

**From:** M Gardner [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Monday, 13 March 2017 2:39 PM  
**To:** Local Government Mailbox  
**Subject:** SUBMISSION IPART Byron Shire Rates

SUBMISSION about Byron Shire Special Rates Variation request

Dear Madam/Sir,

I object to the Byron Shire Council's request for a special rates variation. I do not see how they are justified and I do not believe that the council request should be granted.

From your website, I note that you request from a council

**community awareness of their plans:**

Community consultation done by this council has made us all aware of their plans but not of the need nor of support: the consultation process was designed in a way that was deeply flawed (three different surveys with three different sets of questions and options changed or missing across the surveys) and then interpreted in a way that was misleading (overwhelming responses were against any rates rise and these were all repackaged and said to be supporting various rates rises).

Materials presented to community and to councillors were contradictory and completely different figures were given to different groups.

For 70% of us voting against the rate rise, the irony of spending \$66,000 on a flawed consultation process which was then mis-used as evidence of support for a rates increase is bitter.

**a demonstrated need for higher increases to charges**

The demonstrated need for higher charges is not clear and many leaders in the community advocated taking time for a full re-assessment. There are three reasons for this

1. The rates rise was agreed upon by a council in 2015 which was deeply unpopular with community (a councillor had completely changed the platform on which she was elected) and the 2016 election result was a great swing against that platform. The new council is still getting to grips with all the issues in particular the finances. The volunteer work of financial planners/accountants in the community suggest that the funding gap is only \$2 million not \$6 million. This should be investigated.
2. Another volunteer researcher found that in the Shire, tourists outnumber residents by approx 150+ to 1. The community costs of tourism are not collected from tourism but are borne by community. The shire staff calculate this is about 30% if not more on top of all council costs. The State is negligent in not permitting a tourism levy. This tourism load is a huge issue: less than 30,000 residents are hosting over 2 million visitors.
3. The State has chronically underfunded Byron Shire. Even gone as far as to remove the Brunswick Heads Caravan Parks from council management, which was providing income for the Shire. One of the additions to the rates rise resolution in council was that council work with community to advocate with State about funding issues across the board.

**a reasonable impact on ratepayers**

Because of the timing of this request and the IPART assessment, we have no idea what the impact will be. We are in a region where unemployment and under employment is a big issue, where the average wage is the lowest in the state, where many people live on fixed incomes and many homeowners are asset rich/cash poor due to inflation of house prices. Regional NSW economies are stagnant if not declining. Now is not the time for a rates increase.

**a sustainable financing strategy**

I, along with others in the community, do not accept that there is a reasonable financing strategy. The business rate differentials are much less than those in Lismore. Most of the business here is slanted for tourism so the impacts and costs are felt to be on residents shoulders while the profit is secured in business and not flowing on to council. How about first restructuring the current rates to provide fairness in the Byron Shire buisness/residents ratio and esp by comparison with other areas in the region? I hear that the NSW govt permits tourist levy upon application and if that is true, I think that the council should act on all this first.

**a history of well-documented council productivity improvements**

A lot of council arguments are about backlog not new works. I wonder why council does not have a Infrastructure backlog fund and a plan for it. One that is public information for councillors and community. Community is not confident that management at council is fair, accurate and best practice. The new council since late 2016 has not had the time to make the changes and corrections.

**'In addition to council's evidence, we will assess any other information we consider relevant, including letters from ratepayers'**

My letter to you now is one of dozens against the rate rise published in the *Byron Shire Echo* and the *Byron Shire News*. You can review these online at the *EchoNet Online Daily*. Some of the saddest ones are from neighbours, on fixed incomes, having lived here all their lives, now faced with selling and shifting away to unknown places.

Once again, I object to this increase because there has not been fair consultation and representation, nor does the community accept that the rise is justified. The underfunding issues at State level plus the toursim are oputstanding serious concerns which should be solved first.

Dr. M Gardner

