will boost Douglas Shire's lifestyle and recreational appeal.

I am pleased to announce a \$145,000 off-leash trial for the northern area of Hutchins Park, so dog owners will have a new place to let their pooches run free in Port Douglas.

This is something dog owners have been asking for, and will provide a fantastic opportunity for people and their pets to socialize with the wider community. I can see this park becoming a real social hub for pet lovers.

The project will include welded mesh fencing, water fountains, activity areas and a ball play area. Natural rummaging environments such as rock scramble, seating, bins for dog droppings and signage will be installed.

Council has also committed \$40,000 towards a funding submission for Stage One of the Principal Cycle Network from Mossman to Cooya Beach.

Other projects include playground upgrades (\$250,000) and a new toilet block at Lou Prince Park in Cooya Beach (\$100,000).

We have also committed \$150,000 to **extend the Mossman Skate Park and build a pump track.**

Last year, schoolboy Colby Taylor lodged a petition with about 80 signatures requesting an extension to the Mossman skate bowl to cater for increased users at the popular park. The upgrades will make the Skate Park more attractive and fun for our Douglas Shire youth, and will no doubt complement existing facilities. It comes after Council built a \$131,000 Pump track at the Port Douglas Sports Complex in September last year.

**Council's vision to create a popular kid's waterpark in Port Douglas** will be investigated after funding has been allocated in this budget. I am therefore pleased to announce that Council has committed \$30,000 to complete a design of a zero-depth water park or nature play activities space in Port Douglas.

This project will be a huge **lifestyle boost and a tourist attraction**. We envisage an activity precinct to rival Muddies Playground in Cairns.

It is important that we make this stack up, find an appropriate location and get a feel for what the community wants. This project could give people another reason to not only visit our shire, but move and raise a family here.

It comes as Council commits to Stage 2 of the Port Douglas Waterfront South Precinct Plan, which will be released for community engagement and progressed to shovel-ready status in the next 12 months.

Council will investigate the **feasibility of a solar farm at the Killaloe Landfill site**. This was one of many initiatives designed to boost the region's **environmental performance**.

Council will adopt measures that reduce consumption; more effectively manage waste and achieve reductions in energy and fuel consumption.

Other environmental initiatives include a waste and recycling education program at schools; develop a project plan for achieving Regional Eco Destination Certification and continue our Plastic Free Douglas initiative and Coconut Action Plan.

We have previously committed to six key actions to reduce impacts on Southern Cassowary populations in the Daintree Rainforest. Council will undertake a pre-feasibility study for a Cassowary Research, Rehabilitation and Breeding Centre. Council is firmly dedicated to protecting our cassowaries and we have committed to seeing if this facility would be viable. The Far North has two cassowary facilities and I think it is time we at least look at the feasibility of building one in the Daintree Rainforest.

**The 2018-19 Operational Plan** details the priority projects for Council over the next 12 months, with an emphasis on building on the success of major economic, environmental and community initiatives.

Among these initiatives, is the development of a new Corporate plan 2020-2014, continuation of the economic development taskforces as recommended in the Economic Development Strategy as well as the continuation of our advocacy to establish a domestic and family violence refuge in the Douglas Shire.

More than \$977,000 will be distributed to local organisations, businesses and individuals, including more than \$481,000 for Tourism Port Douglas & Daintree (TPDD). Council's grants program includes the Community Support Program, the Business Development Program, the Events Funding Program and the Regional Arts Development Fund. Council continue to supports Port Douglas Carnivale, Ironman, Great Barrier Reef Marathon, NAIDOC Week, Mossman Show, Port Shorts Festival and Taste Port Douglas, New Years Eve, Christmas in the Park.

**What I have outlined above is only a snapshot of our capital works and operational initiatives. Full details are on Council's website.**

**In conclusion**, I believe today is again a celebration of the combined effort of Councillors and staff over the last 4 ½ years. This budget further delivers with a significant number of new economic, community and environmental initiatives that are precisely designed to stimulate our economy, protect our unique environment and lifestyle that we all treasure.

The success of our council is due to an excellent partnership between Councillors, and our staff, and I would like to thank and express my sincere appreciation to Darryl Crees, John Rehn, Michael Kriedemann, Joanne Jacobson, the finance team and all staff who have worked incredibly diligently to get the best outcomes for the Douglas Shire.

Finally, I want to thank my fellow Councillors for your significant contributions towards this budget.

Councillors, it is my pleasure to present the 2018/19 Douglas Shire Council Budget to you for adoption.

Cr Julia Leu

**MAYOR, DOUGLAS SHIRE COUNCIL**

**19 June 2018**