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Rollout watered down

Residential smart meters now deferred until 2022-23

A DEVELOPMENT boom is hitting Cairns Regional Council coffers with ratepayers set to cover a million-dollar cost just to install new water meters.

But there is a hitch – these new implements are not the smart water meters promised years ago, although they can be retrofitted once the project actually goes ahead.

The council awarded a \$16m contract to tech company Itron in 2017 for the rollout of smart water meters, which use highly accurate ultrasonic readings to communicate usage directly to water departments in real time.

Then, very quietly, it came to a dead stop.

Council chief executive Mica Martin said the project was put on the backburner as part of the 2020-21 budget process in order to find \$30m to bring forward works – chiefly the \$28m Esplanade outdoor dining precinct overhaul.

“Front and centre of the budget deliberations was the need to stimulate the economy and create jobs and it was considered, on this basis, the smart water meter rollout should be deferred,” she said.

Fewer than 1000 meters and half of the council’s communication network, consisting of repeater stations and the like, have been installed.

The remaining 54,000-odd meters are now scheduled to be rolled out in 2022-23, with completion in June 2025.

This latest million-dollar budget will only cover the cost of installing half-smart meters.

Ultrasonic readers will be established at new premises, but the second component – the dongles that send data back to the council – will need to be attached in future years.

“It is compatible,” water and waste general manager Mark Wuth said.

“Instead of having a full meter replaced at that time, it will just need a dongle attached,” Mr Wuth said. Smart water meters were not the only project to be abandoned to fund the Esplanade upgrade.

Residents of Edmonton still have no pool and no indication they will ever get one built after the \$12m project was sacrificed to scrape together enough pennies to beautify the glitter strip.

The council has also ticked off \$4m worth of pavement and sewer main upgrades in

Woree from Links Drive into the city’s southern sewerage plant and through to Jackson Drive. “New lighting at the Jackson D intersection bend is also necessary due to additional pavement widening requirements to satisfy B-double heavy vehicle turning movement standards,” a report to the water and waste committee stated.

“The project will deliver improved safety for all road users and cyclists.”

The council received a \$980,000 federal grant to cover some of the project’s costs.

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