

Randwick Council Special Rate Variation

Randwick Council recently invited community opinion on three options relating to a proposed additional increase in council rates (over and above the increase allowed by IPART) to fund certain projects. The 3 options were to have no additional increase in rates (and not fund the projects); to have a 13.21% rate increase over the next 3 years and complete the projects within 13 years; or to have a 19.85% rate increase over the next 3 years and borrow \$27 million to complete the projects within 7 years.

The Mayoral column and a news article in the Southern Courier of 20 February state that a majority of the community supports the third option - a cumulative rate increase of 19.85% over the next 3 years and Council borrowing \$27 million.

Yet data in Council's submission to IPART seeking a special rate variation to allow this 19.85% increase indicates a majority (50.3%) of the 6,316 community respondents opposed this option. While the percentage is slim, it disturbs me that Council has presented an inaccurate picture to IPART, and particularly when community approval is one of the criteria assessed by IPART in granting this increase.

A further matter of concern is that Council, in its request for feedback, nominated the 19.85% increase and borrowing \$27 million as its preferred option, thus introducing bias into its survey. There will always be some who defer to the 'Council knows best' sentiment. Ratepayers will be servicing this \$27 million debt for years to come as Council's application to IPART is for a permanent increase in rates which means our rates will stay at this higher level after the next three years. This was not divulged to residents by Council. Council transparency and full disclosure appear lacking.

The Council 'community survey' was undertaken over the holiday period, many residents were therefore unaware of it and hence the sample size Council has used in its submission to IPART is a very small fraction of the ratepayer population.

On the basis of data manipulation and lack of full disclosure and honesty by Council to ratepayers, I urge IPART to reject Randwick Council's request.

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