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Submission:

Please see the attached letter, detailing points of opposition to the rate increase submission by Coffs Harbour Council. Originally sent to our local member, the Hon. Andrew Sinclair MP, with a copy emailed to our mayor, the only response received to date is from our local member who stated he would make representations to the Member for Local Government, the Hon Don Page MP, as well as suggesting we place a submission directly to IPART. Our mayor has not responded to our concerns at all. Letters to the editor of our local newspaper, *The Advocate*, indicate a swell of vehement opposition to the proposed increase above and beyond the usual pegged increase, plus the results of the council's "community consultation" indicated approximately 70% of ratepayers were against this increase, yet Council members voted to surge ahead with their submission anyway, choosing to act against the wishes of the ratepayers whom they claim to represent. In our area of demographically high unemployment and high reliance on welfare payments, where most people are struggling to budget and find money to pay bills that continue to rise well above the CPI, we simply cannot afford this outrageous increase. We thank you for considering our submission.

24<sup>th</sup> February, 2014

Dear Mr. Fraser,

I am writing to appeal to you, as our State Government representative of the people of Coffs Harbour area, to intervene on behalf of the majority of ratepayers whose wishes are being ignored by the Coffs Harbour City Council, as the council applies to the State Government to sanction the outrageously proposed 16% increase over and above the nominal increase allowable under the existing rate-pegging restrictions. As you are probably aware, the council sought "consultation" from ratepayers by inviting them to "balance the books" on-line and asking whether they approved of an increase. My husband and I both did go on-line and attempted a number of times to allocate funds to the various basic budgetary areas - but found that whatever we allocated we were destined for failure to balance the books. This "tool" used the assumption of a certain amount required for ongoing maintenance of these individual items, but the outcome was always going to be over budget. We question these figures. How has the council come up with these figures? How do we know they are not rubbery? Have they looked within the administration itself for an explanation of the figures, to review these costs and possibly trim the waste?

Despite setting up this on-line tool to "educate" people into accepting that a rate hike was inevitable, council must have been dismayed that most ratepayers saw through this ruse and nearly 70% chose to vote against an increase over and above the rate-pegging restrictions. I'm sure the majority of people participating in this on-line farce saw through the ruse and realised just what it was: a showpiece that could be trotted out to demonstrate that the council cared what people thought - what utter rubbish, when council have disregarded ratepayers' wishes anyway and have voted to go ahead with applying for the exorbitant increase! Most people within this local government area of high unemployment/welfare dependency simply cannot afford the huge burden this rate hike would impose - many people even now are trying to work out how they can afford their energy bills, insurance costs (which have sky-rocketed since most of our coastal zone has now been reclassified as flood-prone!), even how to put food on their plate over the next week.

Why can't the council undertake an internal audit to cut costs? I know many people who can cite various regular wasteful procedures used by the council and its workers.

[REDACTED]

But it does rub salt into the wounds when we see such waste of ratepayers' money on the one hand and council telling us it can't manage without an outlandish increase in rates!

[REDACTED]

The council also wishes to secure a loan for over \$2 million for a plan of a walkway/park (gee, can I have that job? I can't believe they would pay this just for a plan, let alone the job itself!) - which will also, at some stage, need to be paid off - by the ratepayers again! How on earth can the council be looking at undertaking beautification projects that we, as ratepayers, can't afford? Then there is the \$200,000 gift to the Rabbitohs, the unspent but allocated \$200,000 for sporting promotions, the upgrade to library facilities, the list goes on. These items of spending that we are aware of could have been genuine savings, I'm sure there are plenty more. Each year there are more and more houses being built in newly developed subdivisions, which automatically means more rates for council, but that increase in total revenue doesn't seem to satisfy council. When we first moved to the area, 17 years ago, we compared our rates with my parents' rates in a beachside suburb of Sydney and wondered how they could possibly afford their rates, but at the moment (let alone with the increase!) our rates are approximately the same. Yet their suburb enjoys universally curbed and guttered roads, well-maintained local parks and gardens, car parks, water and drainage works etc., while ours is sadly lacking.

We understand rates cannot stay at previous years' figures, that they do need to increase to account for the CPI, even though ratepayers' welfare payments, governments pensions, etc., do not - but this increase would be well within the rate-pegging allowance under the State Government. Council could at least impose this limited increase and limit its own spending to maintenance only, holding off on new infrastructure projects for a few years and reviewing/auditing its own practices/costs. We cannot afford the proposed increase. I would warrant that a housewife, accustomed to making do with his/her limited budget, could look at the council budget and easily make cuts and trim waste. Perhaps the general manager, probably on around \$200,000 a year, could take lessons on making cuts from those struggling to cope with ever-increasing bills with only a handful of dollars. We hope that you can intervene in the State Government process of the application for this outrageous rate increase for Coffs Harbour Council over the allowable limits and at least raise a few questions re the above issues to council, perhaps even sending them back to the drawing board to look at their own figures and find the ways to cut costs. It concerns us that our present council is not listening to the very people who voted for them as our representatives. Perhaps, as suggested recently in a recent letter to the editor in *The Advocate* someone should be asking whether an Administrator needs to be appointed?

We wish to have this seriously examined but hope you will honour our desire to keep confidential the information about our council worker in our neighbourhood.

Yours faithfully,

[REDACTED]