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## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **WHAT ABOUT THE OTHER 20%?**

The State Election has come to a close, Annastacia is back in power and the deadline for rural rates bills is looming. All this on top of the news that Bingera Mill is closing, water security from Paradise Dam is now in limbo and the announcement by Bundaberg Regional Council CEO Steve Johnston that council has achieved an operating surplus of \$1.5 million for the 2019-20 financial year.

It is not uncommon for forecast budget results and actual financial results to differ but this is significant. The surplus is more than half the value of what rural ratepayers in Bundaberg Region have been dealt in rate increases of up to 235%. It is outrageous to think that a local council that says it supports agriculture can deal such a blow at a time when the community and the nation most needs our farmers.

Farmers are not asking other ratepayers to cover rural ratepayers' share nor are they suggesting that they are disadvantaged by the increase in rural land valuations. Farmers in Bundaberg are simply asking for a fair go by council. Farmers and the community know the rates decision can be fixed simply by applying a concession to the whole of Category 9 (farmland) under Sections 119-122 of the Local Government Regulation 2012.

For Mr Johnston to then go on to state that 80% of ratepayers are paying the same or less than last year is a real kick in the guts for the 20% who are reeling under increases of up to and more than \$30,000 in one single year. That is a lot of money being ripped from the local economy, which is based on agribusiness, and when you consider the compounding effect of following rates notices over coming years the Bundaberg economy and the local businesses our farmers support will undoubtedly feel the negative impacts of this decision.

Bundaberg Regional Council blames the rate increase on land valuations despite other rural based Queensland regional councils seeing similar rises in land valuations. The difference is that other local councils adjusted their rating system to cap increases to the same levels as Consumer Price Index (CPI), which reflects cost of living. Why has Bundaberg Council chosen to go in precisely the opposite direction and ignore the very backbone of our region?

With support of local businesses and the community, there have been more than 2,000 signatures put to date on a petition supporting local farmers who are asking our council to fix these devastating

rates increases. Bundaberg farmers don't want to fight; they simply want their own local government to preserve and protect their local community.

The farmer consortium of Agforce, Bundaberg CANEGROWERS, Bundaberg Fruit & Vegetable Growers and CANEGROWERS Isis is running the community petition at <https://www.gopetition.com/petitions/dont-treat-bundy-farmers-like-rubbish-reverse-the-235-rates-hike.html>