



**MINUTES OF THE PUBLIC FORUM  
HELD ON 26 FEBRUARY 2025**

**1. Opening**

The Public Forum commenced at 5.34pm.

**2. Presentations relating to listed Items on the Council Agenda**

The following presenters were heard:

	<b>Name</b>	<b>Item no</b>	<b>Item description</b>	<b>For/ Against</b>
1	Peter Arkins	9.1	Change of Use of Farm Shed to Rural Industry, 316 Sawyers Ridge Road Reidsdale	Against
2	Helen Grant	9.1	Change of Use of Farm Shed to Rural Industry, 316 Sawyers Ridge Road Reidsdale	Against
3	Cameron Judson - Upside Planning	9.1	Change of Use of Farm Shed to Rural Industry, 316 Sawyers Ridge Road Reidsdale	For
4	Tom Mavec	9.5	Post Exhibition Report – Proposal to Name the Heritage Library	For
5	Judy Lawson	10.2	Update on Clarke Gang Signage	For
6	Glenn Archer - Wamboin Communications Action Group	12.1	Notice of Motion - Regional Digital Connectivity Program	For

The following written presentations were received:

	<b>Name</b>	<b>Item no</b>	<b>Item description</b>	<b>For/ Against</b>
1	Wamboin Communications Action Group	12.1	Regional Digital Connectivity Program	For

**3. Petitions**

There were no petitions submitted.

#### 4. 'Questions on Notice' from the Public

Responses to the following 'Questions on Notice' received up to 19 February 2025 were provided and tabled at the meeting (see attached for responses):

Nos	Received from	In relation to:
1-2	Shane Geisler	Organisational Review

#### 5. Presentations by Invitation from the General Manager

There were no presentations.

#### 6. Closure

As there were no further matters, the Public Forum closed at 5.56pm.



## ATTACHMENT TO MINUTES OF THE PUBLIC FORUM HELD ON 26 February 2025

### ‘Questions on Notice’ from the Public

Responses to the following ‘Questions on Notice’ received up to Wednesday 19 February 2025 were provided and tabled at the meeting.

### Questions submitted by: Shane Geisler

#### 1. Lack of Transparency in Rejecting Morrison Low Recommendations

In response to Questions 1, 4, and 8 (Questions on Notice – 23 October 2024): The council's classification of the \$47.57 million in identified savings as "speculative and unvalidated" is concerning, particularly given that the Morrison Low report prioritised 59 feasible and financially advantageous initiatives. These recommendations encompassed internal efficiencies, process streamlining, and expenditure reduction within council operations, alongside measures that could impact ratepayer services or costs.

Despite this, QPRC senior managers have prioritised initiatives that shift financial burdens onto ratepayers while deferring or rejecting those aimed at optimising internal operations. This raises questions about the methodology employed to assess the Morrison Low recommendations and the professional handling of the report's implementation. If internal cost-saving measures were deemed too speculative to adopt, what distinguished the costings of the approved measures? Furthermore, given that council acknowledged flaws in the financial components of the report, the rationale for commissioning and funding it with public money demands scrutiny.

The Special Rate Variation (SRV) was presented as an inevitability, without clear evidence that all potential internal efficiencies had been exhausted. Ratepayer feedback has also highlighted concerns regarding high executive salaries and benefits, which were not critically reviewed before imposing the SRV. Additionally, the decision to proceed with an expensive new office building amid financial constraints further necessitates clarity on council's spending priorities.

To ensure transparency and justify the SRV, council should provide a documented rationale for rejecting or delaying each Morrison Low recommendation that could have mitigated the need for the SRV. Furthermore, given that SRV consultation commenced before the release of updated land valuations, ratepayers have raised concerns about the adequacy of council's engagement process.

In light of these concerns, I formally request that QPRC Councillors refer this matter to an independent and experienced Governance, Risk Management, and Compliance auditor for investigation. Given that known "speculative and unvalidated" data may have been used as a material justification in QPRC's submission to the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART), an external review is warranted to ensure transparency and accountability.

**Response** – Council's 2023/24 Financial Statements resulted in an unqualified audit opinion by the NSW Audit Office, and were presented to both the Audit, Risk and Improvement Committee (ARIC) and Council. Neither ARIC or Council have sought a referral of any of these issues to an external or internal audit process.

The State of the Region Report 2021-2024 and Annual Report 2023-2024 are available on Councils website <https://www.qprc.nsw.gov.au/Council/Council-Business/Budgets-and-Planning#section-2>

## 2. Workplace Culture and Allegations of Bullying and Harassment

In response to Question 10 (Questions on Notice – 23 October 2024): Council's dismissal of the Morrison Low report's findings regarding bullying and harassment as "informal observations" is deeply troubling. It raises concerns about QPRC's commitment to fostering a safe and professional workplace culture.

Why did an independent auditor feel compelled to include these observations in a report focused on operational efficiency? This inclusion suggests that the issue is significant enough to warrant formal investigation. Dismissing the findings of a qualified professional as "informal" undermines the seriousness of these concerns and fails to address potential systemic cultural problems within the organisation.

Does the Mayor believe that allegations of bullying and harassment—regardless of how they are categorised—should be so readily dismissed? If such allegations were directed at a senior staff member who played a role in rejecting them, would this not constitute a conflict of interest and a failure of due process?

What independent actions has QPRC undertaken to investigate these issues comprehensively? If the council's internal reporting mechanisms were ineffective in identifying these concerns earlier, what improvements are being implemented to strengthen bullying and harassment frameworks? It is essential that council demonstrates a commitment to addressing these matters with the transparency and seriousness they warrant.

Moreover, given the management team's dismissive stance on the Morrison Low findings, I request a formal statement from the Mayor addressing these allegations. If the contents of the report were deemed "not fit for purpose," why was the report accepted by senior council management and what discount did the ratepayers receive as a result of the poor quality?

**Response** – The procedures for investigation and disciplinary measures associated with allegations of workplace bullying and harassment are the responsibility of the General Manager. Any allegations made are taken seriously and dealt with confidentially in accordance with the Local Government (NSW) Award 2023.