

**From:** [REDACTED]  
**To:** [Local Government Mailbox](#)  
**Subject:** CLARENCE VALLEY COUNCIL, SPECIAL VARIATION APPLICATION  
**Date:** Saturday, 3 March 2018 6:17:50 PM

---

**ANONYMOUS SUBMISSION – Names, address and personal details not for publication**

---

ATTENTION: INDEPENDENT PRICING AND REGULATORY TRIBUNAL – NEW SOUTH WALES  
("IPART")

We refer to the recent application by Clarence Valley Council ("Council") to apply for a Special Rate Variation ("SRV") of 25.9% over three years starting in 2018/19 to 2020/21.

At the last Council election on 10 September 2016, Clarence Valley ratepayers voted overwhelmingly for those candidates who vehemently declared that they would not support and vote in favour of a SRV. Why then has Council even made this application? Because, at its meeting on 18 April 2017, *"seven of the nine councillors voted to incorporate the proposal for a SRV of 8% per year for three years (including the estimated rate peg 2%) starting in 2018/19 to 2020/21 (with the cumulative increase of 25.9% to be retained permanently in Council's rate base), in Council's Integrated Planning and Reporting documents adopted for community consultation at the May 2017 Council meeting."*

Ratepayers had already spoken on this subject, loudly and clearly, when they voted - and were then subsequently betrayed by their deceitful "representatives", who were elected under false pretences and on false promises.

If Clarence Valley Council has been declared "Not Fit for the Future", it is through no fault of ratepayers, but rather due to Council's severe and ongoing mismanagement over many years. *["Council's General Fund has operated at a loss each year since the amalgamations in 2004." – Jim Simmons, CVC Mayor]*

Since this SRV issue raised its ugly head, we have certainly learned a lot about this Council and its appalling record of fiscal waste. Through closer scrutiny of Council's operations – via its own literature and meeting minutes, attendance at public "consultations", following discussions in print and social media forums, and talking to Councillors and fellow residents - we have discovered to our dismay that there is very much to be outraged and angry about. Not least, we have learned why this current Council has a well-earned reputation for lack of transparency and for treating people with disdain.

Council, through this process, has on numerous occasions demonstrated a barefaced disregard for facts and a concerted and wilful propensity for spin and downright dishonesty. Public consultations; farcical spreadsheets; "carefully worded" surveys obviously designed to deceive respondents (and, ultimately, IPART) into supporting Council's agenda; blatantly biased articles in the local print media; all boost the universal lack of confidence ratepayers have in this current administration. Frankly, Clarence Valley Council just cannot be trusted!

Furthermore, Council admits it remains incapable of implementing changes necessary to achieve economic sustainability, while at the same time providing even basic services to the community.

Time and time again, and on numerous platforms, Council has proved it is totally incompetent in its operations and financial management.

Put simply, Council needs to run like a business. Budgets must balance, costs must be contained, quality service must be provided to customers. Management and staff must be held accountable for performance and delivery of their role responsibilities, and be remunerated fairly and reasonably according to demonstrated KPI results.

Unfortunately, Council coffers are badly depleted, and yet ratepayers are still expected to fork out exorbitant sums of money for gratuitous items such as airports and regional art galleries which actually benefit very few local residents. Meanwhile, core Council responsibilities and essential services such as roads and clean water continue to be woefully neglected. A major overhaul of priorities, performance and services is imperative.

If jobs need to be lost as part of this necessary operational review; sadly, so be it. Some of these services (and employees) may be reinstated once Council is operating on a sound financial basis. Meanwhile, some of these functions could be sold to private enterprise, outsourced, scaled down or undertaken by volunteer community labour or service groups.

Simply increasing rates is seen as the easy way out – throwing good money after bad - without achieving the much-needed performance improvements. In proposing this outrageous SRV, Council is merely trying to pass the buck and put the onus on ratepayers to solve the financial fiasco, instead of laying the blame (and placing the responsibility for rectifying the problem) where it rightfully belongs – with Council itself.

Council is out of touch when it fails to recognise the enormous burden this proposed SRV will have on its constituents, many of whom - pensioners, families, low income earners and retirees, for example - are already facing a huge financial struggle just to meet everyday living expenses. Statistics from the most recent Census show we are among the poorest Local Government Areas in New South Wales, based on many indicators. Future projections do not seem to offer any relief. IPART requires Councils applying for SRVs to demonstrate “a reasonable impact on ratepayers”. On this condition alone, Council’s application fails. The facts and figures stand for themselves. Despite Council’s claims to the contrary, many Clarence Valley ratepayers do not have the capacity to pay; many already require assistance to put food on the table and pay their bills.

Clearly, a complete and thorough restructure of the whole Council organisation and its operations is long overdue. Pouring more and more money into this situation will not bring about any improvements – rather, the opposite! Council has already had numerous chances to bring about positive changes and it has failed on all counts.

The only credible option is for the current Council to step aside and allow a competent Administrator to lead a performance review and identify operating efficiencies and cost savings for a healthy economic future. The State Government also needs to step up and address the problem of cost-shifting which places such a heavy burden on Council finances. It is unreasonable and ridiculous to expect a regional Council such as ours, with a large land area and a small number of ratepayers, to raise sufficient funds to bankroll big-ticket items including road maintenance and infrastructure renewal projects. “Fit for the Future” is a flawed concept. The

entire system needs urgent review.

In the meantime, we implore IPART to independently review all of the information tendered in residents' submissions, as Council needs to show IPART there is:

- community awareness of their plans (*significant sections of the community remain unaware, either entirely or partially, of the extent of the proposed SRV, or have a limited awareness of its impact*)
- a demonstrated need for higher increases to charges (*not if alternative operational improvements and efficiencies are implemented*)
- a reasonable impact on ratepayers (*FAIL!*)
- a sustainable financing strategy (*FAIL!*)
- a history of well-documented council productivity improvements (*FAIL!*)

IPART's ruling will undoubtedly have major implications for all stakeholders within the Clarence Valley, be they ratepayers, residents, business owners or visitors. Our Fitness for the Future will not be achieved via a rates variation of any amount. We therefore urge IPART to firmly reject this flawed application for a further SRV for Clarence Valley Council.

Yours faithfully

---