

WHAT WE HEARD

DRAFT ABP 2026/27 AND
DRAFT LTFP 2027-2036

COMMUNITY CONSULTATION REPORT

Public Consultation Overview

Public consultation gives councils a direct line to community priorities, helping inform decisions that are practical, balanced and locally relevant.

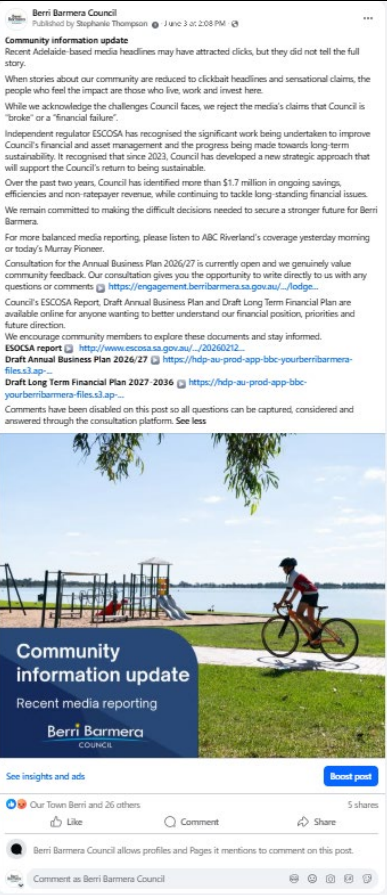
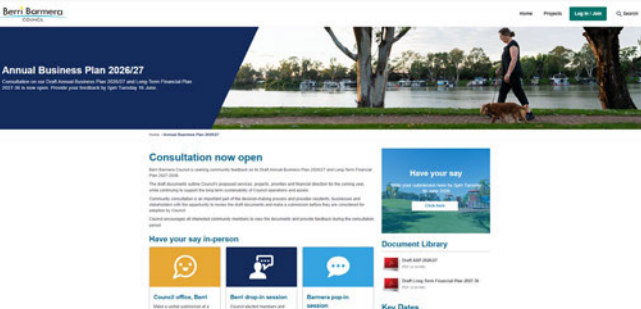
Community consultation is important because it builds trust and transparency, showing locals how their views shape policies, services and long-term planning. Strong consultation leads to better outcomes by reducing unintended impacts and strengthening community support for decisions.

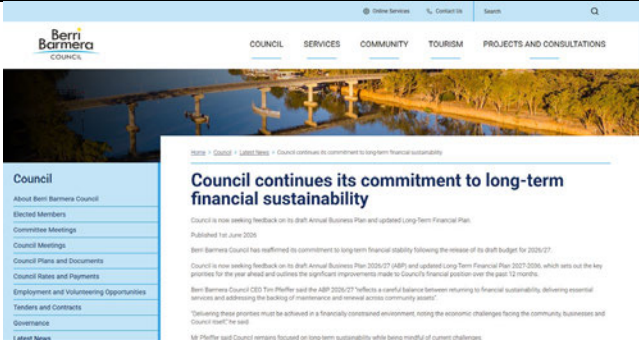
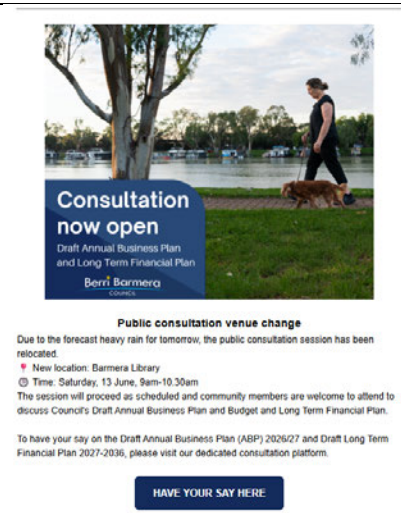
Consultation Summary

In May 2026, Council endorsed public consultation to take place for the public consultation of the Draft Annual Business Plan 2026/27 and Draft Long Term Financial Plan 2027-2036. Consultation commenced on 27 May and concluded on 16 June.

Communication Methods

Platform	Content	Reach/Engagement
Murray Pioneer advertisement 27 May 2026	 Berri Baramba COUNCIL Public Consultation Council is inviting feedback from the community on the following documents: • Draft Annual Business Plan 2026/27 • Draft Long Term Financial Plan 2027-2036 Copies of the draft plans are available at Council's main office and both Berri and Baramba libraries or via Council's website (engagement.berribaramba.sa.gov.au/annual-business-plan-202627). Council values feedback and there are several ways to provide input. Pop-up sessions • Riverland Central Plaza, Thursday 11 June, 10am to 11.30am • Baramba lake front near the yacht club, Saturday 13 June, 9am to 10.30am Public meeting Verbal submissions may be made at the June 9 2026 Special Council meeting, between 5.30pm and 6.30pm. At this meeting, members of the public may ask questions and make submissions in relation to the Draft Annual Business Plan and Budget 2026/27. Each speaker will be allocated a maximum of 5 minutes to make their submission. If you wish to make a verbal submission to Council, you must register by calling (08) 8582 1922. In writing Submissions may be made in writing to the Council and must be received before 5pm, Tuesday 16 June 2026 by post, email (bbc@bbc.sa.gov.au) or in person. Attention: Submission – Draft ABP Mr Tim Pfeiffer Chief Executive Officer Berri Baramba Council PO Box 229 Berri SA 5345 Tim Pfeiffer Chief Executive Officer Contact us for more information (08) 8582 1922 bbc@bbc.sa.gov.au	

Facebook post 27 May 2026		3,200 views 15 interactions 25 link clicks
Facebook post June 3		12,400 views 34 interactions 43 link clicks
Consultation Page 27 May – 16 June		308 views 6 contributions

Media release Sent to local media and published to council's website on 1 June 2026		
E-news inclusion 12 June		Sent to 706 contacts

Engagement Methods

- Verbal submissions at Council public meeting on Tuesday 9 June
- Informal submissions at Berri pop-up session on Thursday 11 June
- Informal submissions at Barmera pop-up session on Saturday 13 June
- Online submissions via Council's dedicated public consultation platform
- Email/written submissions

Consultation submissions

Council received 20 official submissions through a range of channels including online submissions, written submissions, email correspondence, public information sessions and direct conversations with community members.

Feedback was received from residents across the district and reflected a range of perspectives on the Draft Annual Business Plan and Long Term Financial Plan.

Key Themes We Heard

Financial Sustainability, Rates and Affordability

- Significant concern was expressed about the proposed rate increase and the cumulative impact of ongoing rate rises during a period of cost-of-living pressures.
- Many respondents questioned whether rate increases are equitable compared to neighbouring councils and raised concerns about affordability for pensioners, retirees, first-home buyers and low-income households.
- Some community members felt ratepayers should not bear the full cost of addressing historical financial and asset management issues.

Financial Transparency and Communication

- Many participants sought clearer and more accessible information about Council's financial position, including the reasons for proposed rate increases, historical financial challenges and planned recovery measures.
- Requests were made for greater transparency around staffing costs, operational efficiencies, savings achieved, debt levels, borrowing, procurement practices and long-term financial planning assumptions.
- Several respondents indicated they found the Annual Business Plan and Long Term Financial Plan difficult to understand and would welcome simplified explanations.

Cost Savings and Organisational Efficiency

- Community members encouraged Council to further investigate opportunities to reduce expenditure before increasing rates.
- Suggestions included reviewing staffing levels, operational practices, contractor arrangements, procurement processes and alternative work arrangements to improve efficiency.
- Some respondents requested more information about efficiency measures already implemented and the financial benefits achieved.

Asset Maintenance and Infrastructure

- Feedback highlighted concerns about the condition and maintenance of local infrastructure, including roads, footpaths, kerbing, irrigation systems and riverfront facilities.
- Residents emphasised the importance of maintaining existing assets and ensuring infrastructure investment is prioritised effectively.
- Questions were raised regarding project delivery timeframes and the management of carry-over projects.

Community Growth, Economic Development and Tourism

- Some participants expressed concern about local economic activity, vacant shopfronts and the need to attract residents, businesses and visitors.

- Suggestions included supporting local business development, encouraging innovative opportunities and pursuing initiatives that strengthen the area's appeal and population growth.

Environmental and Streetscape Improvements

- Community members identified opportunities to increase street tree planting, greening and shading across towns.
- Feedback also included concerns about tree management, species selection and the design of public spaces to improve amenity and reduce urban heat.

Governance, Accountability and Future Planning

- Respondents sought reassurance that lessons have been learned from past financial and asset management challenges.
- There was strong interest in understanding how Council is strengthening governance, asset management, grant seeking and long-term financial sustainability.
- Several community members encouraged Council to continue advocating for external funding opportunities and to explore innovative approaches to reducing the financial burden on ratepayers.

Community Engagement

- Participants generally valued opportunities to engage directly with Council through information sessions and consultation activities.
- Feedback highlighted the importance of early, open and ongoing communication about significant financial and strategic decisions.

For a list of online, written and pop-up submissions, please see Appendix 1.

For a summary of the verbal submissions made at the Special Meeting of Council on Tuesday 9 June, please see Appendix 2.

Closing the loop

Following Council's adoption of the consultation material and Annual Business Plan 2026/27 and Long Term Financial Plan 2027-2036, Council staff will respond to those who made a written submission.

This is an important part of the consultation process to ensure community members know they are being heard and feel confident in Council's consultation process.

Submissions

Name of staff member or Elected Member who received the submission	Name of community member	Source (Online form, email, verbal submission, attendance at pop-up session, etc.)	Feedback/feedback summary	Does this require council response or action? If so, list the action to be taken.
Stephanie Thompson	[REDACTED]	Online submission	I was very disappointed to read about the financial condition of our council and can't believe it has occurred as result of river flooding. Also to impact more on rate payers we now face another rate rise way above CPI. I tried to read your financial plan but found it too heavy going and would like to suggest council simplify this report for readers to fully understand what is going on with the rates we pay. No where do I see costs incurred at top level that being admin staff. Is the council top heavy in this area? Are the paid employees meeting the commitments of their jobs and working efficiently.? Also who pays for council cars used? I plan to be at Barmera info session, and hope it's not raining as Barmera people are being expected to brave the elements I note. Maybe we could gather in the Recreation Centre - it is a community facility.	Tim and Mayor Winnall met with [REDACTED] on 5/6/26. Response: Thank you for taking the time to review the Draft Annual Business Plan and Budget and Long Term Financial Plan, and for providing your feedback. Council acknowledges community concerns regarding its financial position and the proposed rate increase. Council's current financial position reflects a range of factors, including increasing operating costs, asset renewal requirements and the need to address issues identified through external reviews

				of Council's financial and asset management practices. Council recognises that financial documents can be challenging to navigate and will consider opportunities to improve the accessibility and presentation of financial information in future consultation materials. Information relating to employee costs is included within the budget documents and forms part of Council's overall operating expenditure. Council regularly reviews its organisational structure, staffing levels and service delivery to ensure resources are used effectively and efficiently. Council-owned vehicles are funded through Council's operational budgets and are allocated in accordance with organisational requirements and relevant policies. Amendment to plan: Council staff have worked hard to find additional savings and revenue (such as additional temporary water trade). This will reduce the average residential rate increase to 7.5%.
Stephanie Thompson		Online submission	As a reasonably young male who has lived in Berri his entire life and I now have a little one of my own, I can 100 % say the town does not have anything to	Thank you for sharing your perspective and for taking the time

			make it stand out, your main tourism point is the river but that's nothing special in this region. When a town has more and more empty shop fronts, It'll only lead to a loss of interest. More support for local business and taking "risky" chances on unique business ideas would definitely see an increase in foot traffic through the town.	to provide feedback as a long-term resident. Council acknowledges the importance of creating vibrant town centres, supporting local businesses and ensuring our communities remain attractive places to live, work and visit. We recognise concerns regarding vacant shopfronts and the challenges facing regional businesses, which are influenced by a range of economic and market factors. We will continue to work with regional partners, business groups and other levels of government to support economic development opportunities where possible. Amendment to plan: No change required
Stephanie Thompson		Online submission	Cannot Berri Barmera Council come up with solutions to get themselves out of debt without expecting rate payers to foot the bill. Every year our rates consistently have increased, even though we are already the most expensive Council rates in the region. More affluent households in Adelaide are paying less than half the amount we are expected to pay and yet residents are privy to greater services. Eg Bowden Brompton rates are less than half the price I am expected to pay for a similar priced house. Are you seriously going to expect us to once again pay more even though it's evident that the community is already struggling with the cost of	Thank you for taking the time to provide your feedback. Council acknowledges community concerns regarding the proposed rate increase and the impact that rising costs are having on households. We recognise that many residents are facing cost-of-living pressures and that any increase in rates is significant for those managing household budgets.

			living expenses. Perhaps less passion projects like spend money telling me how to use my bins and making films and put that funding into reducing my rates. As a Council you are putting more financial pressures on the community and not being responsive to community needs. Yes recent headlines were clickbait then again my city colleagues cannot believe how much I am paying per year compared to them and how expensive Berri rates are and the lack of services they receive that we don't. I think it's truly time to stop just expecting the rate payers to foot the bill. I am seriously hoping this years rates are not going up again!	Council has considered a range of measures to improve its long-term financial sustainability and reduce expenditure where possible. The proposed rate increase forms part of a broader strategy to address ongoing financial challenges, maintain essential services and renew ageing infrastructure. While comparisons with other councils are understandable, direct comparisons can be difficult due to differences in the services provided, the size of the area managed and the infrastructure maintained. Unlike many metropolitan councils, Berri Barmera Council is responsible for operating and maintaining its own Community Wastewater Management System, which represents a significant ongoing cost. Council also manages a large rural road network and extensive community infrastructure across a geographically dispersed area. For context, City of Onkaparinga has approximately 75,500 dwellings to share the cost of its community services and infrastructure, while Berri Barmera Council has 5,250.
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				Council continues to review its operations, staffing, service levels and expenditure to ensure resources are being used effectively and efficiently. Your comments regarding affordability, service delivery, community priorities and the proposed rate increase have been noted and will be considered as part of Council's decision-making process. Amendment to plan: Council staff have worked hard to find additional savings and revenue (such as additional temporary water trade). This will reduce the average residential rate increase to 7.5%.
Stephanie Thompson		Online submission	The current plan looks to be increasing rates until 2030. Expecting rate payers to pick up the shortfall in this business plan is pricing new home owners out of the equation whilst causing financial hardships to existing rate payers especially pensioners, those on Centrelink and self funded retirees. Any increase in times of a financial hardship and crisis is not acceptable in a community that talks about let's make Berri great? How great is it to add greater financial pressures to an already stressed community. Our rates are not equitable with our regional peers being Renmark and Loxton. Both these councils have rates at a much lower rate than Berri Barmera. Perhaps a solution is to look how these communities provide the services they do without increasing the rate	As above - same submitter

			payers cost by 8.7 per cent. I strongly believe that the intended rate increase is not acceptable and hope that Council starts to look at this through the eyes of the community and families not through the lens of making a budget balance.	
Stephanie Thompson		Online submission	Council rates are way too much for a town that has nothing going for it. We don't even have proper foot paths. Trees in my street making a mess in my yard.	Invite submitter to meet with staff to discuss specific concerns. Amendment to plan: Council staff have worked hard to find additional savings and revenue (such as additional temporary water trade). This will reduce the average residential rate increase to 7.5%.
Stephanie Thompson		Online submission	No rate rises. We already pay the highest rates in the Riverland. Work out your budgeting.	Council acknowledges your concern regarding the proposed rate increase and the view that Council should seek alternative ways to manage its budget. The Draft Annual Business Plan and Budget and Long Term Financial Plan have been developed in response to Council's financial sustainability challenges, increasing operating costs and the need to maintain and renew community assets and infrastructure. Council has undertaken an extensive financial review and planning to identify opportunities for efficiencies and cost savings while continuing to

				provide essential services to the community. Your feedback regarding the proposed rate increase has been noted and will be considered as part of Council's deliberations before adoption of the final budget and plans. Amendment to plan: Council staff have worked hard to find additional savings and revenue (such as additional temporary water trade). This will reduce the average residential rate increase to 7.5%.
Tony Jordan		Popup Session Berri 11/06/2026	This gentleman was on Council when the Wilson Street office was built. He wanted to know why the high rate rise, that we should be running like a business with CPI rises only, suggested that rubbish bins are placed on one side of road so truck only does one pass for efficiency, complaint regarding Corney Street adjacent Monash Club, poor footpath on south side, unsafe conditions	Travis to contact submitter regarding footpath complaint. Amendment to plan: No amendment required.
Tony Jordan		Popup Session Berri 11/06/2026	Complaint about his road, lives on far north end, requests his road (approx 400 metres) to be graded as it only gets done once per year. Verified, this road looks like an access track, but I confirm it is formally a road reserve, just has limited traffic to No 295.	Travis to contact submitter and to grade after next rain. Amendment to plan: No amendment required.
Tony Jordan		Popup Session Berri 11/06/2026	Complaint about the removal of the Berri riverfront pontoon, man expressed that he and his wife cannot utilise the ladders that gain access to the original solid wharf as its too high.	Explained background, reasons why removal occurring, and that any replacement would need to be grant funded during the budget

				repair position Council is in. No further action. Amendment to plan: No amendment required.
Tony Jordan		Popup Session Berri 11/06/2026	Concerned about Old Sturt Highway condition, adjacent the Bunnings area, very poor state, I explained it is a DIT road and Council has advocated for this section to have remedial work undertaken.	I & O to pass on complaint to DIT and indicate that complaint was received through drop -in session. Amendment to plan: No amendment required.
Alex Cannon-Leyson		Popup Session Berri 11/06/2026 Email	Wanted to pass on her cost saving suggestion of outdoor crews working a 4-day week (9.5 / 10 hr days x 4). There have been previous cases where this has been shown to reduce site travel costs and equipment set up times. Council needs to focus more on greening and shading – especially on verges and streets. Provided photos of newly laid paths and verges with no trees or shading, creating heat and unattractive streets. Called for Council to join other committees with this focus. As it is, our outdoor crew currently operate on a 9-day fortnight (event requirements an exception) and construction does an 8-day fortnight.	AC drafting a response and will partner with TJ on how we can address this in the future. Amendment to plan: No amendment required.
Alex Cannon-Leyson		Popup Session Berri 11/06/2026	Asked for copies of the LTFP and ABP to be sent to her email with a link to online consultation.	AC has emailed to Amendment to plan: No amendment required.
Alex Cannon-Leyson		Popup Session Berri 11/06/2026	Unhappy about the delays in Bruno Bay and wants an update on the tender process and timelines for construction. Raised concerns about the position of	AC is following up with Travis and will provide a response to Mr Balshaw.

			toilet and wants to know why it will be in the middle of the car park. Also concerned about his extremely deteriorated kerbing on Trussel Street in Cobdogla.	Amendment to plan: No amendment required.
Alex Cannon-Leyson		Popup Session Berri 11/06/2026	Concerned about irrigation leaking/spurting at the rear of Berri Regional Senior College, old library entry on Kay Avenue. The water creates flash flooding of the road and she has reported it to Council many times over the last 2 years. Photos and video provided via phone.	AC is following up with Council's maintenance team and will keep Irene updated on the progress of the repairs. Amendment to plan: No amendment required.
Tim Pfeiffer		Email	Summary: An anonymous submission raises concerns about Berri Barmera Council's financial transparency and accountability. It questions whether community input into the Annual Business Plan is meaningful, citing significant gaps between budgeted and audited deficits. The submission highlights growing carry-over projects, increasing costs, and doubts about timely delivery of projects. It also raises concerns about how wages are reported relative to rates, suggesting the burden on ratepayers may be understated. Further questions focus on depreciation practices, service charges, and the accuracy of long-term financial planning. Inconsistent debt reporting is also noted. Overall, the submission calls for clearer, more accessible financial information to support informed decision-making and maintain community confidence. See Appendix 3 for full letter	At the time of agenda publication, Council administration were still drafting a response to the lengthy and multi-questioned submission. Amendment to plan: Council staff have worked hard to find additional savings and revenue (such as additional temporary water trade). This will reduce the average residential rate increase to 7.5%.
Mayor Winnall		Email	I hope the public meeting at the Barmera Library was a successful outreach. Great idea to address community concerns in community events in community facing environments.	Council thanks the submitter for their feedback. Amendment to plan: No amendment required.

Tim Pfeiffer		Popup Session Berri 11/06/2026	Expressed concerns in regard to street tree management and species selection. Highlighted issues with fully bituminising footpaths, with only small cut outs for street trees. Presented an idea regarding a woody meadow that had been trialed in Murray Bridge.	Amendment to plan: No amendment required.
Tim Pfeiffer		Popup Session Berri 11/06/2026	Concerns in regard to high rate increase	Amendment to plan: Council staff have worked hard to find additional savings and revenue (such as additional temporary water trade). This will reduce the average residential rate increase to 7.5%.
Tim Pfeiffer		Popup Session Barmera 13/06/2026	Has read the strategic plan and Annual Business Plan. Understands the reason for needing to increase rates at the current level and is enthusiastic to see residential population increases. Discussion about wine industry challenges. Pleased to hear about the leadership position that Council has been taking with State/Federal Governments in regard to wine industry issues.	Amendment to plan: No amendment required.



MINUTES

of Special Meeting of Council held on

Tuesday 9 June 2026,

commencing at 5:30 PM

in the Berri Barmera Council Office,

5 Riverview Drive, Berri

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To be confirmed

1 **Present:**

Elected Members:

Mayor Ella Winnall, Cr Trevor Scott, Cr Adrian Little, Cr Ian Schlein and Cr Bruce Richardson

Officers:

Mr Tim Pfeiffer, Chief Executive Officer, Mr Tony Jordan, General Manager Infrastructure, Environment and Regulatory Services, Mrs Alex Cannon-Leyson General Manager Corporate and Community, Mrs Cathy LeMaistre, Governance Officer, Mrs Stephanie Thompson, Communication and Engagement Officer.

Observers:

Annette Martin (Consultant – LGiQ) via teams

2 **Apologies:**

Cr David Waterman and Cr Collis Marrett

3 **Draft Annual Business Plan and Budget:**

This Special Meeting of Council will be for one hour and is specifically for Berri Baramba Council to hear questions and submissions from the public, in line with the requirements of Section 123 (4)(a) of the *Local Government Act 1999*.

Whilst Council is undertaking public consultation on a range of matters at the moment, this one-hour session tonight is specifically for and limited to discussion regarding the 2026/2027 Annual Business Plan, as per the legislation.

Notes will be taken from the community members' questions and submissions this evening and presented back to Council (along with all other public consultation content) at the Special Council Meeting on 18 June 2026.

In order to be fair and equitable with time allocations for public submissions this evening, Council called for the public to register in order to provide five-minute submissions. Prior to this meeting there were 2 registrations to speak. Once those that have registered have spoken, if time permits the Mayor will open up to any additional individuals in the gallery who have not spoken but may wish to do so.

4 **Submissions:**

Mr M from Baramba:

- Advised that the newspaper article around the ESCOSA report started his interest in Council's ABP.
- After reading the ESCOSA report he had many questions/statements:
 - He felt that there was a lack of communication and details around what has occurred.

- Believes that Council has not communicated why the rate increase is necessary and have not provided any alternatives.
- Council stated they had made \$1.7m in savings through efficiencies and non-rate payer revenue – how? What cost cuttings were done, how much has that saved rate payers?
- Grants and other revenue is not savings – what activities have been done to reduce rate increases?
- The impression he has is that a lot of the issues have arisen from previous financial mismanagement, this is not the ratepayer's issue and why they should have to pay.
- ESCOSA report talked about fiscal discipline and improved procurement. These statements are not helpful – what has actually been done? What was the old process, what went wrong, what is the new process, why is the new process better and how much savings will this generate.
- Borrowings for capital expenses – what are those expenses, why are they essential, can they be deferred, are there cheaper alternatives?
- Long term financial plan – believe this is unreliable, too many assumptions and forecasts. Only confident for 1-2 years with operating deficit. Capital expenditure increases at an alarming rate.
- Contracts need to be reviewed to ensure they are value for money.
- Tenders – are there clauses such as social factors that deter others from tendering?
- The community impression is that council is asking ratepayers to bail them out for past mismanagement.
- Community needs to be well informed about what has been found, what council are doing about it and how this affects the community.
- Council need to look at whether the increase is necessary and what other alternatives are available.

MOTION: (OMC 130/26)

That Council suspend standing orders to allow for general conversation.

Cr Trevor Scott/Cr Ian Schlein

CARRIED

5. Community Comments

This is a summary in nature of the comments made:

- The Business Plan reads more like a brochure. What has Council done to reduce costs base? We accept historical errors in asset management, what went wrong and how can it be fixed? If this is a burden, what has Council done to limit the burden?

Response:

- Council made a saving of \$1.2m approximately 12 months ago. Can advise that over the past year there has been an additional \$200K in savings and \$300K in non-rate revenue. The non-rate revenue has come from a deal executed in relation to trade wastewater with Vinarchy.
- The ESCOSA report also stated that Council also prioritized expenditure on new and upgraded assets over expenditure on asset renewal.
- That Council failed to update the AMPs and depreciation expenses regularly over the Historical Period, thereby failing to provide the basis of adequately plan for its future asset renewal requirements.
- The Council operated unsustainably over the historical period.
- The Council was not able to manage its assets effectively over the historical period because its Asset Management Plans have not been updated regularly to reflect the cost of replacing these assets.
- The current term of Council has worked on up-dating Asset Management Plans, valuations and depreciations. The Commission has commended us for doing this work. This has been challenging and increasing rates is the last thing we do, not the first. We have tightened our belts over the last 12-18 months. Ultimately if we do not manage our assets appropriately, we will get further and further behind and the cost to the community will increase. We need to keep on top of our assets. We are borrowing to catch up on our renewals – we are building almost nothing new, unless we receive grant funding.
- From ABP looks like 80% goes on staff wages, what is Council doing to minimise staff.

Response:

- Staff expenditure is 24% of the budget and we undertook Enterprise Bargaining last year and staff increases are by CPI. A number of positions have been vacant for a while and have not been replaced; we have found other ways to deliver services. Currently we do not have an Environmental Health Officer or a Planner, and we use contractors for this – which at this time is financially advantageous.

- Ultimately, we want economic development to assist with rates – more housing = more population = lower rates.
- Murray Bridge Council found that staff sick leave and long service leave were not accounted for – has Council got this, correct?

Response:

- Yes
- Council offices are a good example of asset management failure.

Response:

- A good analogy for asset management failure is if council didn't service the family car and eventually the engine blew up. Our Wilson Street offices have been manifesting issues for many years which have caused us to move out and spend money to fix issues like aging pipes, roof repairs, storm water. The roof at the council office has leaked for over 20 years, the air conditioner failed every summer, there are a lot of things that have accumulated over many years that caused that asset to fail.
- The community needs to be told at an early stage, so we don't have headlines. The increases are ongoing and the picture of council getting new offices is misinformation. People want our community to grow and have services – we need explanations on what we are paying for.

Response:

- Berri Barmera Council is not unique in its issues with asset management. We are however doing what we can to ensure we have future services for our community. There are other councils who are having to consider closing roads as they are unable to deal with the burden and cost of repairs. They have valuable community infrastructure they cannot maintain and are having to strike off their asset registers. Council has a lot of work to do in the next 5 years. We have a long term financial plan, but unless we stick to it, we may fall into an unsustainable area. We will need to make hard decisions and work our way through scenarios to get our community out of debt.
- Didn't Council have an infrastructure manager in the past?

Response:

- Yes, they also had a CEO, other Managers and Audit and Risk Committee who consider assets. It wasn't until the last two years when we started pulling at threads that we were able to see the gravity of the situation. We are happy to sit down and go through every decision and mistake that has been made in the past and unpick all what we have done to resolve these issues.

- Have you considered amalgamation? We have a population of 30,000 with 3 councils.

Response:

- When ESCOSA report landed, we sought clarification on it. ESCOSA have 3 dials in the report – past, current and future. BBC were classified as unsustainable in all three categories. In the report, ESCOSA have written if Council sticks with its plan, they will return to being sustainable. We must question that; we have to look at the strategic direction and pathway forward. There are conflicting pieces of advice.
- Following the ESCOSA report there was a meeting with the boundary commission to understand the steps required for boundary changes. From that conversation, I can advise that the Gawler Council investigated a boundary realignment (not an amalgamation), The council have been in this process now for 6 years. They have spent over \$150K on consultants to do an independent review and the Boundary Commission's investigation. The cost for staff, consultants, consultation etc is over \$500K. The state government decide our boundaries and the Minister did not approve it. So 6 years and \$500K for no change. We have taken the time to see what is involved and we are happy to talk about it. In the interim, we are collaborating with the other councils to find efficiencies, share contracts and share costs.
- We are not scared to have the conversation, there needs to be an understanding of what the cost savings and the community impact would be, and this is what an investigation would be able to identify.
- Last year the increase for vacant land wasn't even picked up by the media. They received an increase of 120%. Council reports didn't highlight the fact.

Response:

- We cannot force the media on what they write. We didn't shy away from the vacant land increase it was in all our minutes and agendas. The reason for the vacant land increase was to encourage those sitting on vacant land to develop so that we have more residential properties – which brings in more rates – which then spread the rate load. If people are sitting on land and can't develop it, sell it and get developers in for economic benefit of the community. We want residential development to occur; we need to build our population.

- When setting the rates, do you take into consideration that you are pricing people out of owning property? People who don't work, have owned their own homes for decades cannot afford rate rises and are given limited choices.

Response:

- Absolutely. We would love to be recommending increasing by CPI only. We have thrown the challenge to all staff to find savings – we have asked them to leave no stone unturned. We are hoping that it won't be the full 8.7% and will be slightly lower due to additional savings found in the last few weeks.
- A large portion of our community is on a fixed income and are facing financial pressures. What we can do to alleviate the pressure is to increase the pie of ratepayers by chasing residential growth. We have to make decisions on rebates, fee waivers, and question which community organisations can afford rent. We have very tricky decisions to make – organisations are being asked to pay more that they had previously, like the Girl Guides, but ultimately it is the community paying for those services - these decisions are not easy.
- A lot of people are not up with their rates and you are pricing us out of the market.

Response:

- Some of us are on fixed incomes and we have walked out of the chamber in tears through decisions we have had to make . We have had to make tough calls, and it hurts. We have had to make a call on information and think of the broader scale. Living on pension is impossible, we feel and hear what you are saying. We are reducing our expenses, and staff are trying to correct problems so that we as a community have a future.
- Do you have an in-house committee that looks at Asset Management Plans?

Response:

- We have an audit and risk committee that covers the functions of that committee. When we reviewed our Asset Management Plans, we found that we didn't have the quality of data required, so we went out and found data, and went to engineers. Even some of the information produced by the engineers was incorrect we rejected this and now have faith in the data we have, and the documentation presented.
- In addition to council meetings, council also has two committees the Land, Property, Grants and Awards and the Growth, Infrastructure, Strategy and Planning Committee. These committees meet every two months.

- With regard to staff turnover, it is hard to find people for the long haul, this is not an easy job and even more so in this environment. People are putting in massive hours to help, sometimes the media can harm this and jeopardise what we are trying to achieve. We thank the staff for doing the work that they are doing.
- Do we have council's reassurance that they will be more stabilised and be more proactive in the grant space. There is a lot of money out there at we are not accessing, this could make a lot of difference. Would like this to be a priority of Council. Build meaningful partnerships with the community. We are not leveraging and we could be doing better. Need innovative thinking on how we could bring more money into council.

Response:

- We are continuing to do new things and creative with money.

This is the end of the hour, if anyone has any further questions or would like to raise anything else, they can by calling council and happy to meet with them or alternatively provide feedback online or via written submission.

MOTION: (OMC 131/26)

That Council return to standing orders.

Cr Trevor Scott/Cr Bruce Richardson

CARRIED

6. Closure

The meeting closed at 6.30pm

Appendix 3

Berri Barmera Council

CEO Tim Pheiffer

15/06/2026

Having decided not to participate after many years of providing feedback to Council's request for public input into council's Annual Business Plan, a simple question from a rate payer changed my mind.

What is the current debt level of Berri Barmera Council?

The reaction caused by this question has astounded me and the lack of ability to answer in layman's terms 7 days after the question was asked even more so.

These are some questions and some comments which I hope are not found offensive as they are not written to offend.

Budget to Audited Report

Looking through previous budgets the discrepancy to the final actual audited figures are worlds apart. Always in the red by at times several millions. The current budget was presented as a \$1,603,000 deficit is now predicted to be a \$5,047,000 deficit. Is there any point in ratepayers making a submission when the outcome is never achieved?

Carry Over Projects

A couple of years ago in my submission on the ABP I questioned the number of carry over projects. At the time the current CEO agreed that they were far too high and he would personally assure this long-term trend would not continue. If it did, I was well within my rights to question why.

At the time I think the amount of carry over projects was a bit over \$4million. This year I gather they are \$6,547,000.

I guess this is funds that has been raised that didn't need to be. I also noticed that the carry over amounts are not indexed when carried over. Naturally costs are increasing and council believes this is in the region of over 8%.

In a case like the fully funded Lyrup road where the grants have been allocated and the contract let who pays for any over spend on the budget?

Often projects, it appears, do not have the desire from council to complete and after a few years drop off the list killing ratepayer's expectation. Some projects were on the books for years like the Town Hall carpark that was costed at \$25,000 in 2010. Never done.

Should managers be asked to submit budgets for projects that they can complete in the current financial year?

Rates To Wages %

A question from the meeting held on the 9th of June questioned the amount of rates being spent on wages and that it appeared that it was 80%.

This is where I have issues with council's use of figures. The answer was 24% of budget which is correct comparing to total revenue.

I guess when I read the comment that even the State Government spends 50% of general revenue on wages I think the answer needs clarification. The amount of general rates is around \$11/13 million, not provided in the ABP so my calculation from previous years, which is the amount paid by rate payers, the money they have to find. Wages are \$6,762,000 which makes the wages to general rates a higher % than the State Government.

It would appear the ratepayer has more knowledge where their rates are going.

It's reported that some staff positions have been replaced by contractors. As this expenditure shows in another budget line, has the wages budget been reduced by the same amount? Do the cost of the numerous private use vehicles for staff, provision for long service, sick and annual leave come under wages budget line?

Depreciation

As I don't fully understand how this works, I need some clarification.

Depreciation has increased under the current council from the first budget figure of \$3,795,363 to a budgeted amount of \$7,907,000 an increase of \$4,111,637. This I understand has been funded by the rates going from \$14,513,084 to \$17,891,000 or \$3,377,916. Council has also made operational savings of \$1,700,000.

From my understanding assets have to be revalued and then the depreciation recalculated to that amount.

As a ratepayer, I've paid for the asset at the time of building or by the loan repayment and also the depreciation over the life time of the asset. Why am I then expected to keep paying to fund for the replacement which I possibly will never benefit from?

The Berri pontoon is about to be removed. Ratepayers paid for it, paid \$40,000 in depreciation over 25 years, council were paid \$96,229 by the insurance company and now it will be scrapped. What happened to the \$40,000 set aside to replace the asset?

Is there a problem with council underinsuring assets?

How many other assets do council own that would never be replaced if they fail that depreciation is being collected on?

CWMS and Waste Management Charge

Council has previously separated the general rates from the services charges. Is it possible to revert to this?

The Act says that council can only recover the costs using this rating system. Is it possible to put the cost of the waste collection, like has been done with the CWMS, so ratepayers that don't pay for these can easily determine if they are subsidizing these services.

Long Term Financial Plan

Are these completed just to satisfy the regulation?

The 2024 to 2034 plan presented by this council is already millions out. The budgets on a yearly basis are millions out.

What odds will council give me that in 2034/35 they will be debt free and running a surplus budget as their plan indicates.

Debt

There are numerous figures presented in the Audit Committee, Council agendas and the ABP that state the current long term and short term loans. There are also figures showing loans and when they fall due. Apparently, these don't relate to the actual current balances.

If I had my phone I could within a minute report what my balances were. I can't understand why it's difficult to do that with council.

Does the ABP have provision to pay back the \$16,000,000 built into the figures? If the actual amount of borrowing is a fraction of what is showing is there a need to budget for the higher amount.

Why does one ratepayer, who is a councillor, say the debt is \$6.875 million yet if I was asked the same question I would have to go on the figures presented on page 95 of the Audit Committee held on the 12th of May approximately \$11,253,000?

Does council staff think without a line by line budget being presented and debt figures that can't be explained within a week's time frame that councillors are provided with enough information to keep the budget on track?

The usual approach from council is to attack anyone that questions the ABP and as long as I've been involved or followed council "you do better and get on council" is used. As I'm not eligible to stand for the BBC council that approach doesn't work.

I hope the above questions and comments are received without malice towards the writer.

[REDACTED]