COMMUNITY PANEL REPORT

Differential Rates Review - Cardinia Shire Council

Introduction

Through a process of deliberative engagement, a community panel helped inform Council's proposed amendments to its differential rating structure as part of Council's Revenue and Rating Plan 2025-29.

Deliberative engagement is a structured approach to community participation. It brings together a demographic representation of community members, equips them with balanced information and expert input, and supports them to reason through complex issues together before reaching a considered recommendation. In this instance, the process was independently designed and facilitated to ensure neutrality. The panel's role was advisory, with the final recommendation formally received by the Mayor at the conclusion of the process.

About the Community Panel

The community panel reflected the different property types, geographic spread and demographic profile of the Shire. This ensured the review was shaped by voices representative of the broader Cardinia community, not just particular interest groups.

The panel was convened to consider how rates are charged across different property types and to advise Council on how to ensure the system is as fair as reasonably practicable. Their role was to understand how the rating system operates, weigh up evidence and trade-offs, and develop a principled recommendation to guide Council's decision-making.

The process was designed so deliberation was informed rather than opinion-based, and included:

- Structured learning: Panel members received expert presentations and background materials before deliberating, ensuring decisions were grounded in evidence.
- Transparent and principled deliberation: The panel developed and agreed on a shared set of guiding principles, which were actively used to test and assess potential approaches.
- Consideration of trade-offs: Participants openly examined the consequences of different models across property categories, acknowledging where increases to some would offset benefits to others.
- A defensible, evidence-informed recommendation: The final recommendation was adopted through a supermajority vote and aligns with the principles of equity, transparency, capacity to pay and long-term financial sustainability.

How the Panel's Input Has Shaped the Proposed Model

The panel's recommendation has directly informed Council's proposed differential rates model, which:

- Provides targeted relief to genuine farming properties, recognising their contribution to the Shire's rural character and long-term land use aspirations.
- Increases charges on vacant and under-utilised urban land to discourage land banking and encourage development activity.
- Clearly differentiates between commercial and industrial uses based on their respective service demands and community impact.
- Limits changes for residential ratepayers, ensuring the majority of the community are not significantly worse off.