

On Monday, 5 March 2018, 3:10:53 pm AEDT, [REDACTED] wrote:

To Whom It May Concern:

Local Councils are set up to be in touch with the people of their shire, to be more aware of the needs and aspirations of that part of the State. Or so we are told. Now they are again wanting us to pay more for the privilege, yet. . . . Our local council, the Clarence Valley Council seem set far from that kind of mission statement, and there are many who feel that this council is incompetent and/or negligent in its handling of the needs of this area.

It has in fact, more than twice the NSW Avg employed by Council. It has gone into a debt of over 140 million dollars during its tenure, neglected the transparency that should be shown in its dealings, and also mismanaged the safe handling of asbestos material when building the Super Depot in South Grafton, to the potential detriment of the residents nearby and possibly the people –young and older – who use the school next door.

This is not a wealthy or vibrant area. So many Local People exist on incomes of less than \$25,000pa. In fact statistics tell us that it has a very high number of pensioners, that the education level of younger people is lower than the averages of NSW and that the incomes are also significantly lower, whilst dependence on welfare is higher. Employment prospects are bleak for those who want good careers, so they have to leave the area to find good jobs. It is a pity, but preferable to having them join the youth suicide rate in this area, that is so high that it has been reported internationally or to give in to Self-Harm that is twice the National Average.

Yet, we read that our council is hugely overstaffed, that there are too many vehicles and electronics that we are paying for and that expenses incurred by councillors for conferences and such like, are considerably expensive and maybe not suited to a time when council cannot fit into the budget.

An excerpt from the ABS lists the following from Census Night 2016:

"Aged Care Residential Services = 711 People 4.1% NSW = 2%

Hospitals (except Psychiatric) = 606 People 3.5% NSW 3.5%

Local Gov Admin = 486 People 2.8% NSW 1.3%

Other Social Assistance Services = 462 People 2.6% NSW 1.6%."

That's Twice the NSW Average for Aged Care,

8,210 People were in receipt of Centrelink Age Pensions in 2016 but this increased to 9,577 by 2018.

Council it seems, does have a Hardship Policy, but who knows about it? Even if they did, who would willingly go through the difficult process of applying in writing to be assessed in minute detail of assets and expenses, and only be given more 'time to pay', after the addition of interest is added on the amount due. What's more, it has been said that at least in one instance, such an applicant was interviewed in the Public Foyer of the Council Building by one of Council's front desk staff in full view of everyone present. This, in a country town where everyone knows every one else.

I live on my own in a very small house with no views. As it is, I barely exist on my meagre income, and the worry of expensive maintenance to the house haunts me daily. Maintaining an old house and an old body is expensive business. There just is not enough to stretch to higher rates too. It will have to be money for the council or a leaking roof soon.

The decision is in your hands.

Yours faithfully,
Marie Boler

[REDACTED]
