

## 2022 - 2023 Budget

Good morning, Mayor Christensen, Councillors, the Executive Leadership Team, Officers, and members of the media in attendance and the public listening in at home. This year's Budget is my fifth for Scenic Rim Regional Council and is the result of an extensive process.

I would like to thank the elected Council for their dedication to the budget process and our wonderful employees who have contributed to the development of the budget and to the 2022-2023 Operational Plan.

This budget delivers real value for the more than 44,000 people who live in our community and for the many thousands of others who visit and do business in our region. It reflects Council's ongoing commitment to provide better services, customer outcomes and responsible management. It carefully balances the need to ensure financial sustainability for the future while delivering efficient, modern facilities for our customers today.

It also reflects the culture of continuous improvement and resilience we are building – despite the unprecedented challenges we have experienced this year -- from natural disasters and flooding to the ongoing pressures on our workforce and supply chains caused by COVID 19.

As our population grows, and demand for services increases, we are under pressure to meet the needs and expectations of our ratepayers and to achieve more with resources, that have not grown, at the same rate as demand.

Scenic Rim Regional Council is responsible for almost one billion dollars' worth of vital public infrastructure. Our communities depend on these assets, many of which have been hard hit by unprecedented weather events over the past 12 months.

Our infrastructure is extensive. It stretches across a vast area of more than 4,200 square kilometres, and includes 967 kilometres of sealed roads, 793 kilometres of unsealed roads, 243 major culverts, 261 floodways, 130 vehicle bridges, 15 pedestrian bridges and 80 kilometres of pathways. In addition, Council is responsible for 220 buildings, 43 playgrounds, four libraries, four swimming pools, 66 public toilet facilities, and 129 parks, reserves and camping grounds covering 426 hectares.

We couldn't do this without our team of 446 dedicated field and office-based full time, part time and casual employees, whose hours equate to approximately 410 full-time equivalent positions.

Our employees have continued to not only meet, but to exceed expectations placed upon them, in the face of higher-than-normal impacts affecting all industries, including increased vacancies across our organisation; absenteeism as a result of COVID; and the personal impacts of natural disasters on them and their families. Here at Council, we have a team of truly committed individuals and for that, the Executive Leadership Team of Caroline McMahon, Debra Howe, Chris Gray and Oliver Pring and I are extremely grateful.

This year, rate increases in the Scenic Rim have been kept to one of the lowest increases of any local government area in South-East Queensland announced to date. This has been achieved through Council's diligent management of operating costs. This same diligence enables us to maintain and renew our existing infrastructure and to deliver a raft of new initiatives while limiting rate increases.

We know our customers want better online services and tools, faster turnaround and more transparency and this Budget responds. It includes funds for a new online platform to streamline town planning enquiries, new hardware for more reliable communications in a disaster, and a significant boost in funding for community grants and environmental programs, to name just a few.

These new initiatives will be delivered by our existing employees who are committed to providing better customer outcomes and improved services while managing increasing costs. The challenge has been even tougher this year.

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The Scenic Rim Regional Council's dedicated team provides a huge range of services to the Scenic Rim community. Over the last ten to twelve years, our population has increased by more than 6,000 people, but the numbers within our workforce have not kept pace with that rate of growth. Instead, we have found ways to be more efficient – to deliver more with the same – and we continue to put the customer at the heart of everything we do.

Developing Council's annual Budget is a team effort. Every item is carefully planned and scrutinised from a zero base – not based on how much has been spent in the past – but based on what is needed to deliver the key level of service that our community expects.

It is then up to the Mayor and our Councillors to act in the best interests of the whole of the Scenic Rim region, not just their own division and to determine the right balance between the standards of service we want to deliver and the cost to ratepayers.

Finding the cost balance can be a difficult call. Each year, Council produces a 10-year capital program as part of the Community Budget Report, to show the community where capital projects are being planned across the region.

These strategic planning processes ensure we are looking ahead and making provision for the major infrastructure we will need for our growing community in the future. This year we have budgeted \$34 million for capital works including roads, bridges, drainage, footpaths, waste management, council facilities, fleet and our Vibrant and Active Towns and Villages program.

Supporting local business continues to be a priority and the value of Council's local procurement is growing. Small business makes up more than 98.5 per cent of the region's businesses and are critical for a sustainable local economy and local jobs.

Council also continues to benchmark its financial performance and we are proud to have achieved another positive result in the Queensland Auditor-General's report on Local Government for 2021, with Scenic Rim Regional Council being rated as a Council with a 'lower risk' of concerns about financial sustainability based on current income, expenses, asset investment and debt financing policies.

This is great news for the Scenic Rim Regional Council. It compares very favourably to other Queensland local governments and those local governments that Council is often compared with across the South-East Queensland region and is testament to Council's prudent long-term strategic approach.

As our tourism industry expands, the value of our natural resources is also under the spotlight. The Scenic Rim is one of the most biodiverse areas in Australia and a 50 per cent increase in Council's environmental grants program in this Budget will strengthen the community initiatives that help maintain our stunning landscape and native flora and fauna habitat.

As a Council, we are privileged to partner with our local residents, businesses, community groups and visitors and to work with them to continue building a bright and prosperous future for our award-winning region.

Thank you.

Jon Gibbons  
Chief Executive Officer  
Scenic Rim Regional Council