

## **RE: Proposed Rate Increase Ballina Shire Council**

My objections to the proposed special rate rise are as follows:

Firstly the Council's spiel about fixing the Richmond River is pie in the sky. The River flows through several shires before it reaches Ballina. There is a body Richmond River County Council now merged with Rous County Council: [https://www.rous.nsw.gov.au/cp\\_themes/default/home.asp#](https://www.rous.nsw.gov.au/cp_themes/default/home.asp#) which is supposed to look after water quality, flood mitigation, weed biosecurity etc. Councillors are drawn from the Shire councils of Ballina, Byron, Lismore and Richmond Valley.

At an information meeting we were told that hundreds of thousands of dollars gained from the special rate rise were to be used to commission an academic to do a report on the Tuckean Swamp. When a ratepayer asked if the Tuckean Swamp belonged to Council we were informed that no it belongs to Parks and Wildlife.

Over the years there have been numerous expensive reports and senate enquiries into these matters. A quick Google search will bring up many references to these. Now Ballina Council thinks they are going to fix something which no one else including State and Federal Governments have managed to do before them.

At a Council Ward meeting 9.3.17 it was admitted that with all the previous reports and plans of action there has in fact been no action. The ratepayers suspect that will continue to be the case and more money will be wasted.

From 2015/16 Ballina ratepayers were slugged with a special rate rise to fund refurbishment of the Ballina and Alstonville Swimming Pools. To this date work has not started on this and the cost has blown out from \$8 million to \$14 million. This is a lot of money to spend on a facility that only a small percentage of the population uses. Spare a thought for the town of Wardell and the rural residents of the shire who are paying the increased rates for something they will never use.

Residents are irate at the way their input has been disregarded by Council. At the information meeting we were told it didn't matter if the majority were against the increase they would go ahead with the application for another

special rate anyway. We are told by one councillor that 90% of the submissions to Council were against the rise. People who received phone calls from Micromex Research employed by the Council, at who knows what cost, report being pressured to give answers favourable to Council.

Councillors appear to think Ballina ratepayers are wealthy. In truth there a lot of low income people in the shire. Most working families in this area are not high income earners. Also there are a lot of self-funded retirees struggling to survive because of low interest rates and changes to the super rules. Then there are the pensioners who are not flush either.

I have not heard such community dissatisfaction with a Council since I moved to the area in 1992. The prevailing opinion is there needs to be an enquiry into how the Council manages our ratepayers' money. This is the Council who at election time pledged to be a "LISTENING COUNCIL". I am attaching a sample of the letters published in the Ballina Advocate on 1.3.17. and 8.3.17. Despite assurances from the mayor in the media that ratepayers are in favour of the increase we have yet to see one letter to that effect.

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