

8 March 2019

SUBMISSION AGAINST SRV IN PORT STEPHENS LGA

I wish to register my objection to Port Stephens Council's (PSC) proposed rate variation increase of 66% over 7 years.

I am aware the council wants the rate increase for projects they say the community 'wants', but after reading 'Special rate variation projects for 2019 – 2021' (the pdf on PSC website) I do not see any project above what already is provided and budgeted for. Money to fund other projects out of the normal course of what council provides should not burden households or business owners, the so called 'projects' do not necessitate a rate increase, especially of this magnitude. There is so much confusion of what the increase is for. Fundraising events and grants would be a more sensible approach and is generally the normal course to fund other projects.

In very recent years Port Stephens Council demonstrated in parliament that it was economically sound and fit for the future regarding the suggested amalgamation with either Newcastle or Dungog Councils. There seems to be a conflict of information from PSC regarding budget spending that make me suspect figure fudging to influence IPART's decision. PSC has been reckless with spending public money, especially of late, and that really needs to be looked at by a higher authority. If PSC stopped wasting public money there would be more money available for other projects, why should or would rate payers be forced into a rate increase?

Data from the 2016 Census of people living in Port Stephens shows 59.1% are of working age 33.4% have an income of less than \$500 per week with a 'median equivalised total household income' of less than \$750 per week. More than 40% are receiving either a government pension or allowance. The unemployment rate of 7.2% is higher than the states average of 6.9%

I've heard and read comments from people in our community (on social pages and local newspapers) that they will be economically devastated if this rate rise goes ahead. My current income is extremely low and limiting after my position was made redundant, personally, I have had to cut back on absolutely everything just to survive and that is without a rate increase. I would have to find an extra \$900 per year! Financial assistance / payment plans will be of no help and will only put the most vulnerable of us in debt to the council!

The struggle to make ends meet is enormous in our community, too many of us are reluctant to turn on the air-conditioner in 40°+ heat and literally suffer anxiety anticipating the next electricity bill and how they will be able to pay it. The current drought has seen meat and vegetables practically double in price putting more pressure on families and household budgets.

A rate increase will have a 'flow on' effect and rents will increase (both residential and commercial), prices will go up and consumers will decrease, more businesses will close causing further unemployment. The added worry and stress to many rate payers in our community will cause mental and physical health issues. There are already so many empty shops in my town. I imagine that approving this rate increase will see more empty shops, more unemployment and homelessness. Crime will increase and further burden the communities in PS LGA

In closing I implore to you that IPART rejects the proposed rate increase based on the negative economic and social impact it will have in our community.

Yours sincerely

 (Please treat my name confidentially)