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### **Infrastructure Charging: The End of the Beginning**

Noosa Council recently celebrated the commencement of its Coastal Major Road Network Infrastructure Charges Plan. The Infrastructure Charges Plan (ICP) is an achievement in itself, as Noosa Council can now recover the costs for roadworks needed to cater for future population and development growth, without imposing an excessive burden on existing ratepayers who have already provided a satisfactory standard of road in the coastal area. Yes, this is indeed an achievement.

Another major milestone was also reached though - this one a Queensland milestone. Noosa's Coastal Major Road Network Infrastructure Charges Plan is understood to be the first adopted and operational ICP in Queensland. You might wonder why this is such an achievement. You might think that it is simply logical that development pays for the infrastructure needed to service the future population. Well despite the rhetoric about infrastructure planning that accompanied the introduction of the *Integrated Planning Act*, the State Government has been very slow to act in resolving the issues associated with infrastructure charging, even slower in producing workable guidelines for preparation of infrastructure charges plans and slower still at approving appropriately prepared plans.

Is this too critical? Well hardly, in Queensland there has been a long history of the State moving very slowly on infrastructure charging issues. Back in the early 1980s many local governments were charging development for infrastructure long before there was legislation making it clear that this was a reasonable thing to do.

Since the commencement of the *Integrated Planning Act* many local governments have commenced infrastructure charges plans or priority infrastructure plans as they are now called. Millions of dollars have been wasted as LGAs found themselves tied in knots first by the legislation, then by the guidelines built for piped infrastructure and nothing else, then by the myriad of changes to the legislation many of which was still-born but cruelly hung over local government heads for months, then further legislation changes, then more guidelines and so it has gone.

Why has all this been so difficult? The foundation for the original legislation was highly flawed. The one-size fits-all guidelines also gave problems. The philosophy for the legislation was borrowed from interstate, where responsibilities for provision of road infrastructure and development histories were very different to Queensland circumstances. Put simply, what was appropriate in southern States did not fit with the circumstances in Queensland.

While there has been plenty of ducking and weaving over blame, the overall result after 6 years of 'operational' legislation, is but one operational infrastructure charges plan.

So Noosa's achievement and perseverance is to be admired.