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Submission: Given the current economic and environmental conditions, it is completely unacceptable to be demanding that ratepayers pay an extra 20% on their rates. Many many people are desperately struggling due to the drought in the Upper Hunter region and the financial incompetence demonstrated by the Upper Hunter Shire Council makes it impossible for residents to trust that the council will spend the money appropriately. This is clearly illustrated by the purchase of a \$15,000 baling twine horse / art piece. I live on a thoroughfare between Aberdeen and Merriwa which is used by lots of mining traffic and residents. For my annual rates of approx \$2000 we get our road graded twice a year if we are lucky. We have no garbage, water, or sewage services available and we are only 5km from the post office. Many of my neighbours are struggling to put food on their table and to keep the lights turned on, so for council to demand an extra 20% for non essential projects is particularly difficult to swallow. Murrurundi is currently on Lvl 4 water restrictions but council is proposing to spend \$1.395 million dollars on town beautification when this amount would go a long way to providing subsidised connection for many residents to an approved pipeline. \$6.2 million on Scone beautification is ridiculous when this amount of money could happily bitumen km's of very poor condition Road. \$1million for a River trail in Aberdeen could provide a huge amount of support for desperate farmers near Aberdeen or improved sporting / childcare facilities. In summary, residents do not have the capacity, let alone the desire to pay another 20% on top of the already exorbitant rates we pay, but if we have to pay the increase, the projects should at least improve the residents quality of life and not be purely focused on improving the political position of councillors.