IPART.

PO BOX 290,

QVB Post Office.

NSW. 1230.

RECEIVED
-5 MAR 2014
INDEPENDENT PRICING & REGULATORY TRIBUNAL

Gary Murphy.

[redacted]

Dear Sir/Madam

I am writing to object to Maitland City Council's plan to increase rates yearly over the next seven (7) years by 7.25% P.A., this increase equates to a rate rise of $825.89 or 63.22% (on my current rates $1306.35PA) over the seven (7) years, but does not include any other approved rate rises. This is unjustified, unfair and unreasonable by any stretch of the imagination. The rise is also well above inflation rates and wage growth, wage increase rates imposed by state and federal government. Maitland Council already charge well above some LGA's in Sydney and still are unable to manage. (Newspaper clipping Sydney Morning Herald 24/2/14 attached)

Maitland City Council wants residents to believe this increase was voted on by 43% of those surveyed, this is not a majority of residents of the 1200 surveyed nor is it anywhere near the residential population of this city. From the council website, I observed, the majority of residence voted against any increase. The survey only attracted a minimal amount of involvement by residents, which indicated a lack of awareness by the majority of the population. This seems to be about building monuments, not proving quality service. Although council states it engaged the community through local media, I would say that this method would achieve little interest and audience, the process is flawed, due to lack of community awareness.

I do not believe any person would vote to increase their cost of living. The population in Maitland has increased significantly over the past few years, this has contributed to a number of large residential and industrial developments taking place, which would have significantly increased Maitland Council's revenue base.

If councils are unable to manage on their income levels, maybe they should be advised to live within their means as everyone else has too. During a time of instability in employment (rising unemployment rates), government restraints on wage increases and continual increases in utility costs as the governments sell off the farm and significant utility increase are approved, continual increases in land rates will become unstainable, as have utilities are for low income and middle income families. We are quickly heading down the path of many overseas countries with unstainable costs.

I have lived at the same address for approx. 36yrs and the only council service I have ever received is garbage collection, the roads throughout Maitland are neglected as are measures to eliminate flood prone major roads. I do not believe I should be made to pay for service I do not and have no intention of using, such as art galleries, sporting fields, etc., when more important infrastructure requires improvement.

Maitland Council are proposing wasting millions of dollars in the mall area for beautification works (this is flood area and will always be so), maybe this money would be better spent on infrastructure rather than flood prone central Maitland, which is failing to attract business and customers and has more and more empty shops as business move to the east and west areas of Maitland suburbs. Not wasting these millions would also eliminate the greedy money grab from residents and reducing their living expenses to satisfy council wants. Councils also sell off resident's biggest asset when they are unable to meet the increasing costs of living, such events have been reported through local newspapers such as the Newcastle Herald. (document attached)

I do not believe this increase is justified and council's should be concentrating on quality services at reasonable costs not trying to take over peoples properties because they are unable to met the ever growing costs and wastes of local government through mismanagement and overabundance of high income managers, along with the costs associated with councillors and overpaid mayor. This is level of government needs to be abolished in this over governed country, this would reduce costs to residents significantly.

Maybe council should be encouraged to sell off assets (as all levels of government are doing) that cost ratepayers money and achieve no income. Introducing a user pays system may achieve some increase in income for council, that way those who do not use the facilities aren't forced to pay for them.

I have attached newspaper clippings which indicate councillors are aware 100% of people are against the rate rise, but know they will have to pay to keep their biggest asset and are trapped into a never ending increase in costs and money grabbing by local government

Thank you for your time in reading my objection to a 7.25% yearly rate increase proposed by Maitland City Council.

Yours Faithfully

[redacted]

By JANEK SPEIGHT
Nov. 25, 2013, midnight

CASH-STRAPPED Hunter councils are taking court action, seeking the seizure of homes and property, to recover years worth of unpaid rates totalling more than $14million.

The Newcastle Herald can reveal that thousands of people are refusing to pay a backlog of rates, adding to councils' woes as they face burgeoning debt and uncertain financial futures.

Rate defaulters owed almost $6million to Newcastle City Council at June30 this year – enough for an upgrade to the Newcastle Art Gallery.

The region's councils confirmed ratepayers were increasingly falling behind deadlines and taking up payment plans. More than 11,600 demand notices were sent out by Newcastle, Lake Macquarie, Maitland, Cessnock and Port Stephens councils last financial year.

The courts were involved in 374 cases, after property owners ignored lengthy warning periods and were issued with sheriff's office property seizure orders.

No homes were sold during the 2012-13 financial year, but two were put under the hammer in 2011-12 at Maitland and Port Stephens.

Lake Macquarie Council finance manager Ross Gilshenan said ratepayers were given plenty of time before liquidators became involved.

"The execution of a writ is one of the last options and we try to avoid going down that path," he said.

"But if there's still no response after a letter of demand, which states legal action will be taken, then we have to go down that path."

Mr Gilshenan admitted recent rates rises from Hunter councils could lead to more unpaid bills.

Newcastle City and Lake Macquarie councils both raised rates by at least 8per cent for 2012-13. And Maitland council is expected to give the green light on a similar hike next month.

Mr Gilshenan said councils were "constantly monitoring the situation". And a 9per cent a year interest rate was charged daily on unpaid bills.

"We understand there are employment issues, that economic growth is faltering and population rises are contributing to debt," he said.

"That's why we try to come to an arrangement with any ratepayer struggling financially."

Port Stephens mayor Bruce Mackenzie said the $1.2million owed to his council would "solve a lot of problems".

"We could fix our roads, spend it on ageing buildings, fix drainage problems," he said.

"But I'm also concerned for the ratepayer. I understand that it's not easy at the moment and only getting harder. There are genuine people out there doing it tough and I'd be the last person to start coming down hard."

Auditors revealed at last week's Newcastle City Council meeting that the council was spending $24million a year less on infrastructure maintenance than it should.

Lord mayor Jeff McCloy said access to the millions in unpaid rates would help achieve infrastructure goals in the city.

"[Council] could bring forward some of the key identified projects such as the completion of Bathers Way and the revitalisation of Hunter Street," he said.

"It is always a priority to hold ratepayers to their financial responsibility to the city they live in. This needs to be balanced against the needs of those experiencing genuine financial difficulties, where council can offer advice tailored to the ratepayer's circumstances."

Roads were a concern for other councils – especially Cessnock which had the worst debt-ratepayer ratio at $116 owed each.

"Our whole [roads] network could do with [the money]," mayor Bob Pynsent said.

"We need to be talking with ratepayers and try to be nice and proactive about it instead of taking legal action."

Seven years of rises

THE POST 18/12/13

Council seek approval for rate increases averaging 8.35 per cent

MELISSAH COMBER

Maitland City Council will apply to the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal in an effort to raise rates an average of 8.35 per cent each year for seven years.

Councillors voted unanimously at last week's meeting to apply for the special rate variation in an effort to prevent a forecasted $92 million deficit in seven years, costing the standard residential rate payer an extra $800 on their yearly bill by the end of the variation period.

Despite receiving 23 written submissions objecting to the proposal, councillors agreed that dealing with the issue could not be deferred.

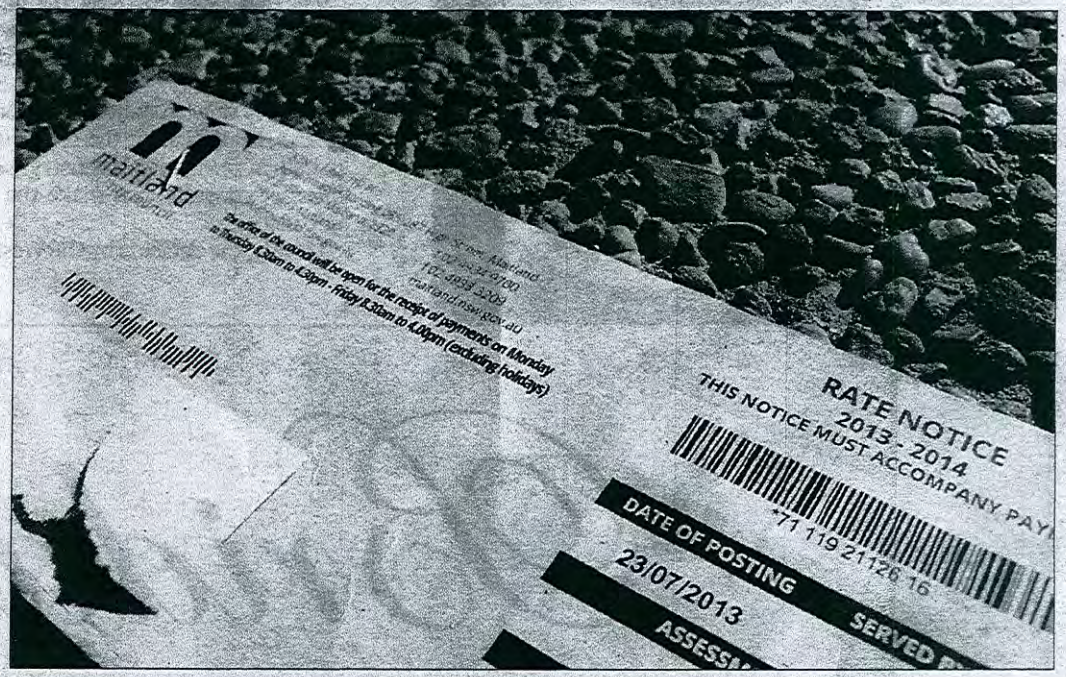
"We are on the precipice of doing something great for this city," Councillor Ken Wethered said.

"I reckon 100 per cent of people are not happy about it but the majority of people will do it."

Councillor Brian Burke, who moved the motion, said that it was not an issue for the next cohort of councillors to deal with.

"Long term financial sustainability must be addressed and it must be addressed now.

"We can't leave it to the next council to resolve."



Maitland residential rate are on track to skyrocketing next year

The rise will maintain some services at the levels they are currently programmed, including cemeteries, libraries, sustainability programs and Maitland Regional Art Gallery, while others will be enhanced, such as roads, footpaths, public amenities and sports fields.

"This Council has $880 million worth of assets," Cr Burke said.

"These assets need to be maintained."

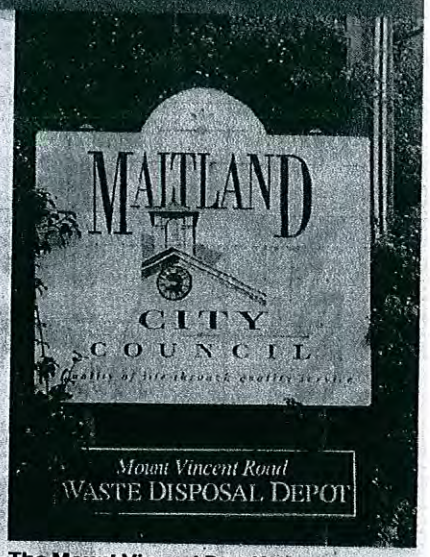
In light of the resolution to apply to IPART for the special rate variation, Council has also revised its Delivery Program 2013-17 to incorporate the variation and extend its capital works program, incorporating the enhanced services.

The Delivery Program will be on exhibition until January 24.

Tip fees on the way up

According to Council document, three quarters of Maitland's tip users could potentially pay more to use the city's facility after councillors voted 9-3 to adopt a differential pricing system.

MELISSAH COMBER



The Mount Vincent Road Waste Management Centre will adopt a differential price structure next year

Councillors Henry Meskauskas, Philip Penfold and Nicole Penfold opposed the motion, which will see users charged $262 to dump a tonne of waste, where previously sedans and station wagons were charged $23 and vans, utes and single axle trailers paid $66.

The system was developed after it was found the Mount Vincent Road facility would reach capacity in three years due to the high number of recyclable materials being dumped in landfill. A Council study determined that 66 per cent of the dumped waste was recyclable.

Green waste, cardboard, e-waste, concrete, bricks and polystyrene can be disposed of for free at the tip, as they then go on for recycling. "Differential pricing is about changing behaviour," Council Manager Development and Environment David Simm said. "What we're creating here is the opportunity for people to decrease their gate fee by sorting their recycling out." While Councillor Nicole Penfold criticised the January 1 adoption date of the system due to the number of residents who will be disposing of rubbish from Christmas, the majority of councillors agreed residents need a financial incentive.

Applications soar Residents asked to pay up

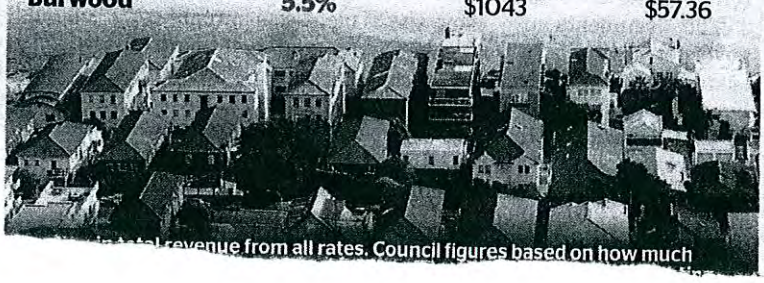
More councils seek extra rate rises as costs bite bottom line

nes Robertson,
sha McKenny

More, please

Rate rises sought by Sydney councils for next financial year

Council	2014-15 increase appled for	Estimated current average residential rate	2014-15 value of special variation
Campbelltown	11%	$980	$108
Fairfield	10%	$780	$40
Randwick	9.59%	$1113	$93
Holroyd	9%	$810	$80
Liverpool	9%	$1063	$94
Canterbury	7.5%	$954	$71.55
Ku-ring-gai	7.3%	$1648	$64
Blacktown	6.7%	$865	$46
Warringah	6.1%	$1138	$70
Rockdale	6%	$1098	$65
Burwood	5.5%	$1043	$57.36



revenue from all rates. Council figures based on how much