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Submission:

Many thanks for the opportunity to comment on Warringah Council's Special Variation Application. I am a ratepayer and householder in Warringah Council's suburb of Manly Vale.

I believe the SVA should be rejected.

- The Council uses a Community Strategic Plan; annual community surveys on satisfaction with Council services and perceptions of community priorities; Strategic Reference Groups and Council funded research by Micromex to justify its application for a SV of Rates. These Plans, Surveys and Groups have a different basis and purpose to that of rate setting and information from them should not be misused and misinterpreted as agreement by ratepayers to rate increases.
- The Micromex Research utilized by Council to measure community support for a special rate levy indicates less than one in three ratepayers support such a levy. This is probably an overestimate given the superficial and technically inadequate nature of the Micromex Research - Warringah has a large and diverse population and there is no way an alleged random community sample size of 400 can give "an accurate and robust measure of the entire Warringah's community's attitudes." Also, if the Council as they describe themselves, "are aware of and responsive to community concerns," then they would not have applied for an SV of Rates on the basis of this research.
- Council can negate the need for an SV by cutting out frivolous and 'trendy' activities by Council such as paying consultants for film and video to encourage people to live in Warringah; paying consultants to change the Council logo from a characteristic flannel flower to a 'W'; introducing free Wi-Fi at a number of shopping Centres and supplying the mayor with a Jaguar car because it has a great 'resale value.' (Manly and Pittwater Council mayors do not have this luxury). It also appears that there are a number of highly paid administrative and financial staff positions on Council which could be cut without affecting services to ratepayers. Advertisements for such staff positions are continually being published in national and local newspapers.
- The proposed increase is unaffordable to many ratepayers. Over the last few years the cost of living has increased relative to average income. There have been massive increases in electricity, gas, water, public transport, petrol and insurance prices in NSW (many because of IPART decisions) and many Warringah residents are paying off substantial mortgages. Although ratepayers will be directly affected by the proposed SV renters will also be affected by landlords increasing rents.
- The Council on the one hand argues that they need to increase rates because of an ageing population and expect to see more households being eligible for a pensioner rebate; on the other hand they argue that they are aware of the impact of rate increases on low income households and will give eligible pensioners a mandatory rebate on rates - this indicates an inconsistency in Council's argument for a Rate Special Variation.