

Irene E Jones



7<sup>th</sup> March, 2019

By email: [localgovernment@ipart.nsw.gov.au](mailto:localgovernment@ipart.nsw.gov.au)

Dear Sir/Madam

**Special Rate Variation (SRV) PSC 2018-02118**

This submission has been prepared to outline my objections to the Special Rate Variation (SRV) proposed by Port Stephens Council (PSC) in my area and in general.

- a) Car Parking Spencer Park - the proposal to construct parking bays along the Soldiers Point Road frontage of Spencer Park at a highly inflated cost of \$500,000.00 was never requested by local residents (as stated by PSC) and is not required. Local residents strongly opposed this parking proposal that was put forward a few years ago by Council staff as a suggestion to help solve the parking problems associated with a failed Soldiers Point Marina extension proposal. Residents were vehemently opposed to the construction of these parking bays as it would mean the removal of several substantial trees along that road frontage, thus severely affecting the amenity of the park. So this figure of \$500,000 would never be required to be spent on parking at Spencer Park and should never been included in their proposed figures..
- b) Financial hardship to seniors and young families – This must be considered as Port Stephens, is a favoured retirement locale as well as being affordably attractive to young families. It has a great percentage of residents on limited fixed incomes and whilst the economy has been showing good growth, incomes have been relatively stagnant. PSC has declared that it is “Fit for the Future” so how then is it fair and reasonable to request a rate variation of 7.5% when the present rate pegging is 2.7%. If this high increase was granted I feel that pensioners and young families will be disadvantaged by such a leap in the rate variation, many people struggle as it is to pay bills. It is my opinion that PSC requested the higher figure so if it is declined by you they may be granted a lower increase of perhaps 3-4% which is more than the pegged amount.
- c) Non budgeted items - PSC has proposed a sports complex costing \$65 million without a business plan being put forward for this complex. I feel that PSC have included items on the SRV report that are not required or are only one-off items so it would enable a surplus of funds from these items that could be directed to this proposed stadium.
- d) Investments - PSC has many commercial investments (e.g.a percentage of Newcastle Airport) that were purchased in the past from the money it collected in rates. Had PSC spent this money on projects that needed to be done, they would not need to ask for a SRV to cover these items. Maybe PSC need to release some of these investments to pay for the backlog of work they wish to do and then when a surplus appears in the future they can reinvest again.

- e) Looking at the present PSC rates system. PSC lowered and varied the NSW 90 day letting regulation to allow residential properties to rent out their homes at extremely high commercial rents to holiday-makers. Maybe PSC needs to restructure their rating system for these homes so they do not pay a residential rate but a higher rate as do hotels and motels.

In my area of Soldiers Point the projects PSC have listed are either a one-off or definitely not required by residents and will not be done, so I do not agree that I or indeed any resident should have to pay higher rates for several years to cover non-existent items, Also Council have not been transparent as to whether rates would decrease after their proposed projects are completed.

I sincerely believe that the Council should have taken a longer and closer audit of what it could have done to attain the funds needed before a special rate variation was applied for. They also received a great deal of opposition to the proposed rate increase from residents but ignored the submissions received.

Yours faithfully

*Irene E Jones*