

THREE LOCAL COUNCILS NOTIFY INTENTION TO VARY RATES

One council from the Sydney metropolitan area and two from regional NSW have notified the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) of their intention to apply for a special variation to increase their general income above the rate peg in 2020-21.

Councils were asked to notify IPART by 29 November 2019. They have until 10 February 2020 to consult with their communities and submit their applications for a special variation increase.

The Sydney council is Georges River.

The regional and rural councils are Bega Valley and Lismore.

Special variations are the mechanism for councils to use if they want to increase their general income by more than the 2020-21 rate peg of 2.6% to fund items such as infrastructure or additional services, or to improve their financial sustainability.

Under the rate peg, all NSW councils are eligible to increase their general income from rates by up to 2.6% in 2020-21. Councils seeking a larger increase must consult with their communities and seek IPART approval, before they are able to adopt higher rates.

Councils that do not apply to IPART for special variations will not be able to increase their general income by more than 2.6% next year. The number of notifications received by councils intending to apply for special variations for 2020-21 is less than the number of applications received by IPART in any year since 2011-12.

IPART will begin assessing the applications against criteria set out in the Office of Local Government's guidelines from February 2020. These criteria include demonstrating the need for the additional income, evidence of adequate community awareness and an assessment of the reasonableness of the increase and impact on ratepayers.

Ratepayers and other stakeholders can have their say by contacting their council or lodging a submission to IPART. IPART will be accepting submissions from 10 February 2020.

Details about each council's proposal should be available from the council.

Full details about 2020-21 special variations, including how to make a submission to IPART, may be found on IPART's website www.ipart.nsw.gov.au. IPART has also published a number of fact sheets that provide guidance on the special variation process on its website.

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More information is available at ipart.nsw.gov.au