

## Private resident IPART submission regarding Central Coast Council proposed Rate Increase

We write as residential property owners of [REDACTED]

We bought the property as a rental property for the first ten years, until we saved enough to demolish and rebuild a modest holiday house, which we no longer rent out.

Our primary place of residence for employment reasons is in Gordon NSW. Thus we pay rates to Council, and land tax to the NSW state government on the CCC property.

In Gordon we are under the management and jurisdiction of Kuringai Council (KMC). We have over 1470 sq metres of land on a prime street in Gordon (current UCV \$1,490,000) and our latest KMC rate instalment is \$632, \$62 off being **HALF our rates in Patonga**, the latest instalment of which was \$1,140 **BEFORE** the anticipated price rises caused by gross mismanagement in Central Coast Council. **Annually, current rates are total \$2,528.32 in KMC. In Patonga? \$4,560.45.**

In Kuringai we get quick responses and good service. In Patonga, we get good weekly garbage removal services for normal household waste and the street bin in Brisk St, but otherwise almost zero other support – not just recently, but for a long time.

In all the storms recently masses of weed and even large tree trunks and logs were washed onto the beach. There was one token and superficial sweep of the beach (leaving all large debris in situ, and weed and seagrass above the usual highwater mark), and nothing else. The beach used to be swept not often but regularly, but has not been looked after regularly for a very long time.

In a 7 year period we bought (March 2008) and built a property at [REDACTED] (subsequently sold in July 2015 because of holding costs). During that period CCC was already floundering financially. How was this not noticed, investigated or reported by responsible authorities internally or externally? During the build we requested that Council remove a severely diseased street tree which was on the footpath. It was approved for removal, all confirmed in council correspondence at the time, but was not able to be given a forward time frame AT ALL for action by Council as the responsible agent, which they said in their letter was because there was no facility available (in 2015!!) to action the obligation. We were invited to remove the tree at our own cost, which we did. There was no suggestion that we should receive a concurrent discount or rebate on rates paid!

The non native weed growth along the beach and creek at Patonga is out of control.

The existence of the totally renovated and enlarged Boathouse Hotel at Patonga is a commercial success. Whilst not all residents support it, we personally find it a very pleasant Village amenity. However it has brought many more people as day visitors into the Village,

and significant concurrent speed, rubbish and parking issues. Council has been inactive on all issues.

Some residents have elected to obstruct their footpaths to public parking by growing vegetation on the footpaths. "Fantasy" double driveways have appeared. Council does nothing to manage that situation, for the residents, or for the number of legal visitors to town whose dramatic increase is a direct consequence of planning approvals granted by Council without additional management.

Brisk Street (on access to the beach end) is supposed to be public accessible but its kerb boundaries are unclear and overgrown. It encourages illegal parking, obstructions, and dangerous blind spots for pedestrians. The addition of extra wooden barrier poles obstructs the access for dinghies etc that used to be walked onto the beach and enjoyed there.

Council has supplied "for free"! and facilitated spreading of very large quantities of their own woodchip to make a wide pedestrian pathway to the beach, which we find is encouraging the existing termite problem that sandy soils expose our homes to. Again we had to pay to remove branches that were dangerous on the beachfront Crown Reserve land, supposedly managed by Council, because they were so termite ridden they posed a branch drop threat to the public walking past/under.

There are numerous examples of long term neglect but now we are confronted by huge rate increases. These payments will presumably have to be used first to reduce Councils extraordinary (and to our mind criminal) debt. Only then can money and work be scheduled to do the jobs Council is meant to do. The HARMonisation with Wyong is even worse.

No employed officers (CEO,CFO) of Council have been penalised for negligent if not more dubious behaviour.

In our personal experience, Councils' record is failure to start and complete jobs, or perform poor quality/inadequate jobs. And now they want more money, with no spending/service agenda.

It isn't just Patonga. Our adult daughter lives with her family in Palm Street, Ettalong. Council recently directed and managed an appalling job on a temporary resurface of that road, following complaints as to the surface condition after roadworks done by Council authority at the end of the street damaged the road itself. There is now no alignment of footpaths, driveways and kerbs to the boundary lines!! The street is a treacherous wiggle!!

Again, Council is unresponsive.

We are concerned that the Central Coast Council has separated the two issues of rate increases and HARMonisation in its media releases on the subject, attempting to play down the cumulative impact on ratepayers, threatening unquantified service cuts and asset sell offs if particular increase percentages are not approved by ratepayers and authorities.

As members of the Patonga Beach Progress Association, we have seen first hand over some years now the efforts of the Patonga community to raise funds for and manage a very professional series of professional submissions to Council to fend off the prospect of sale by Council of the Crown lease to operate and raise money from the Patonga Camping and Caravan Park. It is essential that it remain a genuine camping ground for coastal families, and Sydney kids, scouts, schools and families and **not** be sold to become de facto cheap cabin housing or another Big Four style development as at Umina. Police records show that that facility attracts a criminal element .

Sale of the lease by Council would be a short term if effective financial exercise for Council totally at the expense of ratepayers and local Patonga residents. **We would grit our teeth and pay the new rates (with some difficulty for us, but with extreme difficulty for some older locals) IF IT CAME WITH THE TRADE OFF ASSURANCE OF NON SALE OF THE CAMPING GROUND**. Whatever the rates, we cannot trust our Council any more! And that is a disgrace. There has been no evidence of a moral or ethical approach to community consultation by Council.

The community has to continue to mount a consistent defence to disposal of the camping ground, including contracting costly third party professional consultants, but Council just changes its staff and we have to start all over again. It's culpable behaviour and there is no prospect of change.

We also convey our extreme dissatisfaction in regard to the failure of audit reports by the Local Government Department or the Auditor General to uncover these issues. We are disappointed that the Administrator has not proposed any form of recovery of funds on behalf of ratepayers from either those that were complicit in illegal use of funds or from those who failed to audit Council operations appropriately. There needs to be an inquiry into that behaviour to see where the costs burden should fall.

Our Progress Association has circulated facts to the Patonga community, showing the impact of the combined effects of both the rate increase and the HARMonisation increase.

Correspondence sent to you by the PBPA documents an increase from \$3,131 to \$4,547, a 45% increase in Land rates to a retiree, unconscionable in one year. Apparently this does not even include the new land valuations for land tax and rating purposes, which the sub committee of the PBPA formed to respond to this issue anticipates at 5% using the averaging methodology.

Apparently there is new legislation before State Government to enable HARMonisation to occur over several years. We support this in principle.

**We request that the rate increases and the HARMonisation impact should occur over an appropriate period that protects rate payers from inordinate increase in any one year and**

**that the current financial crisis is not used as a ticket to quick sale of the rights to income from management and control of the Crown Land camping ground.**

We also beg that these increases are subsidised by State Government funding, to mitigate rate payers from incurring the full burden of the costs from an amalgamation that was not supported by the majority of rate payers, did not deliver cost savings promised, and the illegal use of funds that was not reported by the audit reports under the management of the NSW Government.

We support our Progress Associations' recent submission to IPART that:

- a) The 15 % increase by rate payers occurs over 5 years at a 3% p.a. increase to the 19/20 FY rate base. The NSW Government funds the decreasing Council short fall over the five year period each year until the 15% is carried by ratepayers. This ensures that there are no reductions in services **or asset sell offs**. We understand that the 2% rate peg is cumulative but using the above calculation this would also be subsidised by the NSW Government over this 5 year period.
- b) The HARMonisation process between Wyong and Gosford areas should occur over a period that ensures no rate payer incurs a rate increase of more than 5% of the original rate base before HARMonisation, in any one year. This period to be calculated and clearly communicated to each rate payer.
- c) The above proposals limit the cap on increases to no more than 8% p.a. of the original rate base for the first 5 years, and subsequent to this 5% p.a. for the time period remaining calculated to harmonise the rate bases.
- d) That IPART factors into any submission by Council the increase in UCV's on the Central Coast and subsequent increases in rate revenues, as well as Land Tax implications.

The consequences for rate payers in the old Gosford Council area of many years of very poor management, inadequate service delivery and illegal use of funds have fallen to IPART to determine where and how the financial burden will fall.

We ask that you prioritise one of your key objectives to "protect consumers of regulated services from unreasonable price hikes and price gouging" and support our request to save the camping ground from being flogged off, and act on our our Progress Associations considered recommendations.

