

Community Engagement for the Draft Operational Plan 2024-25 (Draft OP 2024-25) included a 1-hour Facebook Live session on 2 May 2024. A panel of senior Council staff, and subject matter experts, fielded a range of questions. These questions and others that we received on the night are responded to below. We have grouped questions into categories for ease of reading and to reduce repetition.

The Draft OP 2024-25 is on public exhibition until 11:59pm on Monday 20 May 2024. Head to our [Have Your Say](#) page to submit your feedback or call our customer service team on 6581 8111.

Panel Members

- Dr Clare Allen, CEO
- Lucilla Marshall, Group Manager Community Voice (facilitator)
- Blayne West, Group Manager Community Infrastructure Project Delivery
- Duncan Coulton, Executive Manager Strategy
- Michael Cosgrove, Executive Lead Finance & Commercial Operations
- Cameron Hawkins, Group Manager Utilities Plan and Design

The responses to all the posed questions have now been collated to assist the community with their submissions.

0.0% Rate Peg

In the 0% Rate Peg fact sheet, there is no reason why this decision was made. To pay for this \$2.7M foregone revenue the community pays with a reduction in services such as longer periods in lawn care, no Community Grants.

The decision to implement a 0.0% rate peg began in December 2023. Councillors requested advice on the impact that the rate peg would have on the Operational Plan 2024-25. In February 2024, we provided a report detailing the financial impacts and likely mitigations.

Councillors then requested that Council prepare the Draft OP 2024-25 based on a 0.0% rate peg. This would mean there would be no overall increase in rate revenue. You can review the reports referenced on the Council Meeting - Agenda and Minutes page on our website. You will need to search for the following Ordinary Council Meetings:

- **15 February 2024** - Ordinary Council
- **Item:** 10.16
- **Subject:** IMPACTS AND OPTIONS IN RELATION TO A PROPOSED RATE FREEZE FOR 2024-2025

You can [watch Councillors debate and resolve this item](#) on our Council Meeting YouTube channel (jump to 2:06:00 for this item)

It appears that Council has had to compile the 24/25 OP with reduced income due to the proposal not to increase rates by the allowable 4.6%. Are all the reductions in services listed on the Fact Sheet to claw back \$2.7M necessary?

The Risk Appetite Statement adopted by Council in December 2023 directs our actions in relation to financial sustainability. The statement says: "Council will not tolerate ongoing failures to meet key financial performance ratios without any adequate resolution planning".

This means the impact of a 0.0% rate peg on the budget needs to be mitigated. The pool of money available to fund the impact further reduces when you look at Council's fixed and variable costs over the next 12 months. To be compliant with our statement and address the impact of the 0.0% rate peg, we have looked at how the \$2.7 million revenue impact can be offset by a reduction in spending.

The revenue impact is operational in nature and from the General Fund. This means the expenditure reduction must also be operational and from the General Fund. This is shown on page 11 of the Draft OP 2024-25.

The council needs to identify \$2.7 million in savings to mitigate the impact of the 0.0% rate peg in 2024-25. The Rate Peg Fact Sheet outlines the proposed reductions to minimise the impact on services in 2024-25.

These proposed reductions are a temporary measure for 2024-25 only.

We will look at permanent ongoing reductions in the 2025-26 Operational Plan, to mitigate the ongoing impact of a 0.0% Rate Peg in 2024-25 if the rate peg is approved.

For road and parks maintenance, staff have identified sufficient short-term reserves to offset the impact of these mitigations. This will enable current maintenance services levels to substantially continue into 2024-25.

How does Council address concerns that the rate freeze primarily benefits property owners, rather than renters or those less financially secure within our community?

What measures are in place to ensure that the broader community's needs are met, especially those who might not benefit directly from a freeze in property rates?

Rates are levied on residential, commercial and farmland property owners. By reducing the costs for those property owners, this may result in the costs being passed on through a reduction in rental fees.

Compared to the 4.6% rate peg, a rate peg of 0.0% would result in a saving of approximately \$60 for an average residence per year.

Can Council detail the specific impacts of the budget cuts on community services and infrastructure maintenance?

In preparing the Draft OP 2024-25, staff have identified reductions to the budgeted operating expenses within the General Fund. This is to mitigate the impact of a 0.0% rate peg, as outlined in the table below:

Mitigation	Amount	Description
Freeze on recruitment	\$650,000	A freeze on hiring staff to specific roles within Council would be used to reduce expenditure by \$650,000.
Corporate Overhead savings	\$200,000	A reduction in discretionary spending, including on consultants and professional services.
Road resealing and maintenance	\$650,000	The Sealed Roads Repairs Program would be impacted by \$650,000 or around 13% of the road resealing and maintenance budget. This corresponds to a reduction of around ten (10) kilometres of road resealing or two (2) kilometres of asphalt resurfacing.
Parks and gardens maintenance	\$350,000	Parks and gardens maintenance would be impacted by \$350,000 or around 8% of the parks and gardens maintenance budget. This impacts Council's ability to maintain existing service levels for mowing across the LGA (i.e., a six (6) week mowing cycle would be an eight (8) week mowing cycle).
Tree and shrub maintenance	\$250,000	Tree and shrub maintenance would be reduced by \$250,000 or around 18% of the tree and shrub maintenance budget. This corresponds to a reduction of around 144 priority trees not being maintained across the LGA.
Building maintenance	\$250,000	Building maintenance will be impacted by \$250,000 across nine (9) sites having reduced asset maintenance including Libraries, Community Halls, and amenities. This represents around 9% of the building maintenance budget.
Community grants	\$200,000	Community Grants will not be available in the 2024 25 budget.
Community activities and cultural events	\$150,000	Community activities and events will be reduced by \$150,000. This would discontinue funding for Arts Mid North Coast partnership, community events, community programs and the installation of public art.
Total	\$2,700,000	

How does Council justify these reductions in services to residents who are already observing a decline in the upkeep of public amenities?

Our approach is guided by the risk appetite statement adopted in December 2023. The statement outlines our tolerance and approach to financial sustainability. It says: "Council will not tolerate ongoing failures to meet key financial performance ratios without any adequate resolution".

This means to address the impact of the 0.0% rate peg on our services and activities, we need to find reductions of \$2.7m to balance this out. Because the impact is in the Operating and General Funds revenue, we must look offset reduced funding in these areas. This is shown on page 11 of the Draft OP 2024-25 and further details are available in the Rate Peg Fact Sheet.

Sporting Fees & Charges (and other recreation related questions)

What will the sporting fees and charges be used for? Are we getting additional services for this charge?

The intention is that the funding contributed to each sports facility will be applied back to that facility for future upgrades / maintenance works.

The fee and fee model has not yet been set. We are seeking community feedback on this.

The fees do not bring in a large sum of money. It will take several years to build up funding for minor updates, let alone significant upgrades.

I am concerned that the proposed 0.0% rate peg is going too far and leading to adverse decisions such as the new Sport Grounds fee on junior sporting clubs use of community assets. Council should be promoting physical activity in our current and future generations not fiscally discouraging it through fees on sports ground use. Why is this proposed?

The mitigation measures include a reduction in some of our maintenance. We will look at the overall need and prioritise how we use this fee. This is particularly relevant to our sporting ground use in line with safety issue considerations.

Please explain how the introduction of increased levies to sporting clubs for hire of field access and canteen facilities will improve facilities.

The intention of the fee is the “user pays” system. This assists in providing funds to those facilities in the future. We have several facilities that need maintenance. This fee will go towards revenue to support those facilities going forward.

Will sports fees to clubs be refunded when grounds are unavailable due to weather? Why should clubs pay for facilities that are unavailable?

Council still accumulates costs for sporting facilities when it rains, including for staffing/line marking/maintenance, etc. The fee will also be accumulated over time to support improvements. Some of these improvements will take years to recoup.

Will we see an increase in staffing for grounds maintenance?

Not at this stage. Staffing will stay at the same level. This is because the fees will only support 3.3% of current costs of maintenance. We are also managing escalating future, as well as an increasing numbers of fields and spaces to maintain.

Will Council be looking to increase sports ground availability by sourcing new facilities as the current allocations are not adequate for participation numbers. Laurieton specific but I am sure relevant across the region.

We are always looking at community needs as part of our future planning. We've recently finished the Rainbow Beach Sporting Facilities. This allowed us to share the load on our sporting facilities across the region. We are in the final stages of design and development for Thrumster which will commence within the next financial year. Within the next few months we will have the new Vince Inmon grandstand completed. Supporting our future sporting groups is something we are always considering.

Why can't you remove the sporting fees and community hall fees from the Operational Plan engagement? Can we have separate discussions on these issues?

The fees are part of the overall integrated planning reporting process. The operational plan sits in conjunction with the operating budget. This means we can't separate it because legislation requires us to present the fees and the budget as part of the process.

Is there any plan to use the increase in revenue from higher levies for use of sporting fields to make fields more accessible & better utilised?

Council looks to accumulate costs over time to support improvements. This includes accessibility and increase usage. We know it will take a long time to accumulate funds to support any changes. We are always developing plans and strategies to improve the accessibility of our facilities, and how much and how frequently they're used.

What is proposed to be included in the Wayne Richard's sporting complex?

The next stages of the Wayne Richards Sporting complex are based on the 2012 Master Plan. It includes additional fields where the current Council depot is, an athletic track and other amenities including parking and change rooms. A draft design will be developed over the next 12 months. We will engage with the community before finalising the design.

How has the Camden Haven community benefited from the dis-banded "Sport and Rec" committee to be wholly run by council's sport and rec department?

We are supporting the management of the Laurieton Sports Complex/Vince Inmon. There has also been extensive work within this space. These include the development of the new grandstand, canteen, change facilities and fit out, and long jump track. New cricket nets will be available soon. The Netball Courts were also installed in the last few years.

More difficult for bookings, less availability, less flexibility and now increased fees to clubs. The committee worked well for 30 + years and result now is just further disadvantaged.

The new booking system is in its first year. It will assist in managing the use of the site and provide better oversight of availability.

Ferry Fees

How can Council justify ferry rate increases of over 56% over just 2 years. \$16 is more than some of the city tolls and we are using a ferry to go 5 minutes across the water.

It is totally unjust to continually increase the ferry fees, no one else in our LGA has fees imposed on them and their families to access their homes.

How does the increasing ferry fees align with the Council's strategies to provide effective and efficient services to the community, and manage assets so that current and future community needs can be met in an affordable way?

The ferry service is operated at a cost to Council each year. Prior to 2023-24 it cost more than \$800,000 per year.

Council resolved in 2023 to progressively reduce the operating loss of the ferry service. It also resolved to fund the ongoing increased Hibbard Ferry operating hours (slightly earlier start in the morning and later finish in the evening Mon-Fri) through an increase to fares. Increases were made for almost all ferry fares in 2023-24. This was in line with the report to Council and decision of Council.

Until 2023-24, no increases to resident concessional fares had occurred since 2015. This was despite operating costs increasing. Residents of the Port Macquarie-Hastings LGA receive significant reductions from the full fare through these concessions.

For 2024-25, fare increases (typically in the order of CPI) are outlined in the Fees and Charges. The increases are expected each year. This is to ensure the rising operating costs are at least covered through user charges. Lower value transactions received at the ferry need to round to the nearest dollar for cash handling purposes. This means the increase may be lower or higher than the CPI in that year.

The fare was increased from \$10 to \$15 in 2023-24. This was to improve relativity between the fares on offer. The proposed fare for resident car/utility weekly tickets is \$16. This is a \$1 increase from the 2023-24 fare. The proposed fare for resident weekly tickets is just above \$1 per trip if returning on the ferry each day over the week.

We are continuing to advocate our position on ferry services strongly with the NSW Government. Council would like to see the transfer ferry services management to the NSW Government or for Council to receive funding support to reduce the financial burden. There is inequity across NSW as most vehicular ferries are operated by the NSW Government free of charge to users.

Feedback Timeline & Council Process

How is all the feedback collated after the exhibition close date and is there enough time for Councillors to consider the feedback before the June 20 meeting?

We have a process in place to centralise feedback and seek responses from subject matter experts. We hold Councillor briefings throughout the process.

As it proceeds to the Councillors for voting, I'm curious whether the Mayor's casting vote will be counted for these plans?

The casting vote may be used at the discretion of the chairperson where there is an equality of votes on an item. If a casting vote is used it must be counted and it will be used to determine the outcome of the item. Council considered a report at the April 2024 Ordinary Council meeting which provided additional information on the use of the casting vote. This report can be found [here](#).

- Ordinary Council Meeting: 18 April 2024
- Item: 10.06
- Subject: USE OF THE CASTING VOTE

Accessibility

What areas are going to be improved for disabled community?

All our designs are now reviewed from a disability and access perspective. This is so that we can ensure that all community members can enjoy the spaces we develop. An example of an upcoming project is the Tacking Point Accessible walkway. It is out for tender and will be finished this year. This will provide a fully accessible walkway up to the lighthouse.

Will council be looking at bringing back an accessibility committee?

The Council has no plans to bring back the Access Committee. However, we have begun conversations with the local community of people living with a disability about priority issues facing them. It is hoped that a new group, once established, will be able to provide a voice for people living with a disability to Council and other entities.

Roads and traffic

What happened to that Road Planned in 2022 for traffic near the roundabout, never heard anything after that, there was 3 proposed options.

What are we going to do about traffic coming in from the highway? The roundabout at the hospital (and the one at lake road) can't cope as it is. An increase in population will only intensify the issue.

In reference to the Oxley Highway (the Wrights Road and Lake Road intersections): This is a Transport for New South Wales (TfNSW) project. TfNSW undertook consultation with the community in 2021. Further updates on this matter should be directed to TfNSW - [Oxley Highway proposed intersection upgrades | Your Say Transport for NSW](#)

Will there be expansion of Lake Road?

The duplication (widening) of Lake Road between Ocean Drive and Chestnut Road is currently in planning. There is an allocation in the Draft OP 2024-25 to continue the planning and detailed design. As part of this Council will need to continue discussions with National Parks and Wildlife Services (NPWS) regarding the impacts of the widening.

The design will be finalised once the land revocation has been concluded. The full construction of this section is currently unfunded. It will be undertaken in future years subject to funding. It will likely require grant funding from the NSW and Australian governments to support this project.

What is happening with Maria River Road and mitigation drain on Mundays Lane?

We are committed to achieving the sealing of Maria River Road in 2025. We are currently seeking environmental approvals, which are necessary to progress to construction. Early works will include drainage and culvert replacement. Work at the Mundays Lane intersection with Maria River Road will be in line with similar drainage treatment along the works corridor.

Find out more on our [project webpage](#).

Economic Development, Population Growth and Destination Marketing

What's council doing to attract big business to set up here to provide more jobs for the projection in population?

At the forefront of our planning is making sure that we have employment land secured. This needs to be throughout our region. This land needs to be in the appropriate centres right across our region not just in Port Macquarie. The key to attracting big business is contingent on having the right infrastructure. This can be provided by Council or NSW Government investment. We continue advocating strongly to make sure Port Macquarie Hastings Council is considered for these investment opportunities.

Why do we need to grow so much?

Our population is made up of the number of people that are born here, migrate here or leave our LGA. The region is sustained by migration. There are significantly more people coming here than there are leaving. It is forecast that our region will grow by an additional 25,000 people by 2041.

Historically we've grown faster than the forecast that we have worked towards. This is fuelled by more people moving to our region. We need to cater for this and consider where people are going to live and work.

In the light of the Bonza collapse, will there be any petition to government to keep airlines flying in/out of Port? So important to keep us connected.

We continue to closely monitor developments in relation to Bonza. Council will continue to communicate with the community as we learn more about the future of Bonza.

The Port Macquarie airport team regularly engages with airlines regarding opportunities to fly in and out of Port Macquarie. The team will continue to advocate for local services that benefit the community and tourism for our region.

How can local businesses get more involved to help shape the future branding of Port Macquarie, making sure that all different types of businesses get the opportunity to be part of it. Ensuring visitors and locals know there is more to Port than what people already know?

Opportunities for Businesses in Councils Destination Branding

As part of our ongoing efforts to enhance our region's appeal, we introduced our latest destination branding campaign: "Where Time Does Wonders." This initiative aims to elevate our area from just a holiday destination to a vibrant year-round lifestyle hub, offering diverse experiences across the LGA.

Ways Your Business Can Get Involved:

1. Listing on Australian Tourism Data Warehouse (ATDW): By creating a listing on ATDW, your business will gain visibility on our official destination website, portmacquarieinfo.com.au. This exposure will allow potential visitors to discover what your business has to offer.
2. Special Offers via Partnership Program and/or Free guides: We are excited to feature your special offers through the current tourism campaigns partnership program. This is an excellent opportunity to be part of a professional tourism campaign and a platform which showcases your unique offerings and attracts more customers.
3. Visit portmacquarieinfo.com.au and sign up for our e-newsletters to stay informed about these opportunities and other ways to be featured. Together we can make our region a must-visit lifestyle destination.

Footpaths & Cycle Paths

Are we getting a Cycle way along the full length of Koala St? Desperately needed for people to ride bikes safely to work, school and parks.

We are currently completing the Walking and Cycling Review to consider the priority needs for Active transport (walking and cycling) across the LGA. This will inform the prioritisation of active transport infrastructure. Please see [Walking and Cycling Review](#) for more information.

How many kilometres of pathway did you install last year?

In terms of our path network, it is approximately 228km. These paths represent about 1.3% of the network. Note - this does not include new pathways from developments.

Footpaths	Status	Length (m)	Area (m ²)
Stewart St	Completed	110	
Bonny Hills	Completed	244	
Oxley Highway	Completed	588	
Pacific Drive	Completed	635	
Lake Road	Completed	404	

B2B D3	Under construction (nearing completion)	410	
Owen/Burrawan Streets	Completed	450	690
Roma Street/Bangalay Drive	Completed	100	
		2941	

When will the school-to-school pathway in Laurieton be complete?

This project is in the current Operational Plan 2023-24 and will carry through to the coming OP2024-25. This is for detailed design of missing sections (see pages 109 and 169 in the Draft OP2024-25).

The construction of these works is unfunded. As part of the detailed design, we will be seeking environmental approvals to have the projects ready for construction. We will likely seek grant funding for these works in future years and consider it within Council's future Operational Plans.

Lake Cathie requires footpaths urgently especially Ocean Drive. Ocean drive is a hazard. A safe pathway on the main road would allow residents to safely walk/shop and have an active lifestyle. A lot of development approved here without investing it back into Lake Cathie. Can you let us know if this is proposed?

Can we get a foot/cycle path from start of Thrumster St down John Oxley Drive to Sovereign Place Shopping Centre as it's dangerous walking on side of the road?

This is being considered in the Walking and Cycling Review. The review saw consultation undertaken with community through many workshops, including Lake Cathie.

Please see the [Walking and Cycling Review](#) for more information.

Once completed, works will be prioritised and funding sought for priority projects.

We are also undertaking Thrumster/Sancrox/Fernbank traffic study to consider the road network and wider connectivity. This includes considering the upgrade of Thrumster Street. This upgrade is currently included in our Area 13 (Thrumster) Contributions plan and this investigation work will inform the final design of these works, including path connectivity.

Is there a plan for safer cycling path from Bonny Hills to Port Macquarie along the length of Ocean Drive. It is often precarious driving with a peloton of pedallers.

A Walking and Cycling review is being concluded. We understand this is a priority from initial feedback. As part of the Integrated Transport Plan, we are also considering the wider road connectivity between our town centres, including Ocean Drive. We are also looking at the road profile in this area, including safe cycling opportunities and road widening. The ITP will go on public exhibition in the coming months.

Can PMHC work with NSW Nat Parks to extend the Googik track, an incredible asset.

We are actively working with National Parks and Wildlife Services on the Googik track design and other projects such as the Lake Road Upgrade and Lighthouse Road Upgrade.

The Integrated Transport Plan will consider connectivity in this area, including the Googik track areas surrounding the Health and Education Precinct (HEP) area and the Cathie straight, as well as the walking and cycling review. We expect a draft of these documents to go to public exhibition in the coming months.

Can we get more dog beaches down in the Camden Haven?

We did a review of our dog beaches a couple of years ago, where we looked at what could be possible in the Camden Haven from a dog beach perspective. It's quite limited due to the number of National Parks down there.

We considered South Beach, however, accessibility and community engagement did not support this. We will continue to look at more opportunities in the Camden Haven, whether that's dog beaches or dog parks. At this point in time we have not identified another site.

Water and Wastewater

Will the ocean outfall for the Camden Haven sewage be extended into the ocean and not left on the beach?

Yes. The intent is that a new ocean outfall will extend into the ocean. Detailed planning work and investigations will be undertaken. This is to understand the ocean currents and seabed as you extend from the beach. These actions are listed on page 118 Camden Haven WWTP – Effluent Outfall (Reference WAE 06) in the Draft OP 2024-25.

Lake Cathie

Can we just open Lake Cathie up for good and take all the sand out instead of a bucket load don't see the point in spending all the money on a band aid when the money spent on it could have already been solved.

Lake Cathie operates under a standard operating procedure that looks at identifying several triggers that we need to hit when Council manages and mitigates flood inundation risk in Lake Cathie.

The intermittent open and close of the lagoon is to manage this system from a flood mitigation perspective. This is so we don't inundate our sewer system and inundate low-lying properties.

We have once reached our 1.6 metre level - which is the trigger that enables us to look at a berm scrape.

The idea is to scrape the top of the berm to remove sand. This will allow the water higher than 1.6 to slowly, go out to the ocean.