

From: Beth Agland
Sent: Tuesday, 10 March 2015 11:42 AM
To: IPART Mailbox
Subject: Letter of Rejection to Coffs Harbour Council Special Rate Variation proposal

IPART
Level 15, 2-24 Rawson Place
SYDNEY NSW 2000

10th March 2015
RE: Coffs Harbour Council Special Rate Variation proposal

Dear IPART

As ratepayers of Coffs City Council, my husband & I strongly oppose council's proposal put forward to IPART requesting a special rate increase of 8.14% for 2015/16 and 7.75% for 2016/15 on the general income component. If this increase is approved, that will be 24.4% increase over 3 years.

We submit that IPART should reject this proposed increase lodged by Coffs City Council. Before we give our reasons to why we oppose, I would like to share with IPART my personal experiences over the past few months.

I have been proactive in doorknocking close to 600 homes in my local area of Sapphire Beach to bring awareness to residents of the proposed rate increase and to present a petition to sign against the proposal. I had an overwhelming reaction from residents, both ratepayers & renters who are greatly concerned with this proposal and were very eager to object by signing the petition, this petition was presented to council on 5th February 2015. Of all the people I spoke to, only two residents supported the increase and only less than a handful didn't sign [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] I found doorknocking to be a timely exercise, spending an average of 10 minutes and in some cases up to 30 minutes with each household because they were so passionate about the subject, airing their dissatisfaction with council's mismanagement & wastage of their funds.

If only each household took a few minutes of my time, I would have knocked on 1800 homes and would have achieved far more signatures against. From all who door knocked across our city, over 1400

residents signed the petition and I believe this was only a reflection of the many more homes that weren't covered during circulation of the petition. The message to Coffs City Council couldn't have been more clear both through the petition and the 'Funding the Future' survey set by council. Ratepayers opposes the large rate increase.

I quickly discovered that every second or third person I met stated that they did not receive their 'Funding Our Future' brochures and option slips. Therefore, the response should had been far greater to what Council received if the survey was sent correctly addressed to households. Council's method of consulting ratepayers was badly handled. They sent out this material without name, making it look like junk mail. I wanted to provide you with this additional information of the large number of households that did not receive the survey or simply toss the unaddressed envelope in thinking it was junk mail. This vital fact could only be discovered by those who have been door knocking in regards to this issue. Clearly council's delivery of such important consultation was a failure. This was an expensive consultation process that did not reach the attention of a large percentage of ratepayers and the survey information provided in 'Funding Our Future' brochure was misleading and badly worded.

Our reasons for our we objection is that our rates are already much higher than majority of other council areas in NSW and it's an insult in wanting to pass on further financial burden onto ratepayers. Council is taking the easiest of options to raise revenue by wanting ratepayers to bail them out of their financial troubles rather looking at reducing their expenditures and stop the misuse of funds that has lead them into the position. If council continues to mismanage ratepayer's funds, no rate increase will never be enough. There are many cost cutting measures that can be undertaken...e.g. restructure of work procedures, job reductions and they should not be giving already overpaid Council Executives outrageous salary increases when declaring that everyone needs to tighten their belts during this period of hardship.

We attended the Council Meeting on the 12th February, it's was clearly obvious from the start what the outcome of their decision was already made to put forward their proposal to IPART and did not discuss other forms of solutions. Majority of Councillors didn't seem to take in consideration the results of the consultation process with ratepayers, an overwhelming 89% of responses were against the proposed increased but this was blatantly ignored. While leaving the Council Chambers, a catering van was in full view, ready to provide gourmet meals to council members of the meeting. This just shows how

insensitive they have become when only moments earlier declaring that everyone needs to tighten their belts. We were informed that this costly exercise was common practice after every fortnightly meeting. Just one example of waste of ratepayers funds.

On the 18th February, it was broadcasted on Prime7 Local News that the inaction of [REDACTED] denied us the opportunity to reverse the council's decision to oppose the massive rate rise. At the conclusion of the meeting on the 12th February, three Councillors, [REDACTED] [REDACTED] had signed a rescission motion put forward by [REDACTED] but was never submitted in time. Not all avenues were explored was the main reason why they signed a rescission motion to be put forward. If [REDACTED] followed the correct procedure, the proposal would not had been lodged with IPART.

IPART would be fully aware of the socio-economic situation in our area. Our unemployment rate is high and a majority of those employed are low income earners. It's also known that there is a larger percentage of retirees and pensioners residing here on the Coffs Coast. Our cost of living here in the Coffs Harbour Council area is extremely high, we pay more in rates, fuel, food and insurance than most areas. Majority of households are struggling to make ends meet.

This is our situation, we first moved here in 1998. We chose to move here because Jon thought it would make life easier for us financial. My husband has been the sole income earner of our family since 1992 as I incurred an permanent deteriorating injury to my lower back. Since arriving, the cost of living has soared, putting a real struggle on our finances. Centrelink refuses me any assistance and gives me no support. I have no means to better my situation and my husband's income remains fixed.

Over the past few years, we are having to access the redraw facility on our home loan to make ends meet and to cover any travel or unexpected expenses. Over recent years, our redraws have been greater than our repayments. We are unable to support our children through university. [REDACTED]

Jon & I have discussed moving out of the area to improve our situation but after weighing up the cost involved, it was not financial viable and my husband was concerned that finding new employment in another area at his age would be difficult & risky.

Clearly, a balance overall view of all factors is needed to be considered before IPART comes to a decision. We urge you to reject Coffs City Council proposal. There are far better means for council to consider to improve their financial situation or have administrators brought in to deal with [REDACTED]

Yours sincerely

Beth Agland

Jon Agland

Beth Agland

NOTE: Letter in word document format attached.