

Author name: Anonymous

Date of submission: Thursday, 9 March 2017

Submission: Attached my submission copy 23/1/17 to BSC outlining my opposition to this variation and Mayor Wrights reply 8/3/17 to me justifying council's decision to go ahead with application.

In Council's IPART submission on Community Consultation p24-25 and in the Mayor's letter to me it notes that the majority of written (118) and online submissions (501) were against both proposals by 87-90%, yet council's submission relies heavily on the Micromax survey council paid for of 403 residents to justify its application. This survey tended to lump the "somewhat supportive" selection in with the "supportive" selection in each option thus giving a misleading 74% approval for both proposals – option 4. It survey was restricted to 5 criteria for each option and a neighbour who was phoned by this company was told that he had give an answer to all 4 options or else his reply would not be counted. This could perhaps skewer the results. I don't have a lot of faith in this type of survey rather than a simple "yes" or "no" one.

This council consistently asks for community consultation and then promptly ignores this if it is negative and goes ahead with whatever it wishes as indicated in Mayor Wright's letter to me, at least he tried to get some form of justification I suppose. This was also the case in a number of other issues – swimming pool renovations, Lake Ainsworth road closure etc.

To the General Manager

Asset Renewal: I am against the proposed rate increase as:

1. Council did not consult with ratepayers in their initial proposal to IPART to gain Fit For the Future status when suggesting these increases.
2. BSC is already one of the most financially viable councils in the region/state.
3. Council is remiss in not approaching this remediation of assets problem (if there is one) 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 alleviate any problem. I realise that income is derived from these assets and selling them would decrease this income but it would spread the task of funding infrastructure remediation more evenly on present and future ratepayers.

Healthy Waterways: I am against this proposed increase as:

1. The reasons already stated above.
2. There needs to be better consultation with other councils in the river catchment area. What is the point of expending funds if they do not come on board and/or contribute and yet cause part of the river quality problem
3. Not all Ballina ratepayers enjoy the benefits of the river/shoreline which hints at cross subsidization. Faculties and scenic coastal vista which are used by tourist/visitors and select ratepayers on the coastal fringe are also subsidized by all ratepayers as are those who benefit from this trade, a bit like the current situation experienced by Byron ratepayers. Perhaps thought could be given as to how these visitors can also contribute to improvement and upkeep in light of the rapidly increasing visitor numbers.

Yours sincerely
23/1/2017

From: srvproposal [mailto:srvproposal@ballina.nsw.gov.au]

Sent: 8 March, 2017 2:56 PM

Subject: Thankyou for your feedback on Council's Proposed Special Rate Variatio
enquiries refer

Cr David Wright
in reply please quote



8 March 2017

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 an Extraordinary Council meeting held on Friday 10 February 2017. As a result of that report the Councillors resolved, by majority vote (seven votes to three) to support an application to the NSW Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) for approval to increase our annual rate income by 4.9% in 2017/18, 5.9% in 2018/19 and 5.9% in 2019/20.

A copy of the report and the minutes of that 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 10 February Extraordinary meeting).

As a result of this resolution Council has now made a formal application to IPART and they will advise Council by late May 2017 whether the application is approved or not. The application includes copies of all the submissions received by Council, along with any other relevant documentation.

In respect to the feedback received by Council, there were 118 written submissions, of which approximately 90% opposed the entire proposal.

There were also 501 responses to the on-line survey, with approximately 70% of those responses opposed to the entire proposal.

I know many people who provided a submission objecting are critical of the majority of Councillors who subsequently voted to proceed with an application, and people have been saying to me that we do not listen to people when they make a submission.

As Councillors we have to balance all the information we have available to make what we would consider an informed decision.

I cannot speak for every Councillor on this issue however some of the key items of information that were available to all Councillors, and which were particularly relevant to me, included the following:

- The overall health of the Richmond River is very poor and there are works we can undertake in the Ballina Shire to significantly improve the water quality, which in turn will benefit our entire community. I agree with comments in many of the submissions which stated that the State Government should be undertaking this work, however as a Councillor for many years I have not seen any works of substance occurring and the river has continued to degrade.

This cannot continue and by Council having its own funding stream we should be in a 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.

This funding, if approved, will also help to improve other waterbodies such as Lake Ainsworth and Shaws Bay.

- In respect to the asset renewal funding I am proud that the condition of our infrastructure assets, such as roads, is generally in better condition than many other councils in this region. At the same time I am also aware that our engineering staff can demonstrate that we are now continually underfunding the regular renewal of our infrastructure by at least \$4million per annum. Our Shire is continuing to grow and expand and it is essential that we adequately maintain our existing assets.

The additional asset renewal funding, if approved, will not fully fund the current shortfall, and we will need to save monies elsewhere to eliminate that funding deficit.

- I know affordability is an issue for many people. That is why Council has resolved to cease charging our waste operations charge, which is \$73 for 2016/17, from 2017/18 onwards. This means that every single residential and farmland property will have a \$73 saving from 2017/18 onwards, prior to the application of any increases in our other rates and charges.
- The special rate variation refers only to the ordinary rate component of your total rates and charges bill. Council has specifically resolved that for the other standard charges such as water, wastewater (sewer), stormwater and domestic waste collection, we will minimise any increases in these charges for the next three years. What this means is that based on our current modelling, we anticipate that the average total residential rates and charges bill will only increase 0.65% in 2017/18, 3.70% in 2018/19 and 3.60% in 2019/20.
- Even if the proposed special rate variation is approved, the total rates and charges paid by Ballina Shire residents will remain substantially lower than similar councils such as Tweed Shire, Lismore City and Byron Shire. Only Richmond Valley and Kyogle Councils will have similar total bills in this region.
- A large number of submissions stated that Council should spend within its means. I feel that as a Council we have always done that in that we don't undertake a number of social and community based programs that other councils do and our primary focus has always been on infrastructure. Unfortunately our current revenue base is comparably low and at times we do need to raise additional revenue to ensure that adequate funding is available.
- Many people criticise Council for having too many staff or they state we are inefficient. An interesting statistic I regularly check is one provided by the NSW Office of Local Government (OLG) in respect to the number of staff a council has, as compared to the number of people in the local government area.

The latest comparative data report available on the OLG website (olg.nsw.gov.au) is for 2014/15 and that identifies that in Ballina Shire we have one equivalent full time staff person to every 152 residents. The same report confirms that the figures for our surrounding councils are (Byron – one per 130 residents, Lismore – one per 107, Tweed – one per 135 residents and Richmond Valley – one per 94 residents). This is just one indicator that tends to confirm that we are operating with very lean staff levels.

- Council also engaged a firm (Micromex Pty. Ltd) to undertake an independent survey based on a minimum sample of 400 residents to seek their feedback on this proposal. The reason for this approach is that this type of survey is designed to provide results that reflect the views of the entire community, remembering that we have over 41,000 residents in the Shire.

A sample size of 400 residents provides a sampling error of plus or minus 4.9%. This means that, statistically, if the survey was replicated, we would get the same result 19 out of 20 times (i.e. only 5% of the survey results would vary).

The Micromex survey asked residents to rate four options; which were as follows:

- a) Option One – No special rate variation – based on the confirmed rate peg increase of 1.5% in 2017/18 and an estimated rate peg increase of 2.5% in 2018/19 and 2019/20
- b) Option Two – Healthy Waterways variation only - 1.5% extra increase in 2017/18 for a total increase of 3% in 2017/18 and then 2.5% in 2018/19 and 2019/20
- c) Option Three – Asset Renewal variation only - 2.9% extra for the three years – represents increases of 4.4% in 2017/18 and 5.4% in 2018/19 and 2019/20
- d) Option Four – Both the Healthy Waterways and Asset Renewal special variations - 3.4% extra for the three years – represents increases of 4.9% in 2017/18 and 5.9% in 2018/19 and 2019/20.

The survey results, as prepared by Micromex, confirmed that option four (being the complete proposed special rate variation) had the highest level of support at 74% (71% support for ratepayers only).

A copy of that survey is included with the Council report as outlined on page one of this letter.

- I have heard many people criticise these types of surveys as being misleading or just plain wrong. In response to concerns we asked Micromex to provide further information on their experience and the results for our survey. The following are extracts from the response we received from the Micromex Managing Director in respect to these concerns.

Micromex Research was established in NSW in 1986 and is 100% Australian owned. We are a mid-sized full service vertically integrated market research company – we have our own call centre, field interviewers, and online survey capabilities, plus extensive qualitative research experience. We have 10 FT employees and circa 100 casual employees.

In 2011 Micromex Research gained contractor accreditation to the Local Government Procurement Community Services Panel LGP 12.08. We are also on the 2014 NSW Performance and Management Supplier Panel and the current NSW Transport Surveys & Fieldwork Services Supplier Panel. And we were accepted onto the NSW Office of Local Government's Fit for Future Technical Advisory Panel to provide community engagement/research advice to government.

Our Special Rate Variation experience

*Since 2010 we have provided technical survey services for over 30+ SRV consultations – and in all our submissions IPART has never expressed concern with our survey approach or scale. **The community support and preference for Option 4 has the strongest support score and preference score we have seen for the highest option in an SRV.***

Capturing community feedback

There are a number of options for capturing community feedback. Generally the best way of capturing representative and quantifiable community feedback is by undertaking a statistically significant, random survey. IPART anticipates that councils applying for a special variation will need to conduct such a survey.

Stuart Reeve
Managing Director



www.micromex.com.au

You may or may not agree with the survey results but nevertheless the advice from Mircomex is that there is community support for the proposed special rate variation.

In conclusion it can be a thankless task being a Councillor in that we often have to make decisions where there is not unanimous community support. Therefore we individually must weigh up in our own minds what we believe to be the "right" decision for the entire community.

In respect to the proposed special rate variation the majority of Councillors have decided to support an application to IPART and IPART will now review that application to determine whether it is justified.

In closing thank you again for making a submission to Council and hope this response is of interest.

Yours faithfully
Cr David Wright
Mayor

