

I am emailing on behalf of myself, Nerelle Hand and my husband Geoff . We are third generation beef producers at [REDACTED] in the local council district of Dungog Shire Council , New South Wales.

We would like to raise our concerns over the proposed Special Rate Variation Dungog Shire Council is seeking. The initial community meetings held in several locations in the Shire were not well attended by residents as they were poorly advertised and did not have details of the proposed 97.8% increase until the actual meeting. This initial lack of advertising left many people unaware of what was in the pipeline and gave a false impression that ratepayers were "onside" with this increase simply because they did not attend. A phone poll was conducted by the Council late last year after it became apparent that farmers (and others) were unhappy and attending monthly meetings to see what was happening. We don't know what questions were asked in that poll as we were not contacted and we do not know anyone who was.

The effect on rural property owners is huge and is unsustainable. The council has said this is an average of approximately \$2700 per year per farming rate notice but the impact on most farmers is much more than that due to many landholders receiving more than one rate notice with multiple lots on their property. We receive two notices and with our total cost currently at [REDACTED] this will increase our rates to [REDACTED]0 - much more than the \$2700 as stated by Council. We, as farmers will bear the burden of the most increase due to rates being based on land values combined with the total area owned but this does not mean farmers have the most income. We do not use infrastructure or Council facilities anymore than any other ratepayer - in fact with farmers being older we may have less occupants per house than many other residents.

Our beef farming operation cannot produce an extra [REDACTED] worth of beef to pay the increased rates. We are efficient operators selling meat into the butcher trade and it is impossible to increase production to absorb such a rate hike .The only measures available to us is to cut costs on our property practices (particularly pasture improvement) which will then decrease the amount of kilos of beef we can turn off and therefore also decreasing our income. With this area being in drought over the past 2 years and having to sell off cattle to reduce numbers due to the cost of feeding it becomes very difficult with the prospect of finding another [REDACTED] to pay the land rates.

Farmers attending the monthly council meetings over the past months to hear updates on what was happening with the SRV have been most upset with Councillors comments such as the following - land rates are tax deductible for farmers, farmers could sell off a portion of their property and live off the interest, we are causing a division in the community and also that Dungog Shire has a higher than average population paying into private medical funds (this is according to the Morrison Low report used by Dungog Council to support the SRV). All of these statements are offensive and irrelevant.

The Council has said it is financially unsustainable without the SRV being approved. The Council was deemed unfit to operate when the NSW State Government introduced its Fit For The Future Reform in 2014 and if the SRV is approved there remains no guarantee for a financially fit Council. Unfortunately the opportunity to have a financially secure Council was lost 18 months ago when the State Government offered a large financial payment for the council to amalgamate, which was refused even though a majority of ratepayers supported this option. The Council was left with a minimum number of Councillors following the resignation of a number at that time. As a result the Council should have been forced into Administration by the NSW Government.

On 22nd February 2019 Dungog Council received a \$16 million commitment of funding for bridge and road repairs from the State Government. On page 20 of the SRV application the Council is seeking \$14,295,000 to cover the repair costs of roads and bridges (although on the same page a table shows \$16,089,750) - which figure is accurate we are unsure? Surely this must have an effect on the councils application for a 97.8% SRV.

We can only hope IPART will give this application from Dungog Shire Council great consideration before approving the application for a 97.8% Special Rate Variation which will be a financial burden on ratepayers including farmers, businesses, families and pensioners.

Yours Faithfully,

Nerelle & Geoff Hand

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Re: SRV Dungog Shire Council (Case Ref: [REDACTED])