

Author name: Anonymous

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Submission: The 8% annual rate increase sought by the Clarence Valley Council is unjustified, unnecessary and will cause extreme hardship.

Ratepayers are already suffering rate levels far higher than the NSW average. For example Grafton residential property owners are already paying a \$390 base charge plus 0.7163c in the \$dollar. On top of this are sewerage, waste collection and water availability charges. A typical Grafton rate bill is around \$2400 plus quarterly water usage charges.

Grafton and surrounding areas has a large population of pensioners and other benefit recipients. Unemployment is high, businesses are under stress and the local economy is struggling. Vacant shops are everywhere and in many locations outnumber the ones still struggling to survive. Many local residents and businesses will simply be unable to pay an extra 8% on their rates.

Clarence Valley Council has also proved itself incompetent and biased with large sums wasted on lavish projects in the signature coastal towns of Yamba, Maclean and Iluka while the rest of the shire is neglected and run down. Seaside sculptures, lavish footpaths and cycleways, glossy murals on toilet blocks, expensive landscaping and streetscaping, exercise stations, unnecessary roundabouts etc etc are just a few examples. Other areas in the shire are starved of funds for even the basics of maintaining parks and roads. Transparency here is badly lacking with Council unable (or unwilling) to produce figures showing how just much money is being spent in each part of the shire - eg Grafton, Yamba, Maclean, Iluka etc. These figures should be readily available so that ratepayers can see just where their hard earned money is being spent and are being spent equitably.

Road repairs carried out by Council are of such poor quality that frequent return repairs are necessary - wasting huge amounts of funds and causing inconvenience for motorists. For example - a recent re-seal of a major thoroughfare in Grafton is already falling apart after on a few weeks of use. This will require significant repairs again soon and cost a lot more than if the job had been done properly in the first place. This situation is being repeated over and over again.

Council also needs to review its staffing levels and conditions, work and administration practices and private lease of motor vehicles. Significant savings would be identified if a proper and transparent review of these areas were to be carried out and would further reduce the need for additional rate increases sought by the Council.