



2016 Local Government Election — Priorities for Tara



The 19 March 2016 Local Government election will determine not only the next Mayor and Councillors for the Western Downs region, but also the course of the region's economy at a critical juncture in Queensland's economic future.

The Chamber of Commerce and Industry Queensland and the Tara Futures Group have conducted this survey to determine priority issues for small business on key election issues such as community infrastructure, economic development, roads infrastructure, local facilities and services, planning and development, local content policy, and the quality of representation in Tara.

CCIQ and the Tara Futures Group are determined that the issues of concern and importance for small businesses in Tara stay at the forefront of the Local Government election debate.

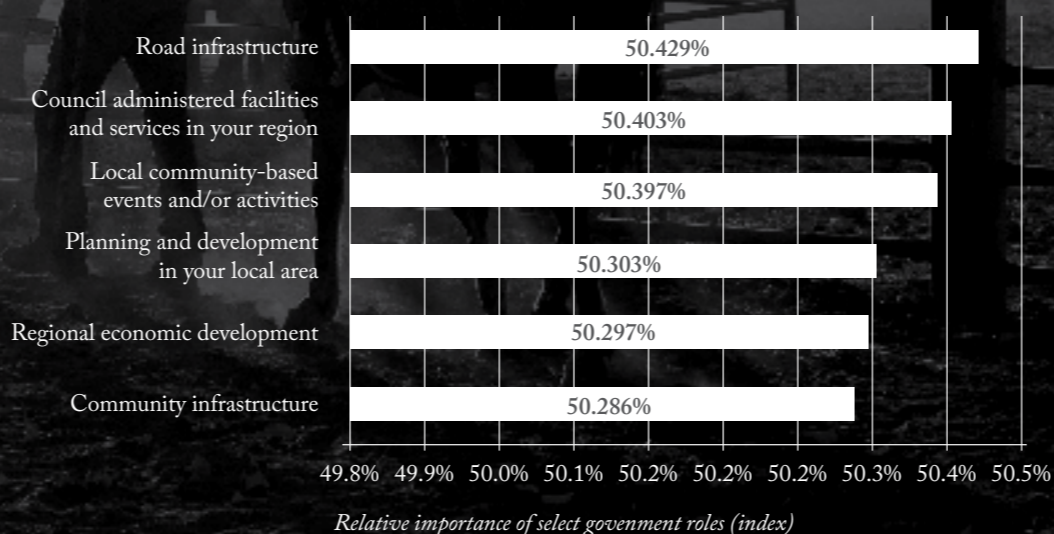
The Tara Futures Group recognises the vital role that the Western Downs Regional Council plays in building and sustaining the Western Downs economy. Local businesses and community members in Tara believe the activities of the Western Downs Regional Council are of crucial importance in their day to day activities and to this end, the Tara Futures Group maintains a significant interest in the outcome of the Local Government elections to be held 19 March 2016.

Tara Futures Group is committed to working constructively with all Councillors across the Western Downs region over the coming four years to address those issues and challenges confronting the community. The next Western Downs Regional Council must also work closely with Tara's small businesses to shape Queensland's economic and social environments in a way that promotes business growth and community prosperity.

The Tara Futures Group Election Survey revealed 3 key priorities that all candidates must act upon to improve the business operating environment in Tara. These are:



In the context of your business and/or community, how important are the following in your local government area: Tara

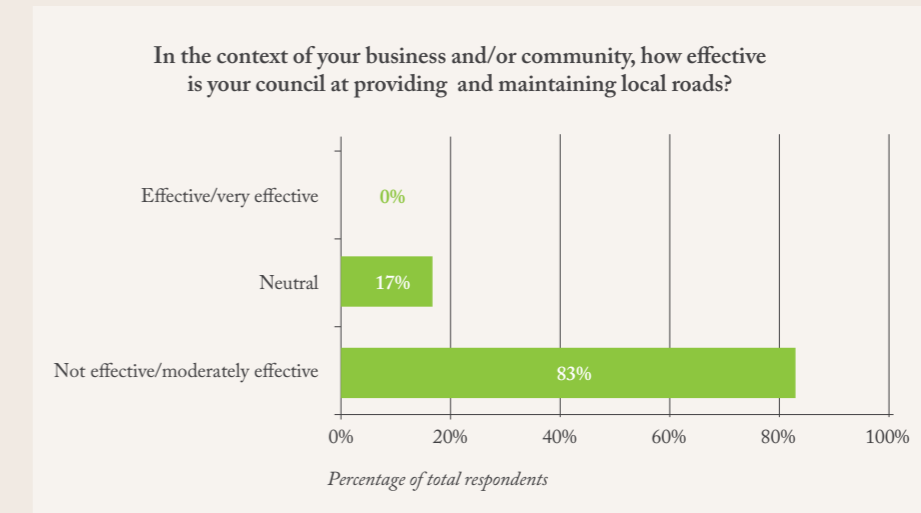


Roads infrastructure

Roads infrastructure plays a crucial role in driving business investment, growth and productivity. It is essential that local governments invest in roads infrastructure and address current and future bottlenecks so that businesses can thrive in the domestic and global marketplace. An investment in infrastructure represents an investment in the future prosperity of Tara, the Western Downs region and its businesses.

The Tara Futures Group Election Survey showed that a significant majority (78 per cent) of businesses and community members believe roads infrastructure is very important or critical to the region. When asked about how effective the Western Downs Regional Council is at providing and maintaining local roads, 83 per cent of respondents believed Council were not effective or moderately effective, with no respondents stating the Council was effective or very effective.

It is critical that the next Western Downs Regional Council put in place a strategic road upgrade strategy and work co-operatively with the Queensland State Government to continue to deliver much needed roads infrastructure for the region to secure a strong future.



The Tara Futures Group is calling on the next Western Downs Regional Council to:

- Prioritise upgrades to the Surat Development Road, Tara-Chinchilla Road, Tara-Kogan Road and Bullockhead Road, working closely with the State Government to ensure roads in and out of Tara are properly flood proofed
- Ensure local roads are regularly maintained, and Council resources are used as efficiently as possible when carrying out this task

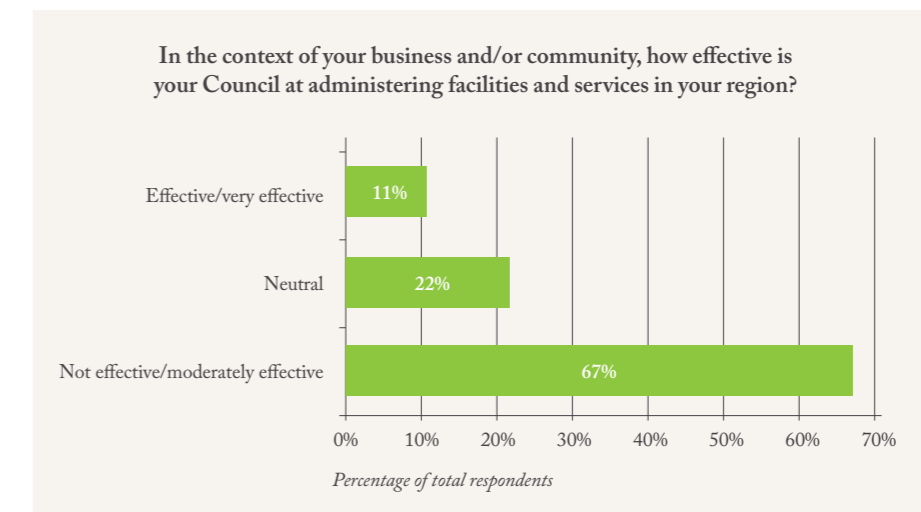
'Upgrade dirt roads to Tara. People on estates get cut off when heavy rain occurs and emergency services cannot get through to help people in emergency. This is not good enough.'

—Survey Respondent, Tara

Council administered facilities and services

Community members in the Tara district recognise that services and facilities are a central component of a thriving community. It is equally critical that the district has the right services and up to date facilities for Tara to continue to be an attractive place to do business.

The Tara Futures Group election survey shows that the majority of businesses and community members (94 per cent) consider Council-administered facilities and services such as the upkeep of footpaths, water and sewerage, waste disposal, and public amenities to be very important or critical for Tara. When asked about how effective the Western Downs Regional Council is at administering facilities and services in Tara, 67 per cent of respondents said the Council was either not effective or moderately effective at providing services and maintaining facilities.



The Tara Futures Group is calling on the next Western Downs Regional Council to:

- Prioritise greater communication with Tara residents and business owners regarding Council's maintenance schedule
- Immediately progress with ensuring Tara has regular and reliable access to clean drinking water
- Fast track kerb and guttering upgrades to ease water build up throughout the town centre during periods of flood

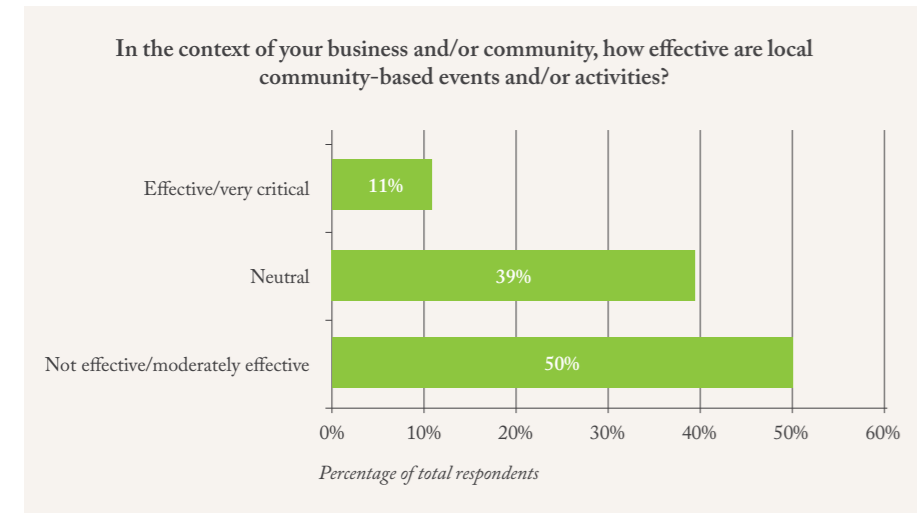
For general enquiries or more information contact David Gunther at the Tara Futures Group on 07 4665 3366

Community-based events and activities

Council's role in facilitating and/or supporting community events and programmes is critical to building and maintaining social capital throughout Tara. Communities that share knowledge and cooperate to deliver mutually beneficial outcomes are in essence more profitable, with networked communities more likely to be innovative, creative, and take risks thereby reducing business transaction costs.

Marked by reciprocity through the collective benefit of networks in local communities, local government across Queensland play a central role in generating social capital. The facilitation and execution of community-based events and activities is therefore critical to achieving this goal. This was also reflected in the survey results.

The Tara Futures Group Local Government Election Survey revealed that 89 per cent of business and community members in the Tara region believed local community-based events and/or activities were very important or critical. When asked how effective Council was at planning and facilitating community-based events, 50 per cent of respondents stated Council was either not effective or moderately effective. Respondents stated that the red tape encountered to host an event was largely prohibitive. Feedback also revealed that the time and expense associated with hosting an event was exacerbated by a general attitude of disengagement from Council in Tara



The Tara Futures Group is calling on the next Western Downs Regional Council to:

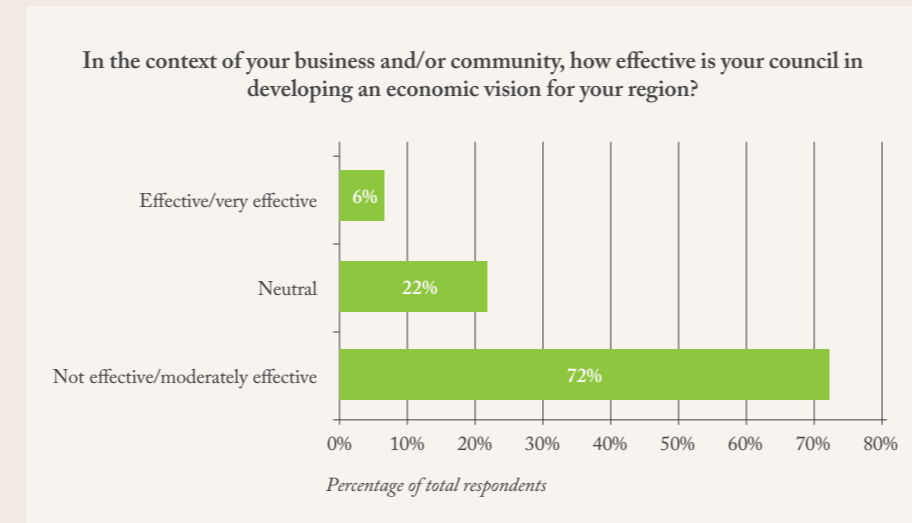
- Develop a Community Events and Celebrations Strategy to bring engagement activities in line with community expectations
- Reduce the red tape associated with hosting an event in Tara
- Better utilise existing Council resources to assist applicants to conform with Council requirements
- Commit to greater engagement with the Tara small business community and develop key accountability markers to measure success
- Ensure the Tara Futures Group is appointed as an official Advisory Committee to Council on Community Engagement activities for the Tara district

Economic development

An economic development strategy for the Western Downs that identifies and capitalises on the uniqueness of Tara is a key determinant of business confidence and investment in the township. Businesses in the Tara district will be looking to the next Western Downs Regional Council to drive economic development and better enable economic growth to ensure the community is supported by a dynamic and globally competitive regional economy.

When asked about economic development initiatives in Tara, a significant majority of businesses and community members (67 per cent) stated regional economic development was very important or critical to the economic future of the Tara district. Notably, the Tara Futures Group Local Government Election Survey revealed that 72 per cent of businesses and community members in the Tara region believed the Western Downs Regional Council was either not effective or moderately effective at developing an economic vision for Tara and/or the Western Downs region more broadly.

This result has been driven by the lack of an existing economic development plan that sets out a strategic vision for the Western Downs region. The most recent plan expired in 2015, and businesses are deeply concerned about the impact of no short, medium, or long-term economic development planning at present. The lack of a clear strategic vision for developing Tara, attracting tourism, and capitalising on future economic opportunities in the region is fundamentally undermining business certainty, confidence, and investment.



The Tara Futures Group is calling on the next Western Downs Regional Council to:

- Develop and deliver a Western Downs Regional Economic Plan that is endorsed by the business community in Tara as a matter of urgency
- Create a positive investment and business operating environment to ensure the Western Downs becomes an attractive place to do business and invest
- Establish an economic diversification strategy for the Tara region to accommodate for the gradual downturn of the energy sector
- Work with the Tara local chamber to implement regular 'buy local' campaigns to encourage greater spend in local businesses

Effective representation for Tara

Better representation for Tara is a key issue for community members and business owners in the district. The lack of Council engagement in the region is being felt strongly by all residents and business owners. This was also reflected in the survey results. Overall, respondents believed the interests of larger townships such as Dalby were being over-represented to the detriment of the Tara region, and that priorities for small business owners in Tara were regularly over-looked in favour of those closer in proximity to Council.

Business owners told the Tara Futures Group that at present, elected Councillors were not living up to local expectations with respect to adequate presence in the district, and felt largely neglected in comparison to other townships in the Western Downs Local Government Area.

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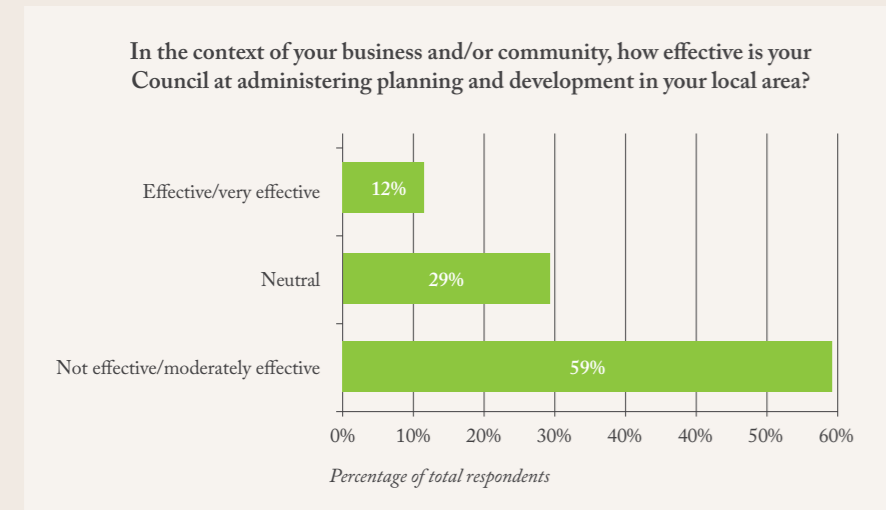
- Commit to greater engagement with the Tara small business community and develop key accountability markers to measure success
- Review Council's Community Engagement Policy to ensure that Council decision-making is founded upon meaningful community engagement activities
- Ensure the Tara Futures Group is appointed as an official Advisory Committee to Council on Community Engagement activities

Planning and development

Local planning departments across Queensland play an important role in achieving economic, social, cultural and environmental goals in their respective regions. Small businesses in particular rely on planning departments to be flexible when assessing applications, to employ a common sense approach towards planning and zoning, and to divulge simple and accessible information on by-laws, and licensing and registration requirements to ensure the barriers to starting, expanding or planning a business is not burdened by red tape.

A significant majority of community members and business owners in Tara believe planning and development is very important or critical to Tara (67 per cent). When asked how effective Council is at administering planning and development in the Tara district, a strong majority (59 per cent) stated Council was not effective or moderately effective.

There appears to be concern about existing impediments to the growth of Tara due to the lack of effective planning at the Council level. The Tara Futures Group believes the next Western Downs Regional Council should vigorously prosecute a comprehensive planning strategy for the region as a matter of urgency.



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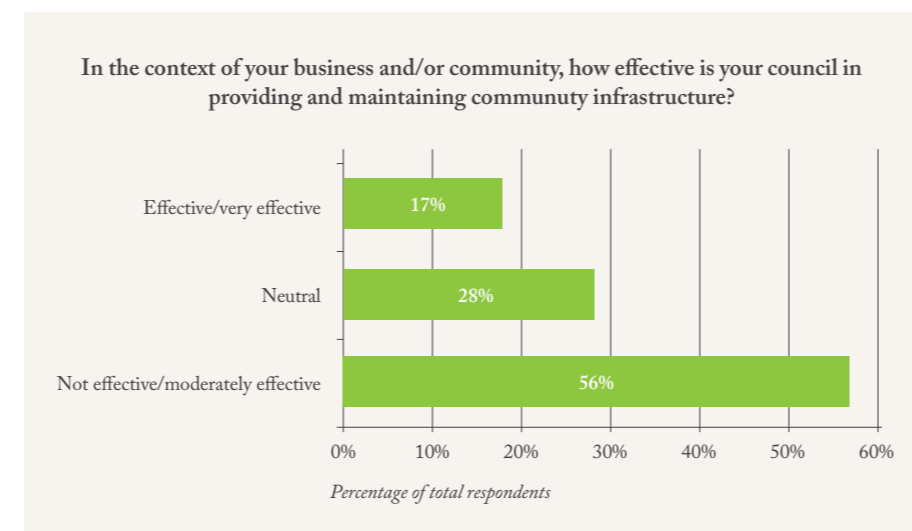
- Consult small and medium sized businesses widely prior to the implementation of the *Draft Western Downs Regional Planning Scheme*
- Accelerate red tape reduction efforts across Council with a focus on reforms that will be most beneficial to small and medium business
- Fast-track approval services to ensure the costs of starting or expanding a business are not prohibitive

Community infrastructure

Investment in community infrastructure is critical to community health, well-being, and economic prosperity. It must benefit the local population, cater for intergenerational needs, and increase the liveability of each region and city across Queensland. When asked about community infrastructure in Tara, a significant majority of businesses and community members (78 per cent) stated facilities for recreation such as sports centres, art galleries, museums and civic centres were very important or critical to Tara and surrounds.

The Tara Futures Group Local Government Election Survey revealed that 56 per cent of businesses and community members in Tara and surrounds believed the Western Downs Regional Council was either not effective or moderately effective at delivering and/or maintaining community facilities. Conversely, 17 per cent of respondents believed the Council was effective or very effective in providing and maintaining community infrastructure in Tara

There is a perception amongst respondents that larger towns in the Western Downs catchment, such as Dalby, receive more funding and support with regards to community infrastructure than smaller townships such as Tara. The challenge for the next Western Downs Regional Council is to ensure existing facilities are effectively maintained for the use and enjoyment of the residents and businesses of Tara, and to engage more closely with residents and businesses to deliver more targeted facilities.



The Tara Futures Group is calling on the next Western Downs Regional Council to:

- Progress a more targeted community infrastructure plan that better informs the current and future requirements of Tara
- Engage more fully with the Tara business community prior to finalising the *Amended Draft Western Downs Planning Scheme* to ensure future planning for facilities better responds to community needs

Conclusion

Regardless of who forms the next Western Downs Regional Council, it is essential they implement a program that addresses the issues of concern for the region's small and medium business owners and community members.

The next Western Downs Regional Council must commit to improved roads infrastructure, better Council-administered facilities and services in Tara, specifically with respect to water infrastructure and supply, and develop a Community Events and Celebrations Strategy to bring engagement activities in line with community expectations

Ultimately, when people vote on 19 March 2016 they should do so on the basis of who they think will best address the concerns raised by the business owners and community members of Tara.

Every citizen of Tara, be they business owner, employer, employee, or resident has an opportunity to determine the future prosperity of their region.

METHODOLOGY

In addition to the survey, the Tara Futures Group hosted (alongside CCIQ) a series of Business Resilience forums to document the insight and experiences of small business owners regarding Council's execution of its functions in Tara.

Survey:
28 September – 21 December
Miles, Jandowae, Tara

'Spend money on community infrastructure evenly throughout the shire. We may not have the population but are still entitled to the same'.

—Survey Respondent, Tara