

Mayor's speech

Special Meeting, 7 July 2025

Today, I'm standing before you to speak to Sunshine Coast Council's 2025-26 Budget – my second as Mayor.

It's fair to say that this has been challenging to prepare.

This budget has weighed heavily on us all. We have agonised over it – we see what our residents are going through in the cost of groceries, in electricity bills, in mortgage stress. I hear it in the voices of community members, the local small businesses, the pensioners and the families – because as Council, we carry the responsibility of finding the balance between easing today's burdens and protecting tomorrow's opportunities.

This is a Budget delivered in an era where the costs of delivering projects and services and maintaining assets have soared. Where's the balance?

Strong population and visitor growth means that we all feel the pressures. And yet while Council must deliver for now, we must also invest in the future.

Plus, we must provide vibrant community facilities and excellent sporting facilities and public spaces that everyone can enjoy. We all need joy.

Then, there's the task of shaping an economy that will generate jobs and prosperity over the coming years and decades.

We're responsible for beaches, parks, roads and coastal and hinterland communities across nearly 2300 square kilometres.

Our region is home to 365,000 people and is forecast to grow by another 100,000 over the next 10 years.

So, what's at the heart of this Budget? What will it deliver?

Safer roads, projects that unite us and delivering the high standard of services our community enjoys each and every day these are front and centre.

We, as a collective of councillors representing you – our community – have listened to your feedback and crafted a responsible Budget that delivers what matters most to those we serve.

The results of our 'Living on The Sunshine Coast Survey', which has been tracking what's most important in the eyes of our residents for five years, tell us that our environment, reducing congestion and creating a sense of community are consistent top priorities.

We've looked hard at the numbers and we're making the tough calls now to achieve this because community is at the absolute heart of every decision we make.

We know we must deliver on these priorities now when the costs to do so, continue to skyrocket. You know that fuel has gone up 15 per cent, contract services 8 per cent and water and sewerage charges 5 per cent. I'm sure these increasing costs will come as no surprise to you.

What's happening with rates? We know our residents expect us to use rate-payer money wisely.

That's why we're working to minimise the impact on households, while still delivering much-needed services and infrastructure.

Where will your rates go?

Supporting this Budget means creating strong communities, caring for our environment, building a resilient local economy, delivering service excellence and managing for growth.

It includes:

- Almost \$130 million to develop a strong community – roads, cycleways and pathways, community venues and libraries, disaster management, lifeguards, public lighting and sporting facilities.
- A total of \$343 million to maintain and enhance our region's environment and liveability – our beaches, foreshores, coastal infrastructure, parks, trails, stormwater drainage, waste management.
- We will also invest \$35 million in building our economy – attracting investment, boosting tourism and sponsoring major events.
- \$380 million will deliver service excellence and manage for growth, supporting road network management, our planning, development assessment, cemeteries, open spaces, local laws, public health and customer service.

These are all big numbers.

Services and program highlights:

- We will invest \$30 million in maintaining and improving sealed and unsealed roads.
- There will be many lifestyle benefits thanks to the \$22.4 million allocated to enhancing our public parks and spaces.

- More than \$11 million will go towards renourishing our treasured beaches so we can enjoy walking on our golden sands.
- About \$23 million will be invested in our libraries which have seen a staggering 37,000 extra people sign up in the past two years.
- We will back major events that attract business and promote our area and provide \$4.4 million in grants and partnerships for community-led programs and events.

Capital works

- Council is committing \$262 million to building infrastructure that supports our growing needs and protects our lifestyle.
- Of course, some projects are receiving welcome co-funding from the Queensland and Australian governments, too.
- More than \$15 million will be invested in the long-awaited Caloundra Transport Corridor Upgrade.
- There's the Mooloolaba Foreshore project and we will create a Southern Parkland seawall to fortify the coastline. Our work to protect our foreshores doesn't stop there.
- We are also investing \$5.5 million in the Moffat Beach seawall construction and there's funding for the Golden Beach south seawall and stormwater improvements.
- First Ave at Maroochydore will be rejuvenated, while \$3 million will be dedicated to enhancing the picturesque hub of Maleny.
- Another hinterland favourite, Eumundi, will benefit from nearly \$1 million for its town centre, while Nambour will receive \$1.05 million for the Namba Place Revitalisation Project.
- Sport and recreation gets a boost with almost \$16 million for the Honey Farm Sporting Precinct facilities for soccer, cricket and running, as well as walking and cycling trails, dog exercise areas and amenities. It's a massive project delivering enormous benefits for you, the people of the Sunshine Coast.
- At Palmwoods, we'll invest in the Briggs Park rugby league and cricket change rooms.
- Construction on clubhouses at Baringa and Narimba in Caloundra South will also start.
- Roads that connect our communities, including Petrie Creek Road at Rosemount, North Arm Road, North Arm, Dulong Road, Dulong and Camp Flat Road, Bli Bli, will welcome funding.
- We are also making walking and cycling safer and easier. There's \$1 million for the Emu Mountain Road, Coolum Beach pathway, almost \$2 million to progress the Karawatha Drive cycle lanes at Mountain Creek and a new pathway on Eudlo School Road at Eudlo.

Managing for growth

To be honest, Council considered a range of options, including higher rate increases, when forming this Budget but instead, we chose a path that balanced financial responsibility with compassion.

We are reviewing our services and tightening our belts and making sure every dollar counts. Cutting the costs of Council. This is our promise to you.

Also, we will be holding the new executive accountable for delivering efficiencies. Transparent and accountable leadership is what you can trust us to provide moving forward, so we are well placed for the opportunities ahead.

Waste charges have increased, reflecting the true cost of weekly waste collections, recycling and safe landfill management – and the impact of the State Government's Waste Levy, which adds \$37.70 to the cost of the standard bin.

Your general waste, recycling and garden organics bin collection services will rise a total of \$2.35 a week.

As our community grows, so too does the demand on waste services. We are investing in long-term projects to manage this responsibly and avoid higher costs in the future.

Key waste projects include:

- \$4.02 million major upgrade to the Nambour Resource Recovery Centre at Bli Bli.
- \$1.22 million in major works at the Caloundra Landfill.
- \$3.4 million for the Caloundra Resource Recovery Centre.

These aren't quick fixes. But they are critical upgrades to protect our environment and ensure we don't run out of landfill space.

We're acting now to avoid much higher costs to our ratepayers long-term.

Levies

To ease pressure on ratepayers, Council has frozen the Environment Levy at \$82 per annum and the Arts and Heritage Levy at \$20 and we've reduced the Transport Levy by \$3.08 per annum. This is a responsible choice.

Environment Levy

Funds raised from the Environment Levy are an investment in the future of our natural environment.

We will support threatened and iconic species such as koalas, shorebirds, and marine turtles.

We'll work to restore waterways and improve water quality and manage invasive plants and wildlife across the region.

Plus, we'll continue coastal dune rehabilitation, shoreline erosion management, and coastal monitoring.

The Arts and Heritage Levy

The Arts and Heritage Levy will support the region's cultural heritage and creative industries funding Bankfoot House and other community museums.

And it will underpin the Sunshine Coast Creative Arts Plan, delivering career pathways for local artists and more.

The levy reflects the vital role the arts and heritage play in shaping our identity.

Transport Levy

This Council changed the application of the Transport Levy and we now support safer and more accessible transport options focussing on protecting our young, elderly, and those with mobility challenges our vulnerable pedestrians, with safety projects near schools, retirement villages, and medical facilities.

The levy will also continue to fund:

- Trialling transport services like Flexilink (Conondale–Maleny, Peachester–Beerwah), Council Link, and Kenilworth Community Transport.
- A partnership with Translink to trial a late-night transport service for the Maroochydore Entertainment Precinct around Ocean Street (getting people home late at night) and explore options for Nambour.
- Investigating a high-frequency, hop-on, hop-off coastal bus service between Sunshine Cove, Maroochydore, and Alexandra Headland.

Transitory Accommodation

Council is also adjusting the transitory accommodation rate category to encourage more houses back into the long-term rental market.

We need more homes for locals. This change supports a balanced housing system.

What does all this mean?

More than 60 per cent of owner-occupiers will remain on the minimum general rate of \$1,586.30 per annum – an increase of \$2.10 per week. This is an increase of 7.4 per cent to the minimum general rate.

My fellow Councillors and I recognise the cost-of-living pressures many residents are facing.

We understand these pressures are real.

That's why we're increasing pensioner concessions in line with the general rate increases, collectively saving our pensioners \$5 million this financial year.

And, Council is also offering six-month interest-free payment plans for ratepayers.

If you're interested, please reach out before the due date. We're here to help and no interest will be charged.

Why have some charges gone up?

This Budget reflects the increasing costs of maintaining and improving a large and fast-growing region.

To be honest, we have inherited some very real problems we've agreed on a way forward. We are owning it and fixing it as you would want and expect us to do.

As part of our financial reset, we've reviewed how we calculate depreciation.

This ensures we accurately reflect the true cost of maintaining infrastructure and planning for future investment.

We're not sugarcoating it – this is difficult. But we are doing what's right and we have a plan.

The organisation will share the load. Council has already saved almost \$9 million by pausing recruitment and managing vacancies – a measure that will continue.

A further \$5.5 million worth of productivity improvements are being delivered through service reviews.

No frontline services will be cut and as I said, the CEO and new executive will be responsible for finding these savings.

Every dollar is being spent wisely and with purpose. We're prioritising what you have told us is important.

I encourage you to go to Council's website to see what each division will receive.

In conclusion, this Budget is responsible. It is compassionate. And it is absolutely focused on delivering what matters most to our community. It's a \$973 million Budget – there are millions of good reasons to support it.

We've frozen key levies, increased pensioner concessions, offered interest-free payment plans, and kept the rate rise to the lowest responsible level possible.

We've also held ourselves, this organisation, to account – with millions in productivity improvements under way.

We are backing the people of the Sunshine Coast – by investing in every corner of our region.

Whether it's rebuilding and strengthening our roads, creating safer pathways for our kids, fortifying our foreshores against very real threats. Or delivering sporting and community facilities that improve wellbeing, inclusion and local pride this budget delivers. Supporting this Budget means supporting all of these great projects.

So let me be clear: I will be voting for this Budget. As Mayor, I don't have the luxury of playing politics with the future of our community. This Budget is responsible and delivers on what our residents have told us matters and it positions us for opportunities ahead. It delivers for our community.

Councillors, I want to thank each of you for your honest debate during our deliberations and your care for our community as we developed this Budget, together.

I know these decisions are hard. I know you've agonised too. But now is the moment we step forward and do what's right.

I also want to thank our CEO, the Executive Leadership Team and Finance professionals for bringing this together under immense pressure.

To our residents: we are listening. Despite the clear challenges, every dollar in this budget has been directed toward what's important to you – safety, community, environment, opportunity, and responsible service delivery.

Councillors, I commend our Council's 2025-2026 Budget to the Chamber and to our community and I ask for your support.

ENDS