



## **MEDIA RELEASE | WEDDIN SHIRE COUNCIL**

### **EMERGENCY SERVICES LEVY IS THE LATEST DISASTER**

“State Emergency Services including the Rural Fire Service provide essential volunteer services that our lives depend on. The recent decision by the new NSW Government on the Emergency Services Levy will make it much harder, and in some Regional, Rural and Remote local government areas impossible for Councils to provide essential services in the communities these volunteers call home,” said Mayor Bembrick.

“We work beside volunteers through natural disaster after natural disaster and we volunteer ourselves. Our highly respected volunteers and the critical services provided from the NSW Fire and Rescue, Rural Fire Services and State Emergency Services will be affected across our communities under the recent decision by the new NSW Government, it will make it challenging for Councils to provide the same level of standard for essential services in the communities these wonderful volunteers reside,” said Mayor Bembrick.

“Frankly, the Emergency Services Levy is a disaster following on the heels of COVID and so many natural disasters in this region,” said Mayor Bembrick.

“Council has no control over the sky rocketing increases in the Emergency Services Levy, the State does. At the same time it is not incentivised to manage its costs. This State imposed Levy will mean an additional \$95,000 with no subsidy received. The last financial year saw Council’s current ESL payment sit at \$292,660.28. To put this into context, Council’s expected increase in rate income for 2023/2024 will be \$109,597 meaning that 87% of the increase in rate income will be absorbed by the Emergency Services Levy,” said Mayor Bembrick.

“And it's not just the levy, assets like our Red Fleet of local Rural Fire Services go on Councils books, although they are technically owned by the State Government,” said Mayor Bembrick.

“Councils do not control these services and cannot make operational decisions regarding the management of these assets. Requiring that local government recover the costs of state government activities is the most transparent example of cost shifting we have recently experienced” said Mayor Bembrick.

\$77 million dollars is believed to be the increase to the State emergency services levy across NSW. This increase comes as Councils across the State are locking in their financial budgets for the coming year and forecasting the next ten years financial position.

Ultimately, with limited capacity to increase revenue, this means that Councils must reduce services to account for these costs. This is simply unpalatable.

This region made representation to the previous Government to bring back to the table the broad based property tax that was put on hold in 2017. This region also supported the Country Mayors Association and Local Government NSW push before the Election calling for all political parties to commit to policy reform that will see the ESL being removed from local government and funded by other means, like a property tax.

“We will be discussing this at our next Central NSW Board meeting. It might be time for every Council in the region to ask for a Special Rate Variation to pay the increasing costs of the State Government,” said Mayor Bembrick.