

## **2025/26 Financial Year**

### **Objects of and Reasons for Proposed Differential Rates and Minimum Payments**

**Council Meeting 22 May 2025**

#### **Introduction**

Through the Local Government Act 1995, Part 6, the Western Australian Parliament has conferred upon local government the power to levy and collect property tax in the form of rates. Property taxes are, with rare exemptions, not fees for service or relate to directly or indirectly an any specific services provided by a local government. Just like income tax they are a just that, a tax; with variations in levels based on an assessment of various principles of taxation.

#### **Overall Objectives**

The purpose of levying rates is to meet a local governments' budget deficiency in each financial year in order to deliver services and facilities as detailed in the Strategic Community Plan, Corporate Business Plan, Asset Management Plan and Long-Term Financial Plan, but also address issues that arise from time to time that have impacts on the Council budget.

Historically, Council has imposed differential rates on the basis of whether land is used for pastoral purposes, mining or mineral prospecting and exploration as it considers that under the general principles of taxation differential rating this is more equitable than a flat rate. It is essential for equity reasons to ensure that differential rating proposals are highly equitable amongst ratepayer groupings, which in themselves are diverse and optimise total rate yields in a legally compliant manner.

Council's overall objective is to balance these complex issues and levy property rates in a fair and equitable manner within Council's overarching philosophy to consider the key values of objectivity, fairness and equity, consistency, transparency, and administrative efficiency.

#### **Reasons**

##### **Context**

Murchison located within the broader Mid-West region of Western Australia and is known for being both the least populated local government area, and the only one without a town. Murchison Settlement acts as the heart of the Shire and is home to both the 'Oasis' Roadhouse and Shire Office and all Shire employees. It therefore it has no residential, commercial or industrial rate base in which to draw upon. It does, however, have an important responsibility for the maintenance of a vast network of inland roads, as well as providing support for travellers and locals through the provision of fuel services, a caravan park, recreational services, power, water and an aerodrome. Unlike other local governments many of these costs are for the most part additional to a normal local government operation.

For the Financial years 2020/21 to 2022/23, Council also acknowledges the strategic importance of the Budget, given the COVID-19 pandemic situation, and desires that all level of governments look to stimulate to assist in the recovery of the economy and council's positive response to this scenario. Like those budgets, the 2025/26 budget will still be affected by these considerations in part as the Council needs to service a road loan associated with this stimulus approach undertaken during the COVID19 Period. Perhaps more importantly the Council needs to fund a range of additional roadworks and significant settlement development works that have since arisen.

Significant changes have also occurred since 2017 when Council's Asset Management Plan and Long-Term Financial Plans were adopted with updated plans adopted in 2024 and now on an annual basis. The most recent review has confirmed a lift in rate revenue is required to fund immediate and long-term works and to address intergenerational issues. In accordance with sound practice as far as practicable rates in the \$ adopted from year to year are set excluding any *Natural Decline or Growth*.

Council is satisfied that the services and facilities it provides are managed efficiently and effectively and that it is adapting in an appropriate manner to the post COVID19 environment and with it meeting significant but positive challenges. Council remains of the opinion, one that is shared universally in the Region that it is appropriate to rate differentially in order to meet the budget deficiency.

As part of its drive to ensure efficiency and transparency within the organisation, Council continuously reviews its budget to ensure income and expenditure targets will be met. It also reviews the appropriateness and effectiveness of its risk management, internal control and legislative compliance as required under *Local Government (Audit) Regulations 1996* and reviews the appropriateness and effectiveness of the financial management systems and procedures of the Shire as per regulation 5(2)(c) of the *Local Government (Financial Management) Regulations 1996*.

For consistency, Council has ensured that properties that are used for the same purpose are rated in the same way and has considered and analysed in detailed the rates charged by neighbouring councils in its deliberations. For a very small local government achieving equity across the Pastoral and Mining Sectors is not without its challenges but the variable nature of the Minerals Exploration Sector and small size of the rate base also provides an additional complexity. This issue is compounded by the valuation system which is derived from on rents set by the State Government in an environment that has seen mining tenements rise by over 50% compared to pastoral properties since 2015.

In line with the latest Rating Analysis Review including a regional rates benchmarking analysis, it is proposed to consolidate the trend that started in 2021/22 and that has seen in 2023/24 and 2024/25 mining and prospecting and exploration rate differential reduce as a ratio compared to the Pastoral Rate to under 2.0.

<b>UV – Pastoral</b>	proposed	9.932	cents in the dollar	\$1,000	min payment
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Pastoral UV applies to any land that currently has a pastoral lease granted and is rated as the benchmark level. Council recognises the reduced viability of the sector caused by many years of droughts and floods, the devastation caused by the wild dog problem and noting that many in this category are required supplement their income through non pastoral activities. It also recognises the perpetual nature of the land, use, the long-term commitment of pastoralists to the region, their stewardship of Crown Land and that a non-Shire biosecurity rate is additionally linked to the valuations provided by the Valuer General. Several Pastoral Stations have in recent years also been taken over by the Crown or CSIRO and become non-rateable, thereby further impacting on this rating sector.

<b>UV – Mining</b>	proposed	19.830	cents in the dollar	\$1,000	min payment
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Mining UV applies to land for which a mining lease has been granted. The mining sector tends to be transitory in nature and benefits from established Shire services and infrastructure which is maintained in the long term with funding assistance by those rate payers who are established long term in the region. A consideration in setting the UV - Mining rate at a higher level than the benchmark UV – Pastoral rate is to ensure that the mining sector's contribution is proportionate to the advantage it gains in using established facilities, and the relatively short time that the operation exists also noting that if a mine is developed into production, it will often place significant additional impacts on roads. Unlike pastoral sector the mining sector does not pay a biosecurity rate linked to the valuations provided by the Valuer General, even though the mining/exploration sectors may pose a biosecurity risk.

<b>UV – Prospecting &amp; Exploration</b>	proposed	19.830	cents in the dollar	\$1,000	min payment
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Exploration/Prospecting UV applies to land for which an exploration/prospecting lease has been granted. As with the UV – Mining sector, the UV - Exploration/Prospecting sector tends to be transitory. Mining licences also have a limited intrinsic value unless minerals are found and mined but the opportunity is still afforded to gain advantage from established facilities. Mining licences also have a high turnover of ownership. If a licence is terminated or the lessee does not pay rates for the period of the licence, the rates are generally not able to be recovered by the local government. Administration of licences for rating purposes is technically complex and disproportionate to that of base level rating. Unlike pastoral sector the mining sector does not pay a biosecurity rate linked to the valuations provided by the Valuer General, even though the mining/exploration sectors may pose a biosecurity risk.