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\$42m cash splash for council upgrades

CASSOWARY Coast councillors were celebrating yesterday after Premier Anna Bligh announced a \$40.4 million windfall for the financially troubled shire.

Ms Bligh said a collective \$42.2 million would help the Cassowary Coast Regional Council and the Tablelands Regional Council upgrade sewage treatment plants and systems.

More than \$25 million will go towards a long-awaited upgrade of Innisfail's ageing sewage treatment plant.

Mulgrave MP Curtis Pitt said the State Government was providing an 80 per cent subsidy for works across both shires. The lion's share would help a "financially stressed" council.

"We are well aware Cassowary Coast is facing a high degree of inherited financial stress and some major infrastructure

Julie Lightfoot

lightfootj@tcp.newstld.com.au

hurdles," he said. "The sewage treatment issues have been a top priority."

Mayor Bill Shannon could barely contain his excitement at the news.

His council has been crying out for help from both State and Federal governments for months.

He said that both water and sewage treatment plant upgrades were desperately needed and would collectively cost more than \$50 million.

A new sewage treatment plant is worth \$33.4 million.

He said \$9 million had already been channelled into sewerage system upgrades, but the plant was in dire straits and the

water treatment plant was "hanging on with a wing and a prayer".

"Water is our number one priority, but this is really really good news - a huge weight off the shoulders," he said yesterday.

Mr Pitt said the State Government would work through the detail of the funding allocation in coming weeks.

The Tablelands Regional Council's \$1.2 million share will go towards the extension of the sewerage system from Kuranda to the Korowa and Mantaka area.

Mayor Tom Gilmore said it would service the Kuranda State District College, the proposed Welcome Pocket aged care facility and future residential developments.

He said the Premier had also been made aware of the need for a Mareeba sewage treatment plant upgrade.