

**Armidale Dumaresq Ratepayers Association
Submission to IPART opposing ADCs Special Rate Variation Application**

The Armidale Dumaresq Ratepayers Association which represents over 350 residents, ratepayers and businesses within the Armidale Dumaresq Council boundary is opposed to the Application by Armidale Dumaresq Council for a 10% SRV over 7 years for the following reasons.

1. The SRV is unnecessary.
2. The timing of this application has not taken into account the fact that severe drought conditions prevail the ADC area.
3. Council has consistently underspent on rural road management allowing them to deteriorate - they claimed rehabilitation of rural roads was a major reason for the SRV
4. Council's public consultation about the SRV was flawed.
5. Council has not pursued other options. Instead it has chosen to apply for a larger than average SRV.

1. The SRV is unnecessary.

With careful financial management, increased productivity and a 10% reduction in staffing levels through natural attrition, we believe that ADC can make the necessary savings to manage their shortfall in infrastructure maintenance and do not need the SRV. In the document *Armidale-Dumaresq Council, Financial Sustainability Assessment and Benchmarking Report* dated 21 March 2013 prepared by NSW Treasury Corporation, the Division of Local Government and the Independent Local Government Review Panel made it clear that ADC is in a reasonably good financial position and is moderately sustainable. The Report found that 'Council's financial flexibility as indicated by the Operating Ratio and the Own Source Operating Revenue Ratio was sound and above the group average' and that 'Council's performance in terms of asset maintenance and asset renewal was generally on par with the peer group'. (p5)

ADC's revenue excluding capital grants and contributions, increased by 16.3% to \$44.6m over the four year period to 2012. When compounded this equates to a 5.2% p.a. increase. Interest and investment revenue has grown from zero in 2009 to \$2.2m in 2012. 'Council expects to recoup a total of \$4.1m of \$10.4m (face value) worth of existing and terminated CDO exposures, subject to ongoing UK and US litigation finding in favour of the Council' (p13).

With the new landfill issue needing to reach a conclusion very soon, this project should not affect Council's financial standing. They say that they will use higher user and gate charges to fund the repayment of that loan (p16). Ratepayers have already been paying a substantial levy over the last few years to pay for that loan. The document reports that from 2014 on, borrowing costs should decline and the Operating Ratio should begin to improve (p18). The document also states that ADC were considering applying for a 9% SRV for only one year in 2014 (p23). This is a far cry from the 10% over 7 years (a total of 70%) that ADC is now applying for. Ratepayers find it hard to understand why there should be such a dramatic difference.

'Council have stated that they recognise that some of the Community Strategic Plan initiatives are unrealistic without a SRV and this is now under discussion within Council and through community consultation' (p25). Ratepayers would like to know which of the

stated initiatives are unrealistic without a SRV. Perhaps these initiatives may be unnecessary.

The document concludes that 'Council's Operating Ratio outperformed the benchmark in three of the past four years and was consistently above the group average. Over the medium term, Council's ratio is forecast to remain above the benchmark and the peer group' (p27).

The Asset Maintenance Review was conducted across NSW so every Council has been affected by an increase in costs. Not all Councils have applied for an SRV and ADC has applied for a particularly high percentage overall. If other councils can manage their assets, ratepayers are wondering why ADC needs such a high SRV and over a period of seven years.

2. The timing of this application has coincided with the onset of a period of severe drought.

2013 was a particularly dry year with higher than average temperatures in spring and in the following summer. The drought has continued into 2014 with the Armidale Dumaresq area missing out on normal thunderstorms and summer rain. Water resources have become extremely scarce. Feed for remaining stock is extremely difficult to obtain, very expensive when it can be found and haulage charges for it are costly. Farmers being price-takers have had to sell essential breeders as well as other livestock at low prices to cut back on rising expenses. Rural recovery will take several years with many landowners being deprived of a regular farming income for some years.

A recent land revaluation has significantly increased the value of some farmland and properties in the outlying villages. This will increase rates for affected properties. Ratepayers impacted by the cumulative effect of the rate pegging increase and a SRV calculated on these already increased Rate Assessments will be unable to pay the large increases demanded. Many farmers already pay Rates Assessments of between \$10,000 and \$20,000 - some even higher - and receive minimal, if any, services from ADC in return.

Farmers have negative income flow. Paying their rates will be extremely difficult even at 2013/2014 levels. With a SRV, it will be impossible. Farmers will either have to sell some, or all (depending upon stock prices, commissions, haulage costs and a range of taxes levied on sold livestock) of the remaining core of their breeding stock or increase their mortgages to pay their rates - if the banks will allow them to do so. Either scenario has obvious long term impact upon the viability of the farming community in the ADC area.

3. Council has consistently underspent on rural road management allowing them to deteriorate - they claimed rehabilitation of rural roads was a major reason for the SRV

The only service that rural landowners get is their road network. Most are gravel roads and ADC inherited these from the former Dumaresq Shire Council. Since amalgamation many of these roads have been allowed to fall into disrepair, becoming unsafe. This is because ADC has had a policy of spending a minimal amount on rural road maintenance. When maintenance does occur Council has been known to use storm damage funding rather than normal allocated road funds. The Premier and Cabinet document 'Comparative Information on NSW Local Government' (measuring Local Government Performance 2011/12) shows that ADC spent only 12% of its service expenditure on roads, bridges and footpaths. The Treasury document reinforces this by stating that Council's Building and Infrastructure Asset Renewals Ratio was below the benchmark in all years reported, which

indicates Council is spending at levels below the required amount on asset renewal. In comparison they spent 22% on Governance and Administration. Compare this with other rural Councils which spent far more in proportion on roads, bridges and footpaths - Bathurst 17%, Gunnedah 21%, Guyra 23%, Inverell 25%.

The SRV application does not really address the problem. Only 14.5% of the SRV will be spent on rural road rehabilitation and resealing. With bridges the ratio climbs to 24.4%. Yet Council justified the SRV by stating that much of it will be spent on rural roads. None of the SRV detail was provided to ratepayers until after ADC's application went to IPART.

IPART's guidelines state that 'the impact on affected ratepayers must be reasonable, having regard to both the current rate levels, existing ratepayer base and the proposed purpose of the variation. Council's IP&R process should also establish that the proposed rate increases are affordable having regard to the local community's capacity to pay'. Clearly Council has not taken into account the capacity of rural landowners to pay the SRV during this difficult period.

4. Council's public consultation about the SRV was flawed.

The IPART guidelines state 'Councils must be able to show that they have fully disclosed all relevant information to the community and clearly identified the impact of the proposed rates increase on ratepayers'. Ratepayers in the Armidale Dumaresq area were given different messages about the SRV. In their notification letter, ADC had three options: no SRV, 10% over 7 years or 20% over 7 years. When the GM addressed the Dumaresq Local Area Committee at the end of October, the meeting was given two options only and voted accordingly. Council has used these results in their evidence for community support but if there had been a third option of no SRV, the result would have been quite different. Similar reports have come in from other Local Area Committees. At that meeting the GM stressed that rural road rehabilitation was a priority. The consultation period occurred over the Christmas period when many residents leave for the coast for their annual holiday. The telephone survey was conducted during this time (16th December 2013 – 10th January 2014) and ratepayers have reported not being allowed to participate because of age. A public meeting was called but not advertised and consequently no-one attended.

Residents were becoming increasingly agitated and Council was forced to call another public meeting on February 8, 2014 at 5.00 pm. For some strange reason they decided to change the meeting to a workshop and booked it for 2pm. The change in time at short notice was very confusing. The intention was to split those in attendance into 10 groups. The Town Hall was full to overflowing with 350+ people turning up and not enough chairs. Many people stood throughout the event. Council had been told beforehand that there would be a huge crowd but they refused to listen. They had hired a consultant Allan Mapstone from Jeff Ruurda & Associates to present the need for an SRV. This made people even more agitated and it became a very heated meeting. The crowd refused to split up when directed by the consultant - logistically it was impossible anyway - and finally the mayor faced the crowd and managed questions. This meeting was later seen as superfluous as it had no impact on council's application since it was held within the 28 day consultation period and Council were unable to change the information that they had put into their notification letter.

Ratepayers received their letters about the SRV in the weeks preceding this meeting - much too late. The letter only showed an estimation of the rise in individual rates in the first

year. People were left confused not knowing if this was a one-off amount or if it would be applied in more than one year. IPART clearly advises that such information must show 'the full cumulative impact on rates if the special variation is for two years or more'. Yet none of the letters showed the impact on rates for more than one year. The survey also indicated a great level of confusion. Jetty Research's Final Report states that only 39% of respondents were aware that Council was applying for a rate variation, a mere 28% claimed to have read about the special rate variation in the media and a low 14%-19% were aware of priorities to be funded by the SRV. 41% didn't accept any of the SRV options and only 10% agreed with Council's preferred option of 20%.

The resulting anger, confusion and frustration among ratepayers caused by a lack of transparency in councils delivery of the SRV and their flawed consultation process led to residents forming an Action Group which has now become the Armidale Dumaresq Ratepayers Association with a membership of over 350 which is increasing every day.

5. Council has not pursued other options. Instead it has chosen to apply for a larger than average SRV.

It is widely believed by ratepayers that ADC is over-governed and is top-heavy in administration. The amount raised by rates and other charges is \$20 million yet their payroll (including benefits) is approaching \$18 million. Ratepayers feel that this is unsustainable. This association has been told that before the failed Strategic Alliance there were 160 Full Time Employees (FTE). A few years after the Alliance that figure had grown to 260. Some attrition has taken place with the number of equivalent FTE standing at 239 at 30th June 2013. Ratepayers believe that this figure needs to be reduced further by natural attrition. A 10% reduction could bring in annual savings of \$1.69 million which would address the asset maintenance shortfall.

A report conducted by Professor Percy Allan AM (25/8/09) found that ADC had had a blowout in their operating deficit which led to a deterioration in their physical assets, such as roads and a need to shift emphasis from services growth to boosting revenue and fixing existing infrastructure. The problems with infrastructure maintenance being given a low priority continue to this day, despite the position of ADC rising from a state of unsustainability to moderate sustainability. ADC's solution is to apply for an SRV rather than changing their priorities.

Council also needs to get back to basics in the type of services it provides and carefully consider any of its non-core operations. It needs to become an efficient customer service oriented organisation again. The frequent use of consultants when one has a highly qualified and highly paid staff appears to have become commonplace and could be reviewed. Outsourcing simple tasks like using a call centre doesn't really reduce expenditure greatly. Council needs to develop economies right across the board but this is achievable if tackled seriously. Reducing waste across all departments would also yield significant savings.

Modest rate increases, such as those recommended in the 'Review Today' report, during better than average years in the rural sector would be far more acceptable to ratepayers than sudden large rises such as in the current ADC application. These could then be used to cover the infrastructure backlog of \$9.1m identified by council in its Fact Sheet on the SRV. With a sound financial policy Council will also find that staff morale will improve leading to a lift in productivity. Poor policies and lack of adequate consultation usually result in conflict with ratepayers and are counter productive for everyone.

As far back as 2009, recommendations for productivity improvements and cost savings were made to ADC via the 2009 'Review Today' Report: *Armidale Dumaresq Council: Achieving Sustainable Infrastructure, Services and Finances* (25 August 2009). The recommendations for a 'Reasonable Scenario' included the following plan:

- Rates revenue to increase by 3.3% (or 2.0% per property) per annum above CPI inflation;
- Fees and charges to rise by 6.4% (or 5.2% per property) per annum above CPI inflation;
- Service spending limited to an increase by 2.2% (or 1.0% per property) over CPI inflation each year.

Other recommendations from that report such as re-prioritising various services and levels of service provision, re-organising/reducing labour and capital inputs, and reviewing organisational structures or services to be delivered in addition to pursuing state, federal and corporate grants were made.

The Responsible spending scenario aimed to achieve a compromise between fiscal, revenue, infrastructure and service responsibilities to the community. This scenario would produce the following results between 2008/00 and 2018/19;

- The net financial liabilities ratio would fall from 50% to 46% (well within the 40% to 80% range recommended by the Local Government Inquiry).
- The operating account would strengthen from a deficit of 1.6% to a surplus of 2.5% (the floor of the LGI desirable range)
- The infrastructure backlog ratio would shrink from 2.7% to 0.5%.

Sadly, the 'Review Today' Report recommendations have all been largely ignored by ADC but could be revisited.

Armidale like many regional centres is suffering from a very slow rate of population increase. The evocities project showed that jobs for both partners are essential in attracting tree-changers unless they are retirees. Council has a difficult job in attracting business to the city but it is an essential task and deserves the highest priority. With a solid business base the town and district will prosper.

Prepared by Maria Hitchcock (Chairman)

In consultation with Trish McRae, Wendy Berkley, Margaret Gunter and other members of ADRA

Attachments

Treasury Dept Document

Newspaper articles and letters from the Armidale Express

Analysis of the Strategic Alliance

Comparative KPIs

Premier's Dept Comparative Information on NSW Local Govt

ADC Community Strategic Delivery Program 2014-2018

ADC Fact Sheet

Ratepayer Action Group Press Releases

Taking a stand for our farms

By LYDIA ROBERTS

A GROUP of councillors will lobby their colleagues at Armidale Dumaresq Council to exempt farmers from the planned special rate variation.

They have sent notice to general manager Shane Burns to debate the exemption at an extraordinary meeting of Council next Thursday.

Jim Maher said they would also push for a review of Armidale's rating structure.

"Council has received dozens of submissions from farmers from across the district calling for an exemption because of the drought," Cr Maher said yesterday.

"According to long-term weather forecasters, substantial rain is not on the cards until Christmas.

"They are having to sell their livestock now because there is no feed and water; a 20 per cent rates hike would be the final straw for many."

Rob Richardson, Colin Gadd and Herman Beyersdorf have lent their support to the motion, which will be voted on by full Council.

Cr Maher said should the motion be successful, the first step would be looking at how money raised from rates would be spent on industrial, rural and residential projects.

"Council is looking at spending a lot of the money anticipated from the special rate variation to upgrade rural roads," Cr Maher said.

"It could be we provide exemption for farmers and spend less on these little-used roads."



A 20 per cent rates hike would be the final straw for many farmers

Council wants to raise rates by 20 per cent; 10 per cent for the first year, followed by another 10 per cent over seven years.

But a fiery meeting of ratepayers at Armidale Town Hall on Saturday drew an angry response. Councillors will consider their feedback next Thursday.

Residents 'rate' council

By SAMANTHA-JO HARRIS

CONCERNED residents will take a firm stand against issues affecting them after the formation of an association aimed at holding Council to account.

The Armidale Dumaresq Ratepayers Association developed out of the Ratepayers Action Group on Monday.

The group originally formed to fight the Council's application for a special rate variation earlier this year, after a huge community backlash against Council's proposed 20 per cent rate hike.

Chairwoman Maria Hitchcock said the association was formed to create a stable group where residents could raise their concerns about a broad range of issues, not just the rate increase.

She said the association already had more than 300 members and developed so the community's voice would be heard.

"Many people have become more involved in local government and now have a general interest into the issues affecting them," she said.

The new association has a

meeting lined up with Council's interim general manager Glenn Inglis on Monday to discuss a range of different issues. Among them will be the rating categories.



Many people have become more involved in local government

"I, and most of the members, agree there is a degree of unfair-

ness in the rating categories," Ms Hitchcock said.

"We would like to see them levelled out across the board so it becomes fair for everyone."

Councillors have previously discussed a review of the rating categories at last month's Council meeting.

But Ms Hitchcock said the association will keep with the issue to make sure "the ball keeps rolling. I hope the association will give rise to more responsible local government and prosperity for the town and the community."

Survey into rates rise skewed: residents

PHONE and web surveys conducted into the special rate variation were skewed, ratepayers claim.

Council commissioned Jetty Research to conduct the phone survey, with the questions constructed via collaboration between Jetty Research and Council.

Ratepayer Jasmine Flora said she

had filled out the online survey, conducted through Survey Monkeys, five times and was concerned there was no safeguard to prevent non-ratepayers from completing the survey.

Also, the questions of the phone survey were framed in such a way to support a rate variation despite where respondents stood on the issue.

Debate on rates rise

By **SAMANTHA-JO HARRIS**

THE CASE for a special variation to rates must be submitted by Armidale Dumaresq Council to the regulator by Monday.

Councillors were scheduled to debate the variation last night at an extraordinary meeting.

Before the meeting, a group of councillors proposed an exemption from the planned rate rise for rural ratepayers because of the drought.

Councillor Rob Richardson, who seconded the motion, said he hoped it would be supported.

"It is a starting point for debate," Cr Richardson said.

"I hope councillors will have a good discussion [about the motion]."

However, councillor Margaret O'Connor indicated she was opposed to the proposal.

"It is divisive and doesn't address the issue facing the whole community," Cr O'Connor said.

At last month's general Council meeting she proposed a recommendation, which would see Council obtain further information about vulnerable groups' ability to pay for the rate increase. She said she wanted to see a more inclusive motion.

The special rate variation has been a hot topic for the past few months, with Council trying to convince a reluctant public of the need for the rate hike.

Council wants to vary rates by 20 per cent. They were tipped to vote for a 10 per cent rise in the next financial year, followed by a further 10 per cent rise for the next seven years.

Council is facing a \$2.15 million shortfall in its renewal of assets, which will see the standard of roads, drainage, recreational facilities and other infrastructure decreased to address the lack of funds.



PLENTY TO SAY: Armidale Dumaresq councillors face a packed Town Hall for a special rates variation workshop and, opposite page, angry ratepayers voice their concerns over the planned increase.

YOUR SAY:

Open letter to mayor over rates proposal

COUNCILLOR Bishop, I refer you to the meeting held at 2pm, Saturday February 8 at the town hall.

This was a community consultation meeting held by Council in relation to the "special rates variation" (10 per cent this year plus 10 per cent in 2015).

Firstly, background. The current Council was elected in September 2012.

topic. I also hand wrote four A4 pages in the *Big Book of Ideas* and filled in Council's consultation form.

Okay, since being elected as a new councillor in September 2012, you have launched a (successful) bid to become mayor, launched a bid to have general manager Shane Burns' contract terminated six months early (at a cost to ratepayers of \$100,000) and are now leading a push to have council rates rise by 20 per cent.

Your rationale for doing so is, "change is good."

That, for example, change oc-

that claiming "change is good" is insufficient reason to be initiating the actions which you are.

Change may also be bad (e.g. from health to illness) or chaotic or many other adjectives.

Tom Livanos
Armidale

Rate increase a nail in the coffin

WOE is me – another nail in the coffin of Armidale following the downward slide evidenced in the

Here is the record of the group led by Bishop. They blocked the awarding of a tender to NSW Public Works to provide an engineering report on the ageing Dumaresq Dam wall. The subsequent awarding of the tender to a higher priced tenderer has cost rate payers around \$30,000.

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A CPI increase in rates would be acceptable, a 10 per cent rise is not acceptable

ON THE WEB:

www.armidaleexpress.com.au

Special rate variation

I AM in two minds about this schmozzle. I don't want the rate hike because my 20 per cent hike is more than \$650 and the only service I get from Council is a wheelie bin and recycling service. However, I am a fan of paying taxes to contribute to services in my community whether I use them or not. The fact that the management of the finances, which our rates contribute to, is a white collar joke is another issue - this must be looked at forensically and obviously practices must change. There have been a lot of accusations of bullying occurring. Having myself been a victim of serious workplace bullying, I am passionate that the bullying in

tion" (10 per cent this year plus 10 per cent in 2015).

Firstly, background. The current Council was elected in September, 2012.

As per schedule, in the first half of 2013, Council spent months in time and a considerable amount of money receiving input from the community to update its strategic objectives for the next 15 years.

I made a written submission during this process which took weeks to put together. It ran for a little over a dozen or so pages and was referenced by over a dozen attachments.

I also made a five-minute verbal presentation to Council at the May 2013 Ordinary Council Meeting on this most important

cent.

Your rationale for doing so – "change is good."

That, for example, change occurs in the presidency of the United States and in other posts.

That may be well and good, however, in the examples you provide, the change is already built into society and "the system".

So too with changes to Council's general manager, to councillors and to the town mayor. Meanwhile, the status of the strategic objectives process (let alone the outcomes) undertaken last year is – as far as I know – uncertain.

Given this context – as it applies to me personally and to the town generally – might I suggest

WOE is me – another nail in the coffin of Armidale following the downward slide evidenced in the shop vacancies in the Mall. Today, like others, I received the latest letter from Council regarding the proposed rise in rates.

The new proposal is said to follow "community consultation", presumably during January when many community members are absent from Armidale.

The letter states that "a majority support the increase" with "little support for allowing the continual deterioration of public assets".

How was this support ascertained and how representative was the "community" involved?

The Armidale Dumaresq Council has been in disarray for a number of years now, with bad investments and in-fighting. Perhaps Council might look at alternatives to this enormous rate hike, the cake does not have to get a great deal larger, just divide it differently.

My income is pegged to increases in the Consumer Price Index; why should Council's not be the same?

The new federal government is constantly saying we must live within our means.

Maybe Council should

a 10 per cent rise is not acceptable

They blocked the proposal by the previous Council for a three per cent increase in rates over three years or a total of nine per cent increase. This proposal would have been far more palatable to cash-strapped rate payers than the proposal of the Bishop led Council of an application for a 10 per cent increase in the first year followed by a ten percent increase in the following year.

Had the original proposal not been blocked there is a very good chance that it would have been supported by ratepayers and would be "done and dusted".

The Council would have had about \$350,000 to spend on infrastructure maintenance in the current year and not had to cancel significant projects. It certainly would not have seen the justifiably angry reaction from the 300 plus ratepayers who attended the public meeting on Saturday afternoon.

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It is time for Mr Bishop to step aside as mayor

They have blocked the pur-

forensically and obviously practices must change. There have been a lot of accusations of bullying occurring. Having myself been a victim of serious workplace bullying, I am passionate that the bullying in the Council environment be looked into. When bullying occurs people, especially the employed workers, go into survival mode. Because of this nothing in the organisation is operating efficiently or effectively. As a rate payer I demand that an independent mediator is utilised - change the culture and maybe the outcomes Council aim for may become more achievable. I am suggesting this beyond the alleged mediation already organised between the general manager and the councillors. If our mayor is a real leader and manager or even a person who cares about the psyche of his employees and colleagues he will do the hard things to make his and his colleagues' job easier.

Annabel

I DON'T object to the 20 per cent hike, as we pay a lot because schools, universities and churches don't pay land rates. But I do want more services. People have asked for a two yearly green pick up, and the general manager said there were occupational health and safety concerns with staff. What concerns, for heavens sake? If adequate protection clothing is provided (like heavy gloves to prevent workers from being pricked by rose thorns) and people don't put big tree stumps to be picked up, what is the harm in removing cuttings? Why should we pay to put green stuff at the tip, when they turn this into wood pulp and compost that we pay for? Maybe they could employ many of the green waste collectors in town to do the job.

Bushbunny



Education & Communities
Office of Education

State Training Services



ELSA DIXON ABORIGINAL EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM

Call for Applications for 2014/15

The Elsa Dixon Aboriginal Employment Program is an initiative of the NSW Government to encourage job opportunities and career advancement for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The NSW Department of Education and Communities is seeking applications from eligible organisations in the NSW public, local government, private or community sectors for funding proposals under the following program elements:

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The **Permanent Employment** element aims to get Aboriginal people into permanent careers in the NSW public and local government sectors.

The **Temporary Secondment** element aims to improve career development for Aboriginal employees in the NSW public and local government sectors.

The **Community Partnership Project** element funds special projects to create jobs for Aboriginal people within Aboriginal Community organisations and other incorporated organisations.

The **Graduate Work Experience** element encourages employers to give new Aboriginal graduates a start in the workforce by subsidising a work experience placement (maximum 12 weeks) in the person's field of training. Any employer is eligible to apply, subject to the conditions in the Guidelines.

The **School-based Traineeship** element aims to get Aboriginal school students into a traineeship as part of their Higher School Certificate in the NSW public and local government sectors.

Program Guidelines and application forms can be downloaded from:
training.nsw.gov.au/aboriginal_services/elsa_dixon.html

APPLICATIONS CLOSE 14 MARCH 2014.
FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT:

State Training Services, Aboriginal Services
 Phone: (02) 6881 6178
 Fax: (02) 6881 6179
 Email: sts-as@det.nsw.edu.au



N3-4094

Council might look at alternatives to this enormous rate hike, the cake does not have to get a great deal larger, just divide it differently.

My income is pegged to increases in the Consumer Price Index; why should Council's not be the same?

The new federal government is constantly saying we must live within our means.

Maybe Council should take note of this. A CPI increase in rates would be acceptable, a 10 per cent rise is not acceptable.

**Darrel Fisher
Armidale**

Gang-of-five are blocking plans

LAURIE Bishop was elected 16 months ago and has been mayor for the past four months.

He is the leader of the group of five newly elected councillors who, with the support of Chris Halligan, have blocked just about every project the previous Council had in train.

ly would not have seen the justifiably angry reaction from the 300 plus ratepayers who attended the public meeting on Saturday afternoon.



*It is time for Mr
Bishop to step aside
as mayor*

They have blocked the purchase of land for the much needed new landfill site which has been the subject of a long series of approval and the granting of a \$14 million loan to develop the site. We ratepayers are currently paying interest on these loans plus yet another consultancy while the project cannot proceed. I estimate the difference between interest paid and interest received on the \$14 million at around \$500,000 per year.

It is time for Mr Bishop to step aside as mayor before he and his followers waste any more ratepayers money and continue to block important projects that are needed for this great city to remain the great city.

**Alex McDonald
Armidale**

yearly green pick up, and the general manager said there were occupational health and safety concerns with staff. What concerns, for heavens sake? If adequate protection clothing is provided (like heavy gloves to prevent workers from being pricked by rose thorns) and people don't put big tree stumps to be picked up, what is the harm in removing cuttings? Why should we pay to put green stuff at the tip, when they turn this into wood pulp and compost that we pay for? Maybe they could employ many of the green waste collectors in town to do the job.

Bushbunny

HAS anybody shown the new mayor where the toilet is?

Darren

I BELIEVE it is the one with the flashing lights in the park on the corner of Marsh and Kirkwood Streets. With the lights and a little music he can feel like he is on Broadway.

Ally Smart

AS A ratepayer, I don't want this kind of 20 per cent rate increase. I believe it's a waste to put money in these councillors' hands. These councillors can't manage their differences professionally, how could they manage our rates effectively?

Armidale Resident

I AGREE, they have proven themselves incompetent and not capable of handling large sums of money. Time to call in an administrator, sack this lot and get a clean slate.

Jack

FOLLOWING the public meeting held on February 8 in the Town Hall, an Armidale Dumaresq Ratepayers Action Group is being formed.

Anyone wishing to join should email maria@coolnatives.com.au

Maria Hitchcock
Armidale