



To whom it may concern,

Statement of opposition to increasing or maintaining the current level of rates.

I wish to oppose the Armidale Regional Council's application for the proposed SRV rates increase.

A special rate variation (SRV) of 20.5% is completely unreasonable and cannot be supported.

As a member of a rural remote community, this rate increase is diabolical given the services rural communities receive. On a yearly basis I pay over \$800 per year in landfill and waste management charges, however I do not receive any such benefit of these charges whatsoever. My local tip is open for 4 hours on a Saturday morning. No rubbish removal, not even supplied with as much as a wheelie bin for waste. I am also charged waste fees on a forestry lease, for which there is no rubbish to be disposed of from that site? So now I should pay \$1000 landfill only per year for what exactly?

In Armidale Regional Council's presentation of the proposed SRV at the Wollomombi Hall, it stated how much of this 'increase' would be spent on fixing roads. I live 12 kms down the Kempsey Road, and we are lucky if this road is graded once per year. In the recent report published it stated that there had been a 50% drop in the allocation of funds to implement roads renewal and maintenance, from \$8.43 million to \$4.2 million, why? The Council have been receiving a temporary SRV from ratepayers for nearly two decades and are not delivering on essential services our basic rates already cover.

Rural communities in the past 12 months are still trying to recover from the effects of bushfires and the worst drought in the history of rainfall recording, and nationally we are in the middle of the most significant economic downturn for 70 years. Drought has impacted all rate payers, obviously the greatest impact has been on the rural sector. Everyone is paying more at the checkout.

Livestock numbers have been reduced by 50% due to the drought. The price of wool has declined by 50% due to the coronavirus induced global spending shutdown. Although livestock prices are at a record high, this is a reflection of drought induced reduced supply rather than increased consumer demand. Producers aren't actually profiting from high livestock prices because they simply don't have livestock to sell. People on the land will experience an income reduction of approximately 75% this year.

We simply cannot keep throwing money at a Council who is unjustly mismanaging our money and expecting ratepayers to top them up, when they overspend so regularly on unnecessary projects! Curb your expenditure, reduce your staffing levels and focus on the basic requirements a Council should provide like roads maintenance.

The state government has granted an extra \$4.1million dollars to the Armidale to Kempsey Road. We would like to see exactly where this money is being spent, to ensure funds received are actually being spent on this road, and not on maintaining council assets in townships.

The community have no faith whatsoever in the Council. Every other business is required to base their spending on income, and adjust budgets regularly as necessary. It's about time the ARC drill down into their spending and significantly cut costs where necessary whilst ensuring they go back to fulfilling the basic requirements of Council.

Some rate payers will incur a "double whammy" not with just a SRV but because of rate harmonisation as well.

Rate payers should not be liable for the failed mis-management of money of ARC

Rate payers should not be liable for the poor management practices of council; especially the exorbitant wages of senior staff

Rural communities have faced many challenges over the past 12 months, and are already struggling

The rates are really stifling growth in the region - over the last decade real estate prices have gone up by about 1% per year whereas the rate peg has averaged 2.5% per year. The rate peg alone is outgrowing the region. When you take into account increases in other charges like the 60% increase in water rates, other rate notice charge increases as well as the current and proposed special rate variations we have averaged an annual rate notice increase of 3.8% per year over the last decade. It's not sustainable.

One of the town's major employers - the University of New England, has announced it will be cutting 200 jobs to balance its budget. Only months ago Woolworths group announced a list of big W stores that it will be closing to maintain the business' financial viability, one of them in Armidale. Additionally to this there are many small businesses too numerous to mention (including, but not limited to retail) that have closed down. The council needs to recognise that there is simply less money in the community and there is going to be even less once these jobs and business leave. It cannot go on spending as much as it has been, and it needs to live within its means as does everyone else.

I reiterate that a special rate variation (SRV) of 20.5% is unreasonable and cannot be supported.