

I strongly object to Central Coast Council's application for a special variation request for rates. I place most of the blame and responsibility for the losses squarely on the State government and to a lesser degree on certain Council staff.

The government appointed administrator has identified a symptom, being a shortfall in available funds. I do not believe he has seriously tried to identify the underlying causes. He is a state government appointee with a particular agenda to absolve the government from blame. Without identifying these causes and who is responsible for the shortfalls, and how they were allowed to happen, I don't believe the ratepayers of the Central Coast should foot the bill, especially as the evidence I am aware of points to massive underfunding by the state government.

Before I go into details I'd like to mention the flawed surveys set up by Council. The first survey operating until 22 January 2021 offered only 2 choices – a 10% increase or a 15% increase. This fails even the most basic requirements of a survey so the result is meaningless. Many people filled out the survey and placed comments to say they really wanted no rate rise but were denied the opportunity to select that option. Based on past misrepresentations of submissions by this Council, I have no confidence that these comments will be passed on to you. Perhaps you could ask for all the surveys so you can judge for yourself the mood of the community. I'm like many others who refused to fill out the first survey when it did not allow me to voice my opinion, but only tick boxes for options that I do not believe should apply. It doesn't matter if we put dissenting comments, they'll only count the ticked boxes. I have filled out the second survey that gives an option for no rate rise. This still has a mandatory question asking whether I would choose 10% or 15%. This question has no meaning where I am saying I want no rate rise. The survey also asks if we should have a state appointed 'independent' financial controller. I strongly support a truly independent financial controller providing transparent reports, but a state appointee is like a fox in charge of the henhouse.

Whose future are we securing? The ratepayers didn't get themselves into this mess and yet miraculously it's no one's fault? I see the rate rise as being like charging the lab rats to subsidise the experimenters. The state government imposed this massive amalgamation experiment on a whole lot of Councils for political reasons and it's been a dismal failure. It was not imposed on any proven basis and was always expected to take many years before any benefits were achieved. To be able to implement, Councils need people to run the existing separate systems, plus they need people to work on the processes to merge the systems. No wonder staff costs went up. With the larger organisation comes greater complexity and more levels of management. To add insult to injury the government has been cost shifting their responsibilities to Councils so our rates are de facto taxes to the state government as they spend less of the state taxpayer funds. And we see massive government grants to Councils that don't need help – see articles below:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Then there seem to be inadequate checks and balances in the accounting systems, especially with regard to restricted funds (and not just in CC Council). Since misuse has been known for about 20 years why hasn't the state government or earlier CEO's or CFO's moved to fix the problems? There seems to be a lot of finger pointing at the suspended elected Councillors but as I see it the basic

problems existed before they came on the scene. And they could only work with the financial reports provided to them that did not show the true situation, as demonstrated by several outside investigations into finances not showing any problems.

Admittedly during their time we had Covid, fires, floods, beach erosion to make matters worse but had we had adequate support for amalgamation and the state government paying their share for disaster support then I believe we'd much better off.

Council argue that ratepayers have received benefits from the money that was lost but this is simply untrue. The extra staff costs have been largely to support amalgamation and that has not progressed far for all the expenditure. A large chunk of Council debt was carried over from the former Gosford and Wyong Councils. Gosford's losses were largely as a result of unsuitable speculative investments that were lost during the GFC. In Wyong we saw overpriced land purchases including land on top of a ridge for a supposed airport. Basic services such as mowing nature strips on roads and clearing vegetation on roadsides for safety reasons have not been occurring.

Until the causes of the problems are addressed, the same people are going to have control of our extra rates, there's no evidence that accounting systems have been fixed. We still have to fork out lots more money to get the amalgamation finished as all accounting and banking systems are still separate. Figures provided to elected Councillors indicated that there was about an \$80 million shortfall in funding from the state government up to last year. Central Coast Council is just one of many suffering financial woes because of drastic underfunding as seen in the following articles:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

And, not only have the state government been effectively stealing our rates by cost shifting for over 20 years, they will continue make us pay for things that they carry the financial responsibility for. Reversing cost shifting and reimbursing our rates would provide enough funds so that rate rises would be unnecessary. See articles below:

https://www.lgnsw.org.au/common/Uploaded%20files/PDF/Cost_Shifting_Summary_2018.pdf

[REDACTED]

What we need is a full judicial inquiry into the whole fiasco and the state government's response.