



February 21 2021

Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal
2 – 24 Rawson Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Re Special Rate Variation Application for Central Coast Council

Dear Sir / Madam,

This submission is about the Central Coast Council application for a 15% rate increase in 2021 – 2022.

- Central Coast Council has not been transparent in advising ratepayers about the state government requirement to “harmonise rates” for amalgamated councils from July 01 2021. There has been no notice of the impact this will have on rates except to be verbally told it will be a few hundred dollars added to the base rate for rates and it will stay in the base rate.
- In addition to this “harmonisation” increase the Administrator is applying for an additional 15% rate increase, including the 2% cap on rate increases.
- Based on an estimation of the verbal figures given to me I would be expecting a more than 30% increase in my rates for 2021 – 2022.
- Being an Age Pensioner I receive a \$250 rebate but my estimation of the increase would see this rebate well and truly swallowed up by the substantial increase in my rates for the coming year with further increases in following years built on the substantial increase.
- Note, I had to call the Central Coast Council to be able to ask questions about the “harmonisation” and prospective rate increase which would be added as well. This took more than a week to receive a promised call back.
- Central Coast Council has not provided any written correspondence about these increases and it would be expected that with such radical change that it would have advised its ratepayers well in advance so there could be explanations and allowance for the ratepayers to make submissions, ask questions and actually be listened to, especially as they are the ones who pay the bills in reality.
- It is unreasonable for Central Coast Council to expect ratepayers to accept the massive increases when many of them are on fixed incomes and having to deal with all other costs increasing. It will mean these ratepayers 1. Selling up and leaving the area; 2. Foregoing food and or medications; 3. Not proceeding with medical appointments, investigations, etc. 4. Other options; 5. A combination of these points, thus reducing quality of life.
- Many are also self-funded retirees and with little to no interest on savings and other investments over a number of years the above scenarios are more

reality than fiction. Government at all levels are failing their communities / constituents.

- Some examples of failures over recent years and particularly in the former Gosford City Council area are detailed below:
- The financial performance of the council(s) – current & former – need to be investigated by an independent judicial inquiry.
- Over recent years road maintenance has deteriorated considerably and only bandaid measures have been implemented, there is no visible improvement for the amount of monies paid to council – Central Coast Council or the former Gosford City Council – what guarantees do ratepayers have that their rate money will be utilised appropriately and to the advantage of them and their community?
- Road maintenance locally (and in many other areas of the former Gosford City Council area) has failed to make permanent and long lasting repairs – one example is Kings Avenue Terrigal which is part of two bus routes and since the state government made substantial changes to Terrigal Drive is now also used as a bypass to avoid the reduction of two lanes to one lane and the substantial traffic problems occurring in the morning commuter exodus to work. Photos taken up to 7 years ago clearly demonstrate the lack of maintenance and patchwork “repairs”. The road has been a tessellated pavement for years.
- Over 20 years ago a council officer gave a verbal undertaking that council would “maintain” the reserve between the rear of Canterbury Close properties and Norwich Close “twice per year”. It has been done **twice in 25 years!** At one stage the Norwich Close side of the watercourse was periodically maintained by periodic detention workers but it hasn’t happened for a number of years now and residents are having to try to maintain the reserve. It could be a hazard due to reptiles and the watercourse, especially for children.
- Trees in the reserve are a hazard due to being declared bushfire prone and due to their closeness to the main sewer easement yet council, past and present, expect ratepayers to pay for tree maintenance which the council controls with a list of approved arborists and controlling exactly what the arborists can do, but the ratepayers have to pay the costs. For what are rates paid to the council? Safety is a continuing issue with the trees regularly dropping large branches – once again left to ratepayers to clean up and dispose of the debris. Councils have abrogated their responsibilities.

Above are just three examples of failure to provide appropriate services in just one area, yet we pay our rates which have always been more than double the “average rates” for the area.

- It is also noted that public submissions close on March 07 2021 yet the Central Coast Council has until April 05 2021 to finalise and submit its submission. This means the public has no opportunity to read and respond to

the Central Coast Council submission for the SV – Special Rate Variation. Where is the transparency and consultancy in this process?

- There is only 14 days left to make a submission from the public according to the IPART website on Sunday February 21 2021
- Why did the amalgamated council increase its staffing when amalgamation was supposed to lead to reductions in staff and financial liabilities?
- We need to know when, how and why Central Coast Council managed to become such a “basket case”.
- We also need to ensure the financial impacts on many ratepayers do not see them excessively impacted so that the anxiety and stresses of 2020 are not enhanced causing further harm to the community and individual members of the community.
- State government needs to accept that its policies have caused some of this situation and should have considered and consulted more widely before implementing and literally forcing acceptance of their amalgamation policy with promises that dissipated in the implementation.
- Transparency, communication and community have been forgotten throughout the entire process and failures have occurred across all levels of government.
- Loss of services is inevitable in the Central Coast Council area but to what extent they will be is a total unknown and they will be lost permanently.
- Standards of living and the attraction to the area will be impacted but the extent is another unknown.
- The former Gosford City Council area is going to be impacted at far higher levels than the former Wyong Shire council area because the latter is going to see a rate reduction and possibly lower notices for some ratepayers, but not the extreme increases to be seen by those in the former Gosford City Council area.
- A process is needed to soften the impact the former Gosford City Council area, but it also needs to ensure there is equity with the rest of the now amalgamated council area.
- A suggestion is to manage the “harmonisation” so the impact is not as harsh in one financial year. This would take State government participation.
- Communication and transparency are essential for Government, be it Federal, State or Local Government. Unfortunately there has been a major failure in these areas leading to a massive distrust of the Council, its Administrator and even the government.

This submission is made reflecting on some of the local issues and note is made that it also applies, in particular, to the former Gosford City Council area. There are so many issues one could list and provide further information but it would be such a lengthy project and require the vast council area to be covered and researched in detail, thus the local focus to demonstrate the shortcomings over a long period of time. Rate increases will not see the situation improve as council is so far behind in providing some of the essential services, that have continued to extend the backlog over many years. Government assistance will be the only way to partially catch up

some of the backlog. Reality tells me removing the backlog will not happen in my lifetime.

Some increase is necessary to maintain some services but not at the expense of quality of life, living standards, safety and general life in the Central Coast community.

Regards,

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the sender's name or signature.