

Wednesday 13 March 2019

Dear Sir/Madam,

I wish to make a submission to IPART on the basis that the SRV applied for by Dungog Shire Council, I believe is far too high for most of the constituents to afford. In 2015-2017, as a community we endured the horror of the local government amalgamation process and the majority in the community believed that the best solution was in fact to amalgamate with a larger 'fit' council, in order to remain sustainable and potentially access advantages on offer in a larger council.

However, the then council voted against this, totally ignoring the will of the majority, despite a number of valid submissions sent to both the delegate and the NSW State Government advocating for amalgamation with Port Stephens Shire Council. So, now we are at this point where in order to survive, the current council is proposing a 97.8% increase in our rates over 7 years.

This increase will only manage to keep the shire sustainable at its current level, it will not be offset by additional services or infrastructure. Our shire has an extremely low rate base, with large areas of land - National Parks, State Forests and Hunter Water, contributing nothing financially to supporting the shire.

Due to previous cost shifting policies by past State governments, we have no State funded roads, so this small, rural shire is responsible for all road maintenance and we actually have as many kilometres as Port Stephens LGA with nowhere near the rate base to pay for it.

During the community consultations, the IPART requested rate increase was the only option we were offered. No smaller increase was ever put on the table for the community's consideration. I understand that Dungog Shire rates have not increased in recent years and I am not opposed to an increase in principal, but I am opposed to such a massive increase which many of us will find unaffordable. It will impact on rural landowners significantly, as well as the fact that many property owners in this small shire are elderly, self funded retirees or operate, what can only be considered marginal businesses.

My request is for IPART not to approve such a high rate rise and ask Dungog Council to work out other less onerous options for our community to consider or recommend further that the NSW State government reviews options for new opportunities for amalgamation to ensure the survival of this shire.

Thank you for considering my submission.
Regards

Carol Skafte-Zauss

