Cr. Gianpiero Battista
[redacted]
March 11, 2016

IPART

Dear Sir, Madam:

I am writing this submission **AGAINST** the Lismore City Council request for a 2016/17 Special Rate Variation (SRV) for funding of a Biodiversity Strategy Management.

The reason for my submission relates to the decision made by Council on 14 April 2015 in regards to the above. I am one of the Councillors who have voted against the report.

The last paragraph in the summary of the report presented by Council 'staff state that….

> This report recommends the adoption of the BMS and the SRV based on the higher level of confidence that is offered by the independent stratified random survey of ratepayers conducted by HRF. This level of confidence is fostered by the sample being considered representative of the whole Local Government Area (LGA). Three other options are provided for Council consideration each with differing merit but offering varying consequences.

The above mentioned HRF phone survey was conducted in January 2015 and DID NOT followed the IPART Guidelines as expressed in *Fact Sheet - Community Awareness and engagement for special variations for 2016-17*, available on your web site.

The survey questions did not mentioned or explained the cumulative effects of the SRV over the years.

Your guidelines present a table as an example….

Table 1 Impact on residential rates of a 508(2) special variation of 7.5% in 2016-17

	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	Cumulative increase
Average residential rate under assumed rate peg of 2.5% pa	$1,000	$1,025	$1,051	$1,077	$1,104	10.4%
Annual increase (%)		2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	
Average residential rate with an SV of 7.5% in first year	$1,000	$1,075	$1,102	$1,129	$1,158	15.8%
Annual increase (%)		7.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	
Cumulative impact of SV above 2015-16 levels		$75	$102	$129	$158	

The above information was NOT SHOWN on previous correspondence from Council and was only later (23 October 2015) included in a letter from the Executive Director of Sustainable Development (attachment 6 page 19) and on a publication called "Local Matter" issue 48 on 11 November 2015 (Attachment 6 page 23).

In addition to this the recommendation from staff on the 14 April 2015 disregards Criterion 2 as per your Fact Sheet where it states that Council must demonstrate a variety of engagement methods as per below.

> **Criterion 2** requires that the council's community engagement strategy for the special variation must demonstrate an appropriate variety of engagement methods to ensure an opportunity for community awareness and input to occur. There are a number of ways that councils may capture community feedback/input. These include:

My point is why, IPART request for a variety of engagement methods which Council received from the community (large number of written submissions) was not considered in the report, as evidence of the community unwillingness to be charged more money, and ONLY an incorrect and incomplete (as per IPART Guidelines) HRF survey was?

Another aspect of the HRF survey that did not followed IPART Guidelines is the sample size chosen for the survey (200 people).

IPART Guidelines clearly states that…..

> Where a council decides to undertake a survey, it is important the survey sample is representative of the relevant population, and is of sufficient size (approximately 400 respondents), to generate statistically reliable results. The survey questionnaire should provide respondents with clear and transparent information on the impact and benefits of the special variation and what it is to fund, and should not use leading questions.

It is clear to me that Council's staff **did not**:

- read the IPART Guidelines on community consultation (the new ones were not released until later in 2015 with the HRF survey already completed).

- follow the Guidelines on sample survey number (around 400).

- presented the correct information to the community in both the survey and other correspondence before the Council meeting on the 14 April 2015.

- consider the majority submissions against changes to the LTFP advertised for 28 days from Saturday 24 October 2015 (see extracts below from Council meeting 8 December 2015 page 195-196).

There were 42 submissions received and these have been posted in full on the Councillor Portal. Council is required to consider these submissions prior to determining to adopt changes to the Imagine Lismore 4 Year Plan 2013-2017 and Long Term Financial Plan 2015-2025.

In addition to the recommended changes to the Council's strategic documents being advertised and consistent with IPART's requirements, additional information on the special rate variation for the Biodiversity Management Strategy has also been provided and advertised to ratepayers.

The public consultation period was from Saturday, 24 October 2015 to Saturday, 21 November 2015. There were 42 submissions received. These have been categorised as 19 supportive, 21 objections and 2 inconclusive.

In conclusion I urge you NOT to grant the SRV as the evidence shows that the community, whilst in agreement with the BMS, is overwhelmingly against a further increase above rate pegging. If I may add I would also like to draw your attention on the fact that Lismore LGA has an higher than average rate charge for all categories compared to other neighboring Councils and a higher than recommended percentages of outstanding rates as well as other factors like high unemployment and greater number of pensioners living in the area. The community CAN NOT AFFODR this increase!

Please feel free to call me at [redacted] if in need of clarifications on the above.

Best Regards,

Gianpiero Battista

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