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Dr Peter Boxall AO  
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Dear Dr Boxall

### **Wingecarribee Shire Council Special Rate Variation**

I understand that this Council has lodged a submission to obtain a SRV for the next four years. No doubt they have lodged "evidence" to support their argument that this increase, of nearly 50%, is supported by the community. I wish to refute that argument.

Council quotes surveys to "prove" the community supports rate rises to maintain or improve infrastructure. The questions were structured so that people had to choose if they would like better roads etc. without making clear the significant cost involved, and who would pay for it. The question should have been better stated as "Would you support paying an extra 10% pa in rates to improve community assets?", or similar to show the financial implication.

In fact, when people were asked how improvements should be paid for, the majority of responses (75%) stated either by sale of Council assets, or by better internal management of resources. A mere 4% stated by rate increases.

The questions were not limited to ratepayers who are the only people affected. In the mail-out survey there was no control of limiting the returns to one person. I am aware of one person who found 100 blank survey forms in the Post Office waste bin, completed the survey but did not reveal their identity. It is not known if Council staff may have been encouraged to fill out forms supporting increases, or whether such people were excluded, as they should have been to avoid bias.

Council has paid little heed to a petition that was lodged in November 2015 by more than 600 residents who objected to any plan for SRV. Such a point of view reflects a far stronger view than people responding to surveys. Perhaps you were not advised of this strong community adverse view.

You will no doubt have a copy of the 200 page Council report headed "Attachments to Reports – Item 13.1 – Investing in our Future" dated 10 February. You will note that all of the unsolicited, voluntary submissions, in the report, made to Council by concerned people were critical of the SRV proposal, and in some cases indicated that the rate increases would force them to sell.

I now ask you to consider the record of Council's use of funds in the last several years. The Council has cried "poor" to ratepayers for too long trying to give the impression that they have been held back from doing necessary work by their inability to raise more money than the rate pegging allows.

Information was provided by Council shows the actual rate percentage increases over the last 15 years. This Please note that in only 4 out of 15 years has No Special Variation been sought. In fact, in this period there have only been 5 years when the rate increase (including levies etc) has been less than 7% pa.

I refer to the IPART Media Release of 18 February and note that of all the 144 Councils in NSW, only 12 have applied for a SRV above the rate peg level. And of those 12, Wingecarribee is applying for the highest increase on a per annum basis (45.3 % over four years).

**In summary:**

- **I believe Council's attempts to "prove" community support for the SRV is flawed and verging on deceitful.**
- **Council had determined long before any community surveys that they would be lodging an SRV, thus making a mockery of consultation.**
- **Council have ignored the outcry made by concerned citizens through petition and unsolicited, voluntary submissions**
- **Council has been making huge increases in rates and levies for many years, so what have they done with the extra funds to make Council Fit for Future?**
- **The proposal to seek further increases of nearly 50% over the next four years is outrageous, and beyond the capacity of many to pay. It is the highest SRV sought in NSW. It comes on top of substantial increases for many years.**
- **Council did not provide an assessment of the impact of rate rises would have on affected ratepayers (as required) other than platitudes.**
- **No attempt has been made to make internal savings or to seek additional funds from sources other than rate increases**
- **When surveyed, people were told the only options were to have rate rises over four years of 10.4%, 38.4% or 46.2%. Why did the Council not consider in-between figures such as 15% or 25%?**

**I request you consider my strong objections to the Council's SRV application.**

Yours

Martin Flaxman  
Susan Flaxman