

From: [REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, 15 February 2019 2:25 PM

To: Local Government Mailbox <localgovernment@ipart.nsw.gov.au>

Subject: Objection to Port Stephens Council's recent application for a Special Rate Variation

Dear IPART

I wish to register that I object to Port Stephens Council's ridiculous proposal to increase rates by 66% over 7 years.

Over 70% of submissions to Council's proposal were against the increase. Over 2,000 people made their voices heard. Council ignored every single one of these people. Thousands more locals have signed online and paper petitions.

Many local businesses are also against this proposal.

It is inevitable that, if this excessive rate rise goes ahead, commercial landlords will pass on the increase to small business owners around all the local towns by increasing their rents. So many already struggling shop owners and businesses will be forced to close down, leaving even more empty shop fronts around towns like Nelson Bay and Raymond Terrace.

Also, residential landlords will also pass on the rate increase to residents who rent properties. So many people who are already struggling financially will be hard hit and have far less disposable income to spend at the local shops and businesses.

It becomes a vicious cycle – Council claims that the SRV will revitalise local towns but it is likely that the exact opposite will occur due to the reasons outlined above.

There is very poor awareness by residents and ratepayers about Council's proposed projects. This lack of awareness has been fuelled by Council changing amounts of money being allocated to projects, between when this proposal first went out for public submission, and what has been submitted to you.

This includes \$25million less over 10 years for roads. The current roads and infrastructure are in a very poor state overall and desperately need urgent updating and maintenance. They are most definitely the number one priority for this area and it makes no sense at all that Council has reduced the funds allocated to them.

Perhaps the 30% of people who indicated a willingness for a rate rise in the first round of consultation may have opted for no increase had they seen the most recent proposal from Council.

There is no evidence that any of the projects proposed by Council are 'needs'. Rather, they appear to be 'wants'. I agree that most of the projects would be "nice to have", but none of them are essential to Council continuing to operate. A good example of this is Port Stephen's proposal to build a brand new

massive Sports Complex on the existing Tomaree Sportsgrounds at Salamander, at the exorbitant cost of around 65 million dollars. The existing Sports Complex and grounds are overall in very good condition and are perfectly adequate for the various Sporting activities of the local population. This proposed new Complex is totally unnecessary and a huge waste of ratepayers' money.

All that is needed is a general update of some of the existing buildings at the current Complex.

Another example of "wants" rather than "needs" is the proposal to build an Art Gallery at Raymond Terrace, which I think would be poorly utilised and attended.

There is already a selection of wonderful Galleries at Newcastle, around 25 minutes drive away.

Council appears to have their priorities wrong, pushing for wasteful, unnecessary projects such as these, above vital upgrades of our local roads and infrastructure.

Council has, in recent years, demonstrated a sound capacity to fund large-scale projects without the need for a rate increase.

Wages are stagnant, power prices are soaring, and the cost of petrol, insurances, and consumer goods is only increasing. Cost of living is rising and I am one of many people who are already struggling.

Pensioners are already deciding between turning the heater on in the dead of winter, or not spending that money so they can pay bills. Parents are already deciding whether they can afford to buy bigger shoes to send their kids to school in, or whether they can afford a bigger school uniform. This is without a rate increase!

Port Stephens Council has ignored residents, and I ask that you listen to us when we say: this rate rise is unnecessary, unaffordable, and will cause extreme hardship for many. I ask that you reject this application outright.

Regards

Christina Miles

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