

General Council Meeting

Notice is hereby given pursuant to the provisions of the *Local Government Regulation 2012*, that the next Meeting of the Central Highlands Regional Council will be held in the **Council Chambers, 65 Egerton Street, Emerald** on

Wednesday, 12 May 2021
At 9.00am

For the purpose of considering the items included on the Agenda.

Scott Mason
Chief Executive Officer

LATE AGENDA #3



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1. DECISION ACTION

1.1. Extension to due date on second half general rates and charges approx 20 mins

DECISION REPORT

Date: 12 May 2021 Presentation Duration: Approx. 20 mins
To: General Council Meeting
Author: Vicky Coleman, Manager Finance
Authorising Officer: Margaret Gatt, General Manager Corporate Services
File Reference: NA
Presented for: Decision

ATTACHMENTS:

Nil

PURPOSE:

This report seeks council's approval for an extension to the payment due date for the second half general rates to 27 July 2021.

OFFICER RECOMMENDATION:

That Central Highlands Regional Council approve an extension to the due date and discount date for the 2020-21 second half rates and charges notices for all classes of ratepayers to 27 July 2021 in accordance with sections 121(b), 122 and 130(7) to (9) of the Local Government Regulation 2012.

REPORT:

Background

Council issued its second half general rates notices with an effective issue date of 27 March 2021 and a 60 day payment period as approved at its general council meeting on 24 March 2021.

Council have experienced a number of data, system and process issues throughout this process which have resulting in unexpected delays.

Additionally issues were identified in the proofs when return from the printer and this was further impacted by the need to segregate specific notices such as those with supplementary levies, zero values or duplicate notices. Proofs were received back from the printer on 15 April 2021, upon which, further data issues were identified.

A decision was made to retrieve all supplementary notices and associated rates notices for review and prior to being issued to ensure the accuracy of the levies applied.

The background information leading to the current situation has been provided to councillors via multiple briefings over the last few months.

A decision was made to retrieve all supplementary notices and associated rates notices for review and prior to being issued to ensure the accuracy of the levies applied.

The majority of notices (14,681) were mailed out by the 17 April 2021 but due to public holidays, the print house being located in Brisbane and an already extended mail delivery time with Australia Post, notices were not being received by some rate payers until May

Additionally, a number of notices (1,014) required revision and were returned to council for review and re-issuing where necessary. These notices are still being processed but revised notices have been consistently mail out since 19 April 2021 upon completion.

The rates team are still finalising the remaining notices (approx. 350) which should be finalised by the end of May.

Water notices were issued on time and remain due on 27 June 2021 as approved by council on 24 March 2021.

Discussion/Current issue

With the mail out of the final notices taking longer than initially expected, it would be prudent to provide rate payers with clarity on payment expectations by extending the payment due day to one designated date.

To ensure that the remainder of notices still receive the benefit of a 60 day payment period the proposed revised date is 27 July 2021.

Table 1 below provides the key time lines:

Table 1: Key time lines

Notice	Formal Issue Date	Current Approved Due Date	Proposed Due Date
General rates notice	27 March 2021	27 May 2021	27 July 2021

The Local Government Regulations allow changes to made to the discount date under section 130(7) to (9) and the deferral of the payment of rates and charges under section 121(b) and 122.

We have sought legal advice from King & Co that this request for a further extension to the due date is in accordance with the Local Government Regulations.

The Customer Service teams have been briefed on the delay and types of issues being identified and have been provided with the necessary information to assist the majority of ratepayers. Where required, a senior rates officers are contacting impacted ratepayers to provide assurance and advice on their outstanding rates balances.

While a number of issues experienced during this process have been rectified, a number still remain and will be addressed through the upcoming Rates Review Project, which will commence in the second half of 2021.

This project will review system functionality and capability, data integrity, and process enhancements. Additionally, internal policies and work processes will be reviewed to alleviate many of the issued faced during this rate run.

CONSIDERATIONS / IMPLICATIONS:

Corporate/Operational Plan Reference/Policy/Legislation:

- 3. Supporting our Local Economy
- 4. Protecting our People and our Environment
- 5. Leadership and Governance

This report refers to the Local Government Regulation 2012.

Budget/Financial/Resourcing:

Impact to cash flows, including foregone investment returns will be minimal with as many rate payers paying their notices within the original approved 60 day term.

Communication/Engagement:

A notice will be posted on Council’s web page confirming the revised due date of second half rates notices with postings made on social media platforms.

The customer service team are contacting many of the rate payers still waiting to receive notices to advise of the process going forward specifically relating to their rate notices.

Risk Assessment:

Impact to cash flow and financial sustainability has been assessed as low.

The issuing of a final due date will provide clarity to rate payers on the payment terms associated with these notices and the extended time frame should be viewed favourably by the community.

Council debt recovery activities will resume following the revised due date of these notices.

Timings/Deadlines:

As soon as possible to provide clarity to rate payers.

Conflict of Interest Declaration:

Council officers contributing to the preparation and approval of this report have no conflicts of interest to declare.

Human Rights Impact:

The content of this report does not infringe upon *the Human Rights Act 2019*

Alternatives Considered:

	Description	Positives	Negatives
Option 2	Not approve the extension to payment due date	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minor improvement to cash balances for 30 days • Ratepayers experiencing financial hardship can still apply for support through the Financial Hardship Policy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adverse reactions from community due to unclear time lines

- END OF REPORT -