

SUBMISSION TO IPART FOR OBJECTION DATED 14 JUNE 2017.

NEED & PURPOSE OF ADDITIONAL REVENUE

Midcoast Council states the need and purpose for the Special Variation Application is *“to address underfunding of renewals of Council’s road and bridge assets, to start addressing the significant asset backlog and support ongoing financial sustainability”*.

- Great Lakes Council ratepayers have for years paid significantly higher rates than Taree and Gloucester Councils and achieved “fit for the future” status as a stand alone Council in pre-amalgamation assessments. Now we are being penalised to pay for the bad asset management practices of Taree and Gloucester. This is totally unaustralian and certainly not “a fair go” that reflects the higher rates we have paid for years in Great Lakes.
- During the Public Consultation process in 2016 prior to amalgamation we were told by Council staff supporting the amalgamation that there would be significant saving obtained. So where is that money, what has it been used for and why does Council need so much more money?
- The Federal Member, David Gillespie, has released a Newsletter in the last few weeks stating there is *“extra funding for our local Councils to fix roads and bridges and other local key infrastructure in the Federal Budget”*. So why does Council need so much more money?
- I understand the “rate peg” has been set at 2% according to mail we received personally from Mr Stephen Bromhead MP. So again, why does Council need so much more money?
- As a qualified Local Government Engineer and from observations of Council works during the year(s), Council already has a reasonable budget and Works program. How could the Engineering/Asset Management Division of Council cope with such a dramatic increase in planning and executing such an additional workload and do so in a financially efficient manner and to sound construction standards in the 4 year timeframe. Given we have a recently amalgamated staff that needs to be settled down, to now introduce consultants and contractors on a grand scale would be a supervision and management disaster.

EVIDENCE OF COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

- During the public meetings prior to amalgamation the Council staff assured us that a Condition of Amalgamation by the NSW Government was *“there will be no rate rises for 4 years”*.
- I opposed the amalgamation and spoke to meetings against it. However, it went ahead. While disappointed I, like everyone else, accepted that at least our rates would not go up for 4 years.
- So we all took our eye off the ball due to Council’s statements.
- Then almost immediately, Council commenced an application for this 28.5% rate rise. The reasons given by Council, especially Taree’s woeful roads and bridges, were all known to it during the Public Consultation Process for the Amalgamation. Yet we were assured there would be no rate rise for 4 years.

- This is not Community Consultation. In my view it borders on false and misleading conduct and should be taken up under Section 52 of the Trades and Practises Act.
- I am aware that others have written to you regarding the Council's Jetty Survey. Council relies on that work as justification for meeting their community consultations requirements. I had never heard of it until 1 week ago. This is both immoral and unethical as the so called survey is not representative of our community and should be totally disregarded.

ASSESSMENT OF IMPACT ON AFFECTED RATEPAYERS

- We all agree that in a perfect world all roads and bridges would be constructed and maintained to a high standard right now. However, we have to budget for what we can afford. This 4 year grab for money so significantly above the rate peg cannot be justified here in the Mid Coast. We are well below the State Average for Income and have one of the highest proportions of aged and welfare dependent people in NSW. We are the "Mid Coast", not the "Gold Coast".
- I note that Council in its justification of need, states that this 28.5% increase is to "*start addressing the significant asset backlog*". This means to me there will be more excessive rate rises after the 4 year period and since this is not a levy, they will be compounded by this increase.
- My current rates are \$2,680 per annum. Council's money grab will result in an increase to \$3,444. This equates to over \$66 per week. We cannot afford this. I am a self funded retiree and my wife and I have a very low minimal income. The only recourse we will have is to be forced to sell our home in Forster.

SUMMARY

- The rate peg increase provides Council with additional funding.
- During the Public Meetings in 2016 for amalgamation we were told that it would provide significant savings (i.e. equates to additional funding).
- Federal Member David Gillespie has advised extra funding is provided for local councils to fix roads and bridges and other key infrastructure; i.e. additional funding.
- The newly amalgamated staff would struggle to cope with works programmes necessary to efficiently spend the additional funding.
- Community consultation has been woeful. In 2016 at public meetings for amalgamation Council staff told us there will be no rate increases for 4 years.
- The reasons now given to justify the 28.5% increase were all known to Council at the time of making the above statement of no rate increase for 4 years. (False & misleading statements???)
- The Mid Coast is not the Gold Coast. We have one of the State's lowest incomes and highest proportion of people who are aged and on welfare.
- As a self funded retiree this increase to over \$66 per week will force us to sell our home.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]