



Summary of discussion at ratepayer workshop

25 August 2025

1 Overview

IPART's online workshop with ratepayers on the 2026-27 local council rate peg was held on 25 August 2025. This workshop was open to the public to attend. We published registration details for the workshop on our website and included those details in our newsletter, which was distributed to our subscription lists. Forty-two community members from across NSW attended the workshop, which was structured in 3 sessions:

1. **Information session:** We explained IPART's role with local government rates and covered the framework for regulating council rates in NSW. This included our methodology for setting the rate peg, special variations (SV) and the impact of land valuations on council rates. We also presented on proposed adjustments to the rate peg such as the inclusion of the Dam Safety Levy. We have published the [presentation slides](#) on our website.
2. **Open feedback on proposed adjustments:** This session gave ratepayers the chance to provide feedback on the proposed changes to the rate peg, specifically the adjustments for election costs and the Dam Safety Levy. We have summarised the matters that were raised below.
3. **Open forum for feedback on the rate peg and other issues:** This was an opportunity for ratepayers to raise any feedback or matters for discussion, particularly around setting the 2026-27 rate peg. We have summarised the matters that were raised below.

The [agenda](#) for the workshop is also available on our website.

2 Key themes from the open forum

Table 2.1 provides a high-level summary of the views expressed by individual attendees during the open forum session of the workshop. The views expressed are from participants and may not reflect the current regulatory environment.

Table 2.1 High-level summary of views expressed by participants

Key Theme	Summary of issues raised
Cost of living and affordability	
Large increases in rates, including from recent special variations (SVs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some ratepayers noted that there are a large number of council fees, levies and other charges that have consistently been increasing in recent years. Some ratepayers raised concerns about the recently approved special variations (SVs) that have resulted in large increases in rates, which they feel are not affordable and one ratepayer noted it has had a negative impact on stress and mental wellbeing. Some ratepayers questioned how large increases in rates meet the special variations' assessment criterion of reasonable impact on ratepayers. Multiple ratepayers noted the difficulties of keeping up with council rate increases while living on the pension.
Oversight of councils	
Levies and Charges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A stakeholder noted that levies charged by councils add up. The domestic waste charge includes a bin service but also additional levies, plus a waste levy, a septic levy, a stormwater levy etc. One ratepayer stated that levies represent a 'hidden charge' on top of the rates base and are difficult for ordinary ratepayers to keep track of and budget for. One ratepayer noted that a proportion of the rate peg is for the Emergency Services Levy.
Councils and their accountability to regulators and their community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some ratepayers felt that councils do not have any regulatory oversight or accountability for the use of ratepayer funds. One ratepayer observed IPART's role in local government is not achieving the objective of protecting ratepayers. Some ratepayers expressed that they had limited confidence that their councillors listen and respond to community concerns. One ratepayer suggested that the rate peg review is a step in the right direction. One ratepayer considered their councillors are controlled by the council staff who often live outside of the LGA, rather than listening to the community.
Special Variations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some ratepayers expressed that the SV process lacks democratic accountability as they are usually opposed by the vast majority of the population. Some ratepayers suggested that IPART should have more powers, for example, to reject SVs that are opposed by the majority of the population. Some ratepayers felt that councils were likely to rush into an SV in 2026 in order to get in a rates increase prior to the Government's proposed comprehensive spending review process.
Council Funding	
Cost-shifting from the state government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One stakeholder suggested that the State governments should take on additional responsibilities rather than shift costs. One ratepayer stated that roads and emergency services should be the domain of the state government. One ratepayer noted that it's difficult for councils to 'catch up' on the costs that have been passed on from the state government over many years. Another ratepayer proposed that councils should chase more grant money in response to cost-shifting, especially before seeking an SV.
Service delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some ratepayers expressed their concerns that the rates and levies were consistently increasing while the quality of services and infrastructure has deteriorated or stagnated. Multiple ratepayers expressed that road quality and need for road upgrades were a point of contention with their local councils.

3 Summary of Q&As

Table 3.1 provides a summary of the questions and answers during the open forum session of the workshop.

Table 3.1 Summary of the Q&As from the workshop discussion

Question/comment	Response
Special Variations (SVs)	
When is the new comprehensive spending review process going to be released?	This is a matter for the NSW Government. The Office of Local Government (OLG) is in the process of establishing an expert advisory panel to work through the processes.
There is a lack of accountability of councils to ratepayers in the SVs process. Why does IPART approve SVs where the vast majority of ratepayers and submissions do not agree with them?	IPART's role is to assess SV applications against Guidelines set by the OLG. Community awareness is one of the criteria, but there are others including financial need. IPART assesses applications holistically taking into account the criteria established by the OLG.
Why does IPART not reject SV applications based on the overwhelming consensus of the population and ratepayer submissions?	IPART's role is to assess SV applications against Guidelines set by the OLG. Community awareness of the proposed SV is one of the criteria, but there are others including financial need. IPART assesses applications holistically taking into account the criteria established by the OLG.
Council Levies	
By leaving 25% of the increase in election costs in the rate peg, what control will apply to stop councils spending the 25% in a non-election year?	Spending decisions are a matter for councils. When the next election comes around, councils will have to fund it within their existing budget.
If dams are a reasonable inclusion in the rate peg, why not cyber security?	IPART is currently considering whether to include these costs in the rate peg methodology. IPART recognises this as an important expense that all councils now have to deal with.
Where can we find information on what constitutes a dam?	Dam Safety NSW's website has a definition of what a dam is as well as a map of declared dams to show where they are in the state.
Why does the state government not take greater responsibility in funding emergency services rather than through council levies?	IPART understands the NSW government is considering reforms for the funding of emergency services.
How much of the Emergency Services Levy is generally shouldered by councils and by extension ratepayers?	In NSW local councils currently fund 11.7% of emergency services costs through the Emergency Services Levy (ESL). The majority of the funding (73.7%) comes from insurance premiums, while the NSW Government contributes the remaining 14.6%.
Council accountability	
Councils have money in the form of investments and 'cash in the bank' that they aren't spending in their communities.	Council 'cash at the bank' may be restricted funds that have been allocated to certain projects.
Is IPART able to impose conditions on special variation or rate peg increases for increases to be spread more evenly?	IPART can impose conditions on special variations but not the rate peg; however, the structure and distribution of rates is a matter for each council.
Where are council over or under recoveries of costs recorded, specifically for example with domestic waste management annual charges?	This information is available in council Annual Reports. Councils can smooth the collection of domestic waste management annual charges to meet future expenditure such as land remediation costs.
Is there an oversight agency that looks at the issue of cost shifting from the NSW government to local governments?	OLG is the agency within the NSW government that is responsible for the local government sector.
Can we publish the breakdown of the rate peg increase for individual councils?	IPART will publish information on the rate peg (including the breakdown of the rate peg components) with our, for each council when we release our rate peg decisions at the end of September.