



Insight for
Business & Government

Junee Shire Council Special Rating Options Survey

Prepared for



by
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the results of the Junee Shire Council special rate variation survey, 2013. IRIS Research was commissioned by Council to conduct a comprehensive telephone-based survey among the area's residents. The survey sought to gauge community support and reaction to the proposed rating options.

The key finding of the survey was the overwhelming majority (85.9%) of residents in the Junee Shire supported a special rate variation to cover the gap in funding for renewal and reseals of roads, rather than the alternative of reducing the standards of services and infrastructure.

Of the rating options presented, 45.4% opted for the "improve" scenario which not only allowed Council to renew and upgrade roads, but provide revenue to support community infrastructure. 40.5% opted for Council to maintain the special rate variation for which all additional revenue above the rate peg is dedicated to road renewals and reseals. This left only 14.1% that supported the decline option where Council would need to reduce the level of service.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

IRIS Research was commissioned by Junee Shire Council to undertake a survey of residents within the Junee Shire. The survey aimed to canvass the community on funding options being considered by Council for vital road renewals and reseals.

1.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of this survey were;

- To determine what the community viewed as important community assets.
- Assess the level of support for a special rate variation to cover the gap in funding for renewal reseals of local roads.
- Measure the level of support amongst ratepayers of specific various rating options being considered by Council.

1.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The survey was conducted following an information package being mailed out to all resident rate payers explaining Council's proposal of an application for a special rates variation and the form the rating options could take. The questionnaire was only administered to those residents that were familiar with the special rate variation proposals and the reasons why Council is seeking the variation.

The questionnaire was administered using IRIS's CATI facility. CATI facilitates strategies to combat non response using time shifted retries for non contacts and a callback facility for the convenience of respondents.

Adult decision makers were randomly selected across the local government area in proportion to population densities ensuring a geographic spread.

1.4 SURVEY RESPONSE

Interviews were conducted during the week commencing 9th December 2013 between 4.00 and 8.30 p.m.

A final sample of 405 adult decision makers was achieved. The maximum error on proportion for the total sample is +/- 4.9%.

The following indicates the key survey findings.

SURVEY RESULTS

2 IMPORTANCE OF INFRASTRUCTURE

Respondents were first asked the following;

...how important are specific types of infrastructure to you on a scale of 1 to 5?

Table 2-1 Importance Ratings for Infrastructure (n=405)

Type of Infrastructure (rank order)	n/r	Importance Rating (%)			Mean Score (out of 5)
		Low (1-2)	Medium (3)	High (4-5)	
Rural sealed roads	0.0	5.4	17.0	77.5	4.21
Rural unsealed roads	0.5	15.3	26.9	57.3	3.73
Town roads	0.2	3.7	10.9	85.2	4.41
Parks, playgrounds and reserves	1.0	7.2	15.8	76.1	4.11
Sporting fields	0.7	10.9	15.8	72.6	4.01
Community buildings and halls	1.0	8.9	26.2	63.9	3.86

...how important is it for Council to renew and maintain each type of infrastructure at an acceptable level.

Table 2-2 Importance Ratings for Renewing and Maintaining Infrastructure (n=405)

Type of Infrastructure (rank order)	n/r	Importance Rating (%)			Mean Score (out of 5)
		Low (1-2)	Medium (3)	High (4-5)	
Rural sealed roads	0.0	4.2	11.6	84.2	4.34
Rural unsealed roads	0.5	7.7	19.5	72.4	4.06
Town roads	0.2	2.0	9.1	88.6	4.46
Parks, playgrounds and reserves	0.5	5.4	17.3	76.8	4.15
Sporting fields	0.5	8.1	18.8	72.5	4.06
Community buildings and halls	1.0	9.4	23.7	66.0	3.90

Key findings;

- o Mean scores indicated town roads and rural sealed roads were rated as the most important of the infrastructure assets listed.
- o Consistent with the above results, residents indicated a high level of importance for Council to renew and maintain town roads and rural sealed roads.
- o Despite the overall lower mean importance scores for community buildings, it is noted that two thirds of the community provided a high importance rating for its maintenance and renewal.

3 SUPPORT FOR PROPOSED SPECIAL RATE SCENARIOS

3.1 COMMUNITY PREFERENCE

All respondents were provided with a detailed description of the proposals as outlined in the information brochure and were asked:

Of the three rate scenarios proposed by Council which option do you most support?

Table 3.1 Support for Special Rate Variation Options

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Decline	57	14.1	14.1	14.1
Maintain	164	40.5	40.5	54.6
Improve	184	45.4	45.4	100.0

Key findings:

- o 86% of residents surveyed indicated they would prefer a special rate variation rather than a decline in service levels.
- o Of residents who supported a special rate variation, 45% opted for the “higher” rate variation and 41% supported “maintaining” the existing variation that is set to expire in 2013/14.

3.2 REDUCTION IN SERVICES AND INFRASTRUCTURE

The 57 residents (14.1%) who supported the “decline” option were asked to identify what services and infrastructure they would like to see reduced as a result.

The following responses were provided

- Parks and gardens in town (6 mentions)
- Town roads (4 mentions)
- Council administration (5 mentions)
- Athenium theatre (4 mentions)
- Christmas tree (2 mentions)
- Aquatic Centre (1 mention)
- Sporting fields (1 mention)
- Footpaths (1 mention)
- All services (1 mention)

32 of the 57 respondents did not identify any specific service or infrastructure they would like to see reduced.

3.3 CIRCUMSTANCES WHERE SUPPORT FOR MAINTAIN/IMPROVE WOULD BE PROVIDED

A further question was asked to respondents who supported the decline option on whether they could identify any circumstances where they may support the maintain or improve options.

38 of the 57 residents that opted for the decline option indicated they could not identify any circumstance where their support would shift to maintain or improve options.

Three residents indicated they would support the other options if Council could guarantee it is too be spent on roads and identify the roads that the money is going to be spent on. One person indicated they would only support option 1 or 2 when they knew how much their rural rates would rise.

Other comments related to increasing fees for use of the aquatic centre, that Council needed to stop wasting money and spend more on sporting fields.

4 ATTITUDES TO RATE INCREASE AND SERVICE CUTS

This section is concerned with the perceptions held by residents towards the financing of services and facilities by Junee Shire Council. Residents were read three statements and asked to rate the level of agreement with each on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 meant they strongly disagreed with the statement and 5 meant they strongly agreed with it. The identical questions were posed to residents in the 2011 and 2006 Junee Community surveys. Comparisons are provided below.

Table 4-1 Level of Agreement Concerning Service Cuts (n=405)

	% Agreement						Mean 2006
	Can't say	Low (1 & 2)	Medium (3)	High (4 & 5)	Mean 2013	Mean 2011	
I would be happy to pay a little more Council rates to fund essential improvements in services and facilities	1.2	12.1	17.8	68.9	3.97	3.40	3.48
I would rather see Council rates rise than see cuts in local services	2.2	11.6	21.5	64.7	3.94	3.14	3.43
Council rate rises should be kept to a minimum even if it means that local services are cut	2.2	59.0	20.0	18.7	2.29	2.74	2.75

Key finding;

- o Overall Junee residents support the position of paying more in Council rates to fund improvements in services and facilities rather than keeping rates pegged and the likely need for Council to cut service levels.
- o The degree of support for rate rises opposed to service cuts was significantly higher in this survey, compared to the community's response in 2011 and 2006.

5 RESPONDENT CHARACTERISTICS

5.1 Gender

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Male	169	41.7	41.7	41.7
Female	236	58.3	58.3	100.0
Total	405	100.0	100.0	

5.2 Locality

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
June township	272	67.2	67.2	67.2
Village	21	5.2	5.2	72.3
Rural Farm or Property	111	27.4	27.4	99.8
Not Stated	1	.2	.2	100.0
Total	405	100.0	100.0	

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Bethungra	20	4.9	4.9	4.9
June Reefs	8	2.0	2.0	6.9
Dirnaseer	4	1.0	1.0	7.9
Marinna	3	.7	.7	8.6
Erin Vale	2	.5	.5	9.1
Old Junee	21	5.2	5.2	14.3
Eurongilly	9	2.2	2.2	16.5
Wantabadgery	17	4.2	4.2	20.7
Harefield	1	.2	.2	21.0
Wantiool	3	.7	.7	21.7
Illabo	17	4.2	4.2	25.9
Yathella	10	2.5	2.5	28.4
June Township	290	71.6	71.6	100.0
Total	405	100.0	100.0	