

As a husband and wife partnership and retired pensioners, we hereby oppose the Port Stephens Council's proposed SRV and state that our Council is one of very few in NSW Fit for the Future and should remain with CPI cost of living increases only.

Brian attended the October 9 meeting of our Council and the majority of councillors ignored 70%+ of objectors against a Special Rate Variation levy increase (SRV). It appeared that the majority of councillors 6-2 had made their minds up prior to any expensive community consultation, which clearly appeared as "only going through the motions" of these information sessions.

We will see increases over \$700, \$1,000 and over \$1,200 on average for our residential homes over 7 years + CPI increases which will remain beyond the 7 years in perpetuity, also increasing when we next receive our Valuer General's (VG) tri-annual assessment of our land values also compounding in perpetuity.

We completely disagree with our Council's stated average residential rate value (VG) of only \$224,000 throughout the LGA, where there are far more valuable properties including coastal, waterfront residential and farmland properties which are valued far in excess of the suggested residential average.

Our Council had worked without a SRV for over 30 years, except for the 3% Drainage Levy cleverly hidden in one sentence during each annual budget report.

Since having lived at this residential address for almost 40 years, we have witnessed major improvements to our shopping centre at Nelson Bay and a whole new shopping centre at Salamander Bay. The Nelson Bay CBD was improved with a business rate levy imposed by our Council to property owners. The Salamander Bay Shopping Centre, (now known as Salamander Central), is owned by private companies.

It has just come to our attention that our Council garnered the services of a consultant who claims that Council needs to spend \$48 million on all shopping centres within the Local Government Area. This amount would equate to almost half the proposed \$100 million of the SRV over 7 years. These shopping centres improvements should be financed by the property owners, not the residential ratepayers.

Our Council proved that we are Fit for the Future, when 14,000 signatories opposed the NSW Government's proposed forced Port Stephens and Newcastle merger. A forced Newcastle Council merger would have seen us receive an immediate rate increase as the Newcastle Council (not Fit for the Future) and its crumbling buildings and facilities required those new rates increases.

Our Council's assets include:-

\$38 million in cash reserves (recent Business Paper);

50% ownership of Newcastle Airport, Williamtown, with Newcastle City Council, worth around \$50 million, returning cash dividends;

Numerous buildings in Newcastle, Nelson Bay and Raymond Terrace, also worth tens of millions;

Vacant land at Salamander Bay, Nelson Bay, Karuah and Williamtown (adjacent to the airport) known to our community;

These assets easily equate to over \$100-\$150 million, the same amount of the 7.5% SRV rate increase over 7 years.

A previous land asset sale at Masonite Road, Heatherbrae netted our Council a tidy profit of around \$6.5 million.

Our Council needs to work smarter, provide fewer services that we should not be providing and teach our road repair gangs to do a proper job with molten tar with hotmix and more heavy patching, then and only then will our Council remain Fit for the Future and our roads come up to a much better standard, especially where it rains incessantly.

Working smarter and keeping out of court will most certainly save us millions as well. (The Lagoons Estate, Nelson Bay is a prime example where our Council ignored the proponent's DA application numerous times and wound up in court 3 times, losing substantially each and every time. Costs of these losses are in the millions and not made public with an out-of-court settlement with the current owners.)

Another Council "investment" at Treescape, formerly Samurai Beach Resort, Anna Bay (now under a different name) is another area of Council's inept ability at backing yet another money-wasting exercise to the tune of over \$15-\$17 million. This development has a current dollar value of less than \$2 or \$3 million.

As pensioners and a husband and wife team we responded to Council's "SurveyMonkey" in-house electronic survey twice and DID NOT receive any electronic recognition of our Council having received our submissions. Therefore we forwarded our objections to the proposed 7.5% + CPI increases over 7 years and in perpetuity via separate emails to Port Stephens Council's General Manager, Wayne Wallace.

The Integrated Planning Policy, known as part of Port Stephens Council's "Wish List" of \$100 million is the same as our Council's airport, property and land assets of either \$100-\$150 million.

This Integrated Planning Policy was presented in various ways with only 3 towns, Anna Bay, Medowie and Raymond Terrace, for the Information Exhibition Period, not Nelson Bay and adjacent suburbs on the Tomaree Peninsula area, where the majority of Council rates come from. It was also presented with only 3 days to respond via Council's "Have Your Say", email to a selected number of recipients.

Council's Hardship Policy appears unchanged where debts on private properties would remain with interest until the passing of the occupant(s) and/or that property is sold. The proposed assistance from household waste subsidies for eligible pensioners would be miniscule and not take effect for many years.

To be able to fully appreciate our Council's Bedminster Co-Composting System, we were expecting, and are still waiting for a green waste bin, the same as other progressive councils. There is no intention to see this in reality under the current 5 x 5 Waste Management contract.

With all the above information supplied, and the most inaccurate, unfair nature of this SRV proposal and Council's handling of this unfair proposal, Port Stephens Councillors should be relieved of their duties and an Administrator appointed. Our Council has all its priorities wrong.

Please refer this submission to the Minister for Local Government and the NSW State Ombudsman.

Yours Sincerely,

Brian and Cheryl Watson-Will, Corlette

**(Brian: Member of Corlette Hall/Parks & Reserves
355c Committee and Corlette Headland 355c Committee
of Port Stephens Council, nearly 40 years.
Councillor, Port Stephens Council 1991-1995 and 1999-2004.)**