



Southern Downs
REGIONAL COUNCIL

**ATTACHMENTS TO MINUTES
SPECIAL COUNCIL MEETING**

28 FEBRUARY 2017

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PROPOSED
Southern Downs Regional Council
Invasive Pest Control Scheme Policy Outline

Overview

The proposed Scheme will commence in 2017/2018 and introduce a special charge on rateable land when landowners do not meet invasive pest control requirements. The introduction of the special charge is aimed at incentivising and increasing voluntary compliance with invasive pest control requirements. Monies collected via the Scheme will be reinvested directly into new initiatives to improve invasive pest management outcomes in SDRC.

Approximately 5,000 properties will be included in the Scheme. A considerable administrative effort will be required to implement the Scheme, including additional staff and associated resources. It is anticipated the special charges collected will offset the additional resources required.

New Special Charge

- The special charge needs to be sufficiently high so as to act as an incentive for landowners to fulfil their invasive pest control obligations.
- The special charge will be applied as a rate in the dollar, based on land valuation. A minimum charge of \$500 per property will apply. This figure was chosen as it accounts for Council administrative effort in enforcing compliance.
- Land valuation is the preferred charging platform as it is seen as the most equitable. Other options considered such as flat fees and property size were seen as arbitrary, less equitable and therefore open to criticism.
- All rateable land over five hectares will be subject to the Scheme, regardless of rating category or land use. The five hectare threshold was chosen to limit the scope of properties and the subsequent administrative burden, and, as it is considered properties less than five hectares generally have a lower instance of non-compliance than that of properties greater than five hectares. Properties not subject to the Scheme will be dealt with via existing invasive pest compliance processes and may be included in subsequent years' Schemes.
- The special charge will be applied in two rates in the dollar; one for residential (\$0.003) and one for primary production (\$0.005), taking into account primary production valuation concessions. The higher rate set for primary production to offset valuation concessions provides for similar resultant charges for both categories of land, as is done for general rating purposes.
- Section 94 of the *Local Government Act 2009* provides Council with the head of power to levy special rates and charges.
- Section 94 of the *Local Government Regulation 2012* details the process by which Council must levy special rates and charges. An *overall plan* must be prepared that:
 - describes the service, facility or activity; and
 - identifies the rateable land to which the special rates or charges apply; and
 - states the estimated cost of carrying out the overall plan; and
 - states the estimated time for carrying out the overall plan.
- Council must adopt the overall plan before, or at the same time as, Council first resolves to levy the special rates or charges.
- The overall plan will be developed following public consultation on the proposed policy outline.

Administrative Process

- Landowners will first be personally notified of their obligation to participate in the Scheme with the issue of rates notices in July 2017.
- Included with rates notices will be information including:
 - an information notice explaining:
 - what is required of landowners under the Scheme;
 - how penalties (charges) are applied if requirements are not met;
 - how Council will invest monies collected via the Scheme.
 - a *Proposed Works Form* template for completion.
- Landowners will be required to return a completed *Proposed Works Form* within 30 days of the date of the rates notices issue.
- One reminder letter will be sent to those landowners that have not returned completed a *Proposed Works Form* once the 30 day period has passed.
- A register will be maintained to track *Proposed Works Form* received or outstanding, inspections undertaken, and, completed or not approved works.
- Those landowners that do not submit completed *Proposed Works Forms* will be noted in the register for the special charge to be applied later in the financial year when supplementary rates notices issue. The opportunity will be provided to negotiate late submission of *Proposed Works Forms* (subject to completion of agreed works in the current financial year) to avoid the special charge, but no further personalised correspondence will be provided. Print and social media will continue throughout the financial year.
- Pest Management officers will vet the content of *Proposed Works Forms* and commence inspections immediately once *Proposed Works Forms* begin being received.
- There will be a large percentage (perhaps as high as 50%) of landowners that will not be required to undertake any works, due to their past diligence in invasive pest control.
- It is anticipated a percentage of landholders will submit *Proposed Works Forms* fraudulently stating there is no work to be done. Should inspections reveal that to be the case, landowners will be provided the opportunity to submit a revised *Proposed Works Form*.
- All works will be required to be completed by the end of March. (The *Proposed Works Form* vetting process will need to account for and avoid the majority of landowners undertaking to complete their works in March. The timeframe to undertake control will essentially be August to April, which is more than sufficient even after taking account of variables such as seasonal conditions.).
- Finance will be supplied a list of property numbers, by the end of April, identifying the land the special charge is to be applied, where landowners have either:
 - not submitted a completed *Proposed Works Form*;
 - not submitted an approved *Proposed Works Form*;
 - not completed the works stated on their *Proposed Works Form*.
- Supplementary rates notices will issue to those landowners in May.
- It is not reasonable to expect that all 5,000 properties subject to the Scheme will be inspected. It is inevitable that some landowners that do not comply with their invasive pest obligations will escape penalty. Those that may escape penalty would be targeted in subsequent years' Schemes, which may seek to impose a higher financial penalty.

Anticipated Revenue

- Modelling has been undertaken using the proposed rates of \$0.003 and \$0.005 for residential and primary production respectively, applying scenarios of 10%, 20% and 30% non-compliance. The resulting revenue is shown below in Table 1.

Property Types	Number of Properties	Potential Revenue			Anticipated Costs
		10% Default	20% Default	30% Default	
Primary Production	2,294	230,436.25	460,872.50	691,308.75	250,000
Non Primary Production	2,644	154,884.63	309,769.27	464,653.90	
Total	4,938	385,320.88	770,641.77	1,155,962.65	

Table 1

Anticipated Resources

- One additional field officer (and vehicle) and one additional, dedicated administration officer will be required to implement the Scheme. Staff, vehicle and consumables costs such as printing and advertising are not expected to exceed \$250,000. It is reasonable to anticipate a 15% default rate, which would sufficiently account for the additional resources required.
- Council currently has one Warwick and one Stanthorpe based Pest Management Officer. There are three (two Warwick, one Stanthorpe) Pest Control Officers that undertake weed control on Council land.
- It is envisaged one additional full time field officer will be required to work in conjunction with current Pest Management and Control staff to undertake property inspections and determine the list of properties to which the special charge will be applied and therefore the landowners that will receive supplementary rates notices. The field officer would require a dedicated vehicle, office space, IT and overheads.
- The Scheme will, to some extent, replace some of the current workload (property inspections and compliance program) of the two Pest Management Officers. However other duties (such as coordinated wild dog control and planning, externally funded project delivery, provision of private land weed control service, management of wild dog check fence capital and maintenance works, customer request response service and landholder and community group liaison) dictate the officers do not have the capacity to undertake the field and administration work required to deliver the Scheme.
- Similarly, the three Pest Control Officers will have some capacity to assist with inspections while undertaking works on Council land, however it is crucial that the current roadside (and other Council land) weed control program is not diminished. Council will be open to criticism should weed control on its own lands not be comprehensive.
- Council's Planning, Environment and Corporate Services Directorate has three administration officers. There is not currently capacity to provide the level of support required to deliver the Scheme.
- It is envisaged one full time administration officer will be required to undertake administration duties associated with the Scheme. The administration officer would require office space, IT and overheads.
- Anticipated revenue generated by the Scheme is expected to exceed the additional resources required for implementation.
- The *overall plan* must state how Council will invest monies collected via the Scheme. Therefore, consideration needs to be given to how revenue collected over and above the additional resources required to implement the Scheme is to be invested.
- Given the 'surplus' amount is unknown, a prioritised listing of activities for investment is to be included in the overall plan (such as Table 2 below). The number (or extent of some of) the activities that are funded in the subsequent year are determined by the size of the 'surplus'.

Priority	Activity	Indicative Cost
1	Helicopter hire for aerial baiting	\$50K
2	Meat bait for coordinated ground and aerial baiting	\$20K
3	Stanthorpe Dingo Spur Fence electrification	\$100K
4	UTV (side by side vehicle) for property inspections, roadside and private spraying and wild dog fence inspections	\$20K
5	Herbicide spray equipment to improve efficiency of roadside and private lands spraying	\$20K
6	Feral deer population reduction	\$50K
7	Remote IT applications for invasive pests mapping	\$20K
8	Wild dog fence track maintenance works	\$20K
9	Indian myna community trapping	\$10K
10	Killarney Wild Dog Check Fence electrification	\$10K

Table 2

Extension Activities

- Significant effort will need to be directed towards educating the community about the Scheme.
- Media releases will be issued well in advance of the issue of rates notices, supported by social media.
- Officers will facilitate public forums to explain the requirements of the Scheme prior to its commencement.