

[REDACTED]

Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal  
Level 8,  
1 Market Street,  
SYDNEY. NSW 2000

Dear Sir/Madam,

**RE: ARMIDALE DUMARESQ COUNCIL'S PROPOSED RATE INCREASE 20%**

Last Saturday afternoon, 8<sup>th</sup> February, my husband and I were two of over 300 persons who attended a meeting by Armidale Dumaresq Mayor and Councillors regarding the proposed rate rise. We understand the Council has made application for the above proposed rate rise, but against the wishes of the majority of rate payers.

I would like to make the following statements:

- We live in a large rural-based, University city, which also boasts a broad range of Government Departments, 3 Private Schools; 1 Catholic College and over 12 Primary schools. There are a disproportionately high number of buildings for whom no rates are paid to our Council but the Council still has to maintain the infrastructure within its boundaries.
- The Armidale Dumaresq Council (ADC) has lost (by declining) considerable business development opportunities over the last few years. There are no new enterprises and a considerable number of shops in the CBC are empty.
- The Council has not considered productivity improvements within Council with a salaries bill of \$17M and is considering "paying out" the existing General Manager prior to when his term of office ends in September. When compared with the neighbouring Tamworth Council we appear to be over-staffed. This is not clearly understood by Council. I spoke with one of the Councillors who commented that they do not set salary levels, nor do they determine the minimum number of workers in Council trucks, so it was not their problem. They clearly do not understand the financial implication of reducing staffing numbers.
- [REDACTED]
- In the last Council elections, 4 Councillors were returned and 6 new ones appointed. The then Mayor, Mr. Jim Maher, was also returned. He was subsequently displaced by the current Mayor, Mr. Laurie Bishop. That changed the ratio to 5:5 with the Mayor given the casting vote. Until the ratio changed, the returned Councillors were out-voted on many issues and it is still happening.
- Unfortunately, it seems, we are not in apposition to "sell" water from Malpas Dam (a suggestion made by a ratepayer).
- In the past, Council has wasted many dollars on legal matters, taking a former Mayor to Court; a matter concerning the Art Gallery; currently wasting legal money on a resident regarding home style; supporting a private function to the tune of \$40,00 over 3 years; paying a consultant \$25,000 to address the ratepayers on 8<sup>th</sup> February. I also believe it is possible that they will regain monies believed lost in a large investment bungle to the tune of some \$2M.
- Council has spent a lot of unavailable monies trying to win over their constituents about their preferred 20% hike rise. This is a rural area, in the worst drought known for many

years, and rate payers just cannot accept a rise in rates. The proposed increases for rural properties is laughable, as is the proposed rate hike for us pensioners.

- Council are permitted to get the 2.3% cpi rise, or whatever the cpi rise is for any particular year.
- Council argued that if they do not get the price rise, they would not be able to undertake proposed upgrades in infrastructure. Well, guess what? If we, as ratepayers, don't have the money to do things, we can't !! We have to look at other alternatives, or not do it at all. Council needs to accept this position in the current economic climate.
- We have a landfill issue – need a new site – money is literally being poured “down the drain” over this matter. Council has \$14M for a new landfill.
- Consider the information provided by Council under the heading “Loans and Interest Bearing Liabilities” – they are so far in debt and planning to make application for further amounts.
- There are many savings available within their “Proposed Additional Special Variation Income and Expenditure” paper submitted to iPart, if only they had better management skills.
- I am now concerned that the Mayor and some Councillors may not have the business experience to lead our Council.
- Why can't Council join the subcontracting arena? They have all the necessary heavy machinery and equipment to put in contracts for work for private enterprise.
- Council should be run as a business entity not a charitable organisation (who do have to put their hand out every time things get difficult).
- In relation to their future planning (Community Strategic Delivery Program 2014-2018) – “the focus of future process improvements is centred on *implementing software functionality that Council owns which is still to be implemented*. Council has identified a further \$609,649.94 of improvements that have yet to be implemented”.
- Again in relation to their Community Strategic Delivery Program 2014-2018 document – Strategies 2 & 3 are outside the role of Council and relate to other organisations within the area.
- I have read the documentation Council have sent to iPart and it concerns me greatly.
- We have some of the highest rates in the State – even higher than the Gold Coast of QLD. A review of rate variations is long overdue. We are charged for: Residential – (in our case) City; Sewerage; Water Access; Domestic Waste; Landfill Charge; and Drainage Charge. As pensioners, we receive a rebate. Were we not pensioners, our annual rates for 2013/2014 would be \$2178.38 for a 657.600 square metre block. Our rebate is \$500.00.
- Council have tried to railroad this request for 20% rate increase through, by trying to pull the wool over the ratepayer's eyes. They were “caught out” on a number of anomalies in the “propaganda” they have given to us; paid a company to do a phone poll and according to the concerns of many persons at the meeting, would not include any submissions we put to them in their documentation to iPART. Accordingly we were encouraged to write direct to yourselves. However, I do note that the results of the survey given to participants on 8<sup>th</sup> February has been included and the views of those in attendance should be clear for iPart to give consideration to *declining Council's request for a rate rise of any amount*.
- Council only have one vision “more Money”. In a nutshell “NO RATE RISE” except for the CPI and make Council put their house in order first, starting with productivity improvements and more transparency.

Merryn

(Dr/Mrs) Merryn Twemlow

26 February 2014