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**Sent:** Friday, 11 March 2016, 12:20  
**Subject:** Rates & Fees Clarence Valley Shire

Dear Ma'am/Sir,

I am writing yet again about the proposed increase of the council rates in the Clarence Valley Shire. I would like to tell you why I cannot afford higher rates and higher fees for services that our Council is intending to implement.

My story is typical of many others in this shire who have retired here and I will talk of that later. But more importantly is the story of the ones born and bred here. They have learnt to use any means at hand to keep head above water. Many work at poorly paid jobs, but they are proud and want to survive on their own. There is also a large proportion of people who are jobless and unfortunately we also have a contingent of homeless ones.

As country people, they are what one expects. Kind and generous to a fault, and ready to lend a hand, and they do. But when just surviving takes all your cash, your energy and your motivation, it is not easy to find more of the same to share with others.

Our council is not, as one expects' searching for ways to assist us in raising the standard of living, and ***to find ways to keep the youngsters occupied and interested in making a life here.*** They seem insensitive to our supplications for more understanding of what is needed, what the average person here is asking for.

***What Council have proposed instead is the 37% Rates Rise Plus a 53.7% Increase in their Revenue from User Charges and Fees over the next 5 years, Plus a reduction in services . We do not yet know what this means to us.***

I am 76 years old, worked hard all my life and left Sydney after a forced early retirement due to Staff Cuts. For years I tried to get another paid job, but I would not even get an interview. One cannot lie about one's age.

I left family and friends, and moved north, and then again further north, to Yamba. I bought a very modest little house in the residential part and would have survived nicely if I had not lost all my savings in the Provident Capital Crash of December 2012. Now I live on the age pension.

I am skilled in using a computer, so I have set up my budget so that as soon as the pension hits the account, it is apportioned to various other accounts, which help me keep it in the black. This is a finely tuned exercise and needs constant vigilance.

That leaves me with \$180 in my purse for the whole week. I have to buy food, clothes, cleaning materials, the odd greeting card and small gift, and other sundries. As I said, I apportion moneys for regular expenses, but there is not enough to pay for any extra-ordinary ones. EG: Christmas has become a nightmare. I am the only grandparent to 6 grandchildren. They have been taught all the right attitudes, but which grandparent would like to say "Sorry pet, but there is no money for a gift". Would you?

Add to that, the expense of going to a specialist, which happens often at my age, and that of a large percentage of people living in this shire. One has to pay anything from 75-125 dollars for the gap [this is the norm] then add the cost of the petrol or the community transport which will be anything between 20-40 dollars added onto the rest.

One has to accommodate rising prices in everything we buy and horror of horrors, house and car maintenance and **replacement**. I have been waiting for at least 18 months to get assistance with some house maintenance help. In the meantime, I have a long list of small jobs that I simply cannot afford to get done.

At 76 I find I am always busy with do-it-yourself maintenance and eking out the life of my clothes. I was not brought up in poverty, so this sub-strata existence depresses me no end. It does nothing to alleviate this depression when I hear people half my age worrying about how they will cope with higher prices, and higher taxes. They despair of keeping their children from going to the big cities or overseas because they too want to get ahead and earn a decent living without working 24/7 as many of the parents do.

So I am compelled to ask, why is it that we who are not able to access the 5 digit salaries, or even four digits sometimes, have to shore up the council's intention to initiate large-scale projects which – to my way of thinking- will not create a commensurate benefit to the shire?

I am speaking of the project that the council keep touting as their 'coup de grace'. Building one Depot for all of the shire. It may seem fine on paper, but this is a sparsely populated shire, and having one depot for all of it is likely to add much to the travelling all around, which is likely to make it less effective and more expensive to run.

Our council has over the past ten years accumulated a huge, huge debt which will only grow bigger for our children and grandchildren to deal with. And yet they now want us to pay more. When I was in dire straits I sold what I could to make up the short fall. Borrowing without the ability to pay back, is deferring the problems. Yet our council it seems, is reluctant even consider the sale of assets.

Is it a question of might is right here? These people are mostly in the six figure income bracket. It is manifestly obvious that they have no idea what it is to live on 2-5% of what they earn annually. When I paid my taxes I figured that I must be doing okay to pay so much in tax. Now that I am old and alone, as so many others are here, why are we not allowed a reasonable existence without having to beg for mercy?

Please do not allow these harsh taxes on us. Please stop our council from taking advantage of their position and to urge them to work at assisting the people here, not oppressing us.

Thank you for taking the time to read my letter, and please do not allow this abomination.

Regards and thanks

Marie Boler

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