

Sent: Monday, 16 March 2015 11:17 PM
To: Local Government Mailbox
Subject: eurobodalla shire rate variation

Further to my earlier submissions, I would like to make one final point: one of the Council arguments for a rate variation is the need to make improvements to the Batemans Bay cbd, presumably to promote tourism. This is, to say the very least, ingenuous. The idea that Council staff can decide on ratepayer funded improvements to promote tourism is facile in the extreme. Most Council actions to “beautify” the area have resulted in traffic chouse or other problems. The people who can best decide what is likely to attract tourists are those who manage the local businesses and who can see what is needed to improve their own bottom line.

The problem is fundamentally frustration with what the Council staff consider “desirable” and what the business people know to be practical.

Rather than spend ratepayer funds on “improvements” the Council and its staff should, instead, embark on a realistic consultation (not dictation) with the entrepreneurs in the BB area to see what planning changes/approvals, etc, may be necessary to facilitate their own development within a cogent and agreed long term plan. The cost of such development could, and should, then more than reasonably be met by the businesses which stand to benefit rather than by ratepayers. The problem is not the “funding” but the planning, or absence of any realistic, simple and achievable planning scenario which allows business people to decide on the level of their overall investment, its timing and its benefits. This is just a very small part of what could be done with a realistic strategic business plan for the Shire aimed at avoiding excessive rate increases, encouraging greater tourism, and improving the overall rating base. Council should be told to pull its collective “entrepreneurial” head in and instead have a serious dialogue with business people as to the planning requirements needed to encourage development and then sit back and let the private sector take the risks, make the investments, and help Council reap the reward via a larger and more lucrative rate base.

Thank you

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Sent: Monday, 16 March 2015 1:04 AM
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I note your suggestion that objections should be passed on to the Council, and while this has been done by me and many others in the community the fact is there is little point: once Council management has made a decision to progress a particular course of action no amount of community input has any effect or value. There are an enormous number of examples. Perhaps the most recent is the Council determination to proceed with the erection of traffic lights in North Street Batemans Bay, which will compound traffic dislocation especially during tourist season, damage the small businesses that operate on this strip, and probably create far more traffic dangers than they will solve. Although the relevant commercial operators who are the only land holders on the street opposed this development (suggesting a pedestrian crossing or, at most, speed humps would solve the problem) the Council proceeded with its plan to erect traffic lights regardless: a cost of \$200,000 which, though being met by a State Government agency, is still money that could have been much better spent elsewhere. This is just one small example of a local government body which operates without any serious consideration of its obligation to provide reasonable and rational community services at realistic prices. And, of course, the damage that will be done to the businesses involved by eliminating parking at their doorstep and creating traffic chaos throughout much of the Batemans Bay CBD is ignored by Council's "planners" who seem more concerned with pursuing their own philosophical agendas than making the Shire a vibrant and prosperous entity.

However the fundamental problem with Eurobodalla Council's rate application is the failure of the Council, or its management, to put forward a serious business case as to what strategy the Council intends to pursue to expand its rateable base and increase its revenue without substantially increasing the rate burden on individual property owners (and, as a flow on, residents generally).

While it presides over what should be a particularly attractive coastal (and thereby holiday and tourist environment, not to mention retirement zone, the logical coastal attraction for residents of both Sydney and the ACT) Council has failed to adopt any policies aimed at encouraging development which will capitalise on this natural resource in ways which enhance the overall property value, and therefore its rateable base. Yet if it did this it would be able to avoid any need to increase the rate burden on current ratepayers. Its first task must be to see what can be done to increase its potential sources of revenue by attracting more development rather than imposing an ever increasing burden on the community. It needs a serious strategy to create wealth within the Shire and spread the rate burden far more widely than is currently the case.

At the moment far too much money has been spent in this area are of questionable benefit and dubious value. Far too much has been spent, for example, on construction of expensive physical traffic controls which could have effectively (and almost certainly more safely) been handled with paint (as with the North Street example above).

As has been previously pointed out, the Council, acting on recommendations from management, approved plans to deal with seawater rise which can only contribute to a significant reduction in property values (and thereby the value of its rateable base) in marked contrast to decisions of its neighboring Shoalhaven Council. Had it adopted the same policy the rateable base may well have avoided the need for an application for a rate valuation. Instead the Council, acting on management advice (and that of very expensive consultants) opted for one which reduces property values, increases insurance costs on the properties affected, and in both the short, medium and long terms reduces the base on which rates may be levied, and so it now says it needs to increase rates. What an irrational, and certainly not businesslike, or financially strategic approach. (This is not to say the question of sea level rise should not be considered, but to take a 100 year timeframe is, to put it mildly, crazy in the extreme given the variety of technological and political developments that will inevitably occur during that period: but for ESC this simply means today's residents must suffer and it simply seeks an approval which does little more than maintain its revenue: talk about shooting yourself in the foot!).

Proposals to develop an aged housing estate resulted in so many requirements that the investors abandoned the project....only one of many, but in each case rejecting developments which would yield more funds to the Council and thereby reduce its need to increase rates. There are many more examples which can no doubt be provided by anyone who has attempted a small to large development anywhere within the Shire's borders.

There are many, many more arguments as to why this application should not proceed, not merely in the interests of residents, all of whom will ultimately bear the burden, but in the interests of encouraging a more realistic, rational and business like approach by Council and its advisory staff. As indicated earlier, the Council has failed abysmally to articulate a rational and realistic plan as to how it intends to encourage greater investment, employment and thereby overall wealth in the Shire which of itself must flow on to creating a larger pool of potential revenue without the need to increase the burden on current individual ratepayers. Rejecting its application (and suggesting it might look to developing a serious strategy to improve its revenue base) would not only serve current ratepayers but might help the Council itself understand the need to develop a more strategic and businesslike outlook.

Yours

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Sent: Monday, 16 March 2015 1:13 AM
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In the last few years the Council has spent hundreds of thousands of ratepayer dollars on “consultants” ranging from those on sea level rise (whose contribution is highly debatable) to “community views”, despite the fact that elected Councillors are, supposedly, expected to assess, understand and put forward what they believe to be the views of their constituents.

Perhaps the Council (and its staff) would be a little more concerned about the cost of consultants if these costs were deducted each year from the funds paid to Councillors and/or senior Council management, because, after all, they are supposed to do those jobs if they are half way competent: if they need consultants, why should ratepayers have to pay for them to get advice?

Cheers

