

IPART Submission - Ballina Shire Council 2018-2019 Rate Variation

I am against any further rate increase by Ballina Shire Council. I have pasted my council submission below outlining my concerns as well as the response to this submission from the Ballina Mayor David Wright dated 8/1/18. Please note that again, as was the case last year, Council have decided to ignore the majority of the submissions of its ratepayers:

“As with all our rate consultation processes, a large majority of submissions opposed the proposed increase. When we make a decision such as this, which is in direct contrast to the submissions received, people often say to me that we are not listening to the community.

We are in fact listening and as Councillors we have to balance all the information we have available to make what we would consider is the right decision for the entire community.”

Council surely needs to prove to IPART that it is acting to or is representing the majority of ratepayer's wishes instead of believing that they are unaccountable. Cost overruns on previous projects do not engender confidence in this council!

Thank You
Mr

Reference: Submission Ballina Council Special Rate Variation 11/10/17

I am again against these proposed rate increases as:

1. I am a self funded retiree typical of the demography of Ballina Shire and my income has decreased considerably over the last few years while the costs of other utilities have increased. Council is suggesting a permanent rate rise of 15.7% over the next 2 years on top of last year's increase which is unsustainable for many retirees and pensioners. It also affects many struggling small business owners. BSC is already one of the most financially viable councils in the region/state and any rate rise should be in line with the general community's capacity to pay.
2. As admitted previously by the mayor 90% of written submissions and over 80% of the online survey received after a similar proposed increase last year were against this increase. Why would this be any different the second time around?
3. Council has been remiss in not approaching this remediation of assets problem in a more measured way over the longer term in the past and now suddenly wants current ratepayers to fund any catch up.
4. This council has sufficient assets to capitalise which could help alleviate some of the necessary upgrade issues. Council persists in investing in commercial venues for which it has no expertise. I realise that income is generated from these assets and selling them would decrease this income but it would spread the task of funding infrastructure remediation more evenly on both present and future ratepayers.
5. With regards to healthy waterways there needs to be better consultation with, and contribution from, other councils along the upper river catchment area. What is the point of expending our funds if they do not come on board and/or contribute and yet cause much of the current river quality problems?
6. There is yet unresolved issues with regards to the proposed costly Lake Ainsworth upgrade under Healthy Waterways with many Lennox residents against the expenditure proposed. This is to be subject to DA proposal shortly, maybe there may be changes to required expenditure after this DA process.
7. Not all Ballina ratepayers enjoy the benefits of some of the proposed upgrades which hint at cross subsidization. Infrastructure and the scenic coastal vista which are used by tourist/visitors and select ratepayers on the coastal fringe are subsidized by all shire ratepayers as are those select local businesses that benefit from this trade, a bit like the current situation experienced by Byron ratepayers. Perhaps instead thought could be given as to how visitors can also contribute to infrastructure improvement and upkeep in light of rapidly increasing numbers.

Yours sincerely
11/10/2017
8 January 2018

Dear Mr

Re: Proposed Special Rate Variation

I refer to your submission to Council's consultation process in respect to the proposed special rate variation to finance the Healthy Waterways Program and increased expenditure on Asset Renewal. A report on the feedback received during the consultation process was submitted to the 23 November 2017 Ordinary Council meeting. As a result of that report, the Councillors resolved to support an application to the NSW Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) for approval to increase our annual rate income by 9.3% in 2018/19 and 5.9% in 2019/20.

The 9.3% includes a 3.4% one-off increase approved by IPART for 2017/18, which means the actual increase planned for 2018/19, as compared to 2017/18, is 5.9%.

A copy of the report and the minutes of the November meeting are available on our website (refer to the Minutes and Agenda tab under the heading of Your Council) or by clicking on the following link http://www.ballina.nsw.gov.au/cp_themes/default/agm.asp (navigate to 23 November 2017 meeting minutes).

The report provides a good overview of the submissions received, along with the reasons why Council has now resolved to proceed with this application.

As a result of the November resolution, Council will now make a formal application to IPART in February 2018, and IPART should advise Council by late May 2018 whether the application is approved or not. The application includes copies of all the submissions received by Council, along with any other relevant documentation.

As with all our rate consultation processes, a large majority of submissions opposed the proposed increase. When we make a decision such as this, which is in direct contrast to the submissions received, people often say to me that we are not listening to the community.

We are in fact listening and as Councillors we have to balance all the information we have available to make what we would consider is the right decision for the entire community.

As a Council we are doing all we can to ensure that the total rates and charges paid in the Ballina Shire remain comparatively low. When we review our rates and charges with the councils in this region, the only other council with rates comparable to ours is Richmond Valley, with councils such as Byron, Tweed and Lismore well above our figures, even if this increase is approved. We have also resolved to ensure that we minimise any increases in our water, sewerage and waste collection charges for the next three years to help offset any higher increase in our rates.

To help offset the impact of this increase Council also resolved to cease charging our waste operations charge, which was \$73 in 2016/17, from 2017/18 onwards. This means that every single residential and farmland property with a dwelling, has had a \$73 saving from 2017/18 onwards in their total rates and charges bill.

As Councillors we have a statutory responsibility to ensure that we adequately manage the assets we control. Council has over \$1.2 billion worth of infrastructure that is our responsibility and our financial modelling identifies that additional rate income is needed to ensure that over time, our existing infrastructure does not deteriorate.

The majority of the additional monies raised, if IPART does approve this increase, will be expended on increased asset renewal to help maintain and improve our infrastructure.

Many submissions are critical of Council in having a small part of the proposed rate increase expended on our Healthy Waterways program.

The overall health of the Richmond River is very poor and I have been trying for many years to have State Government agencies undertake works to improve the river. Unfortunately, despite Council's best efforts, there has not been any works of substance occurring.

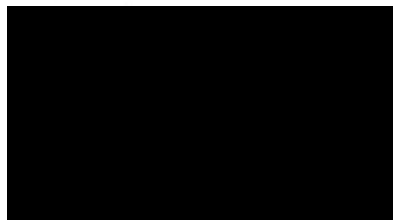
This cannot continue and by Council having its own funding stream we are in better position to substantially leverage our monies with grant funds to undertake essential works. Tweed Shire Council has been successful in doing this for the Tweed River and I am confident Ballina Shire Council can also deliver on this promise.

We have recently had success this financial year where Council was able to secure grant funds for Lake Ainsworth, Shaws Bay and other tributaries of the Richmond River to fund works to improve the health of our waterways. We have been able to match those grants with funds sourced from the temporary increase approved by IPART for 2017/18.

I also know that our neighbouring councils of Lismore City, Richmond Valley and Rous Water are now placing a higher focus on improving river health due to Ballina Shire Council's proactive approach.

In closing, I accept that many people making a submission do not accept Council's justification for this increase however I do want to emphasise that we believe that this is the best approach to ensure that we continue to improve, protect and enhance the beautiful Ballina Shire.

Yours faithfully

A large black rectangular box used to redact the signature of Cr David Wright.

Cr David Wright
Mayor