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SUBMISSION : FIT FOR THE FUTURE
EUROBODALLA SHIRE COUNCIL

Eurobodalla Shire Council's Fit for the Future Proposal raises concerns in regard to sustainability into the future, the effective management of infrastructure and services, efficiency and consideration of community input.

Information disseminated to ratepayers regarding the effect of the SRV was inadequate, deceptive and confusing. In council's Delivery Program and radio interviews, there was no mention of the cumulative effects of the rate rise to households, over the 3 year period. In IPART's SRV approval council states that "the average residential rate will increase by \$53 in 2015-16, a cumulative increase of \$170 over 3 years." However, this does not "clearly show the impact of any *rises* upon the community"(IPART's assessment p.6) as it does not factor in the increases to other fees and charges which result in an increase of \$96 in 2015-16 with a cumulative increase of \$300.

As council describes its ratepayer base as 'lower socio-economic status and an aging population,' and given the extent of community opposition to the SRV, I believe that council has not given due consideration to the community's capacity and willingness to pay.

Council states that the SRV funds will be mainly used to address the Infrastructure Backlog. However, this is one benchmark that will not be met in 3 years. It has a history of underspending in this area and it seems that they plan to continue doing so. This is hardly a sustainable, efficient or effective management strategy as the cost of restoration will be more prohibitive on council's budget in the years to come.

Council's method of prioritising expenditure on transport infrastructure maintenance and renewal is highly questionable, contrary to their Improvement Proposal claims. As an example, \$790,000 was spent on sealing a low traffic gravel road, with the Mayor stating on its completion, that now tourists might use it. Compare this to the shires only arterial access road(Araluen Road), utilised by locals, through traffic and tourists. It provides access to camping grounds, holiday cottages, the river and fire trails. Emergency services use it when responding to road, river, fire trail incidents and bushfires(red zone). Locals have been battling with council for years to adequately maintain the road, to no avail. Budget constraints are given as the reason. Now they have extra funding from the SRV, which is supposed to go towards the infrastructure backlog, yet there is still no allocation to repair the road. In 2010 a section slipped into the river resulting in locals having to traverse fire trails for 9 months to get to town. I am concerned that there are similar examples within the shire that are in dire need of extra funding but are being neglected.

Projects benefitting from SRV funding should be prioritised on a needs basis to ensure effective and efficient use of available funds. Some projects identified in council's proposal are more of a *want* than a *need*. It would also eliminate wastage as evidenced by a recent

upgrade to a bus shelter that isn't used because it's on the wrong side of the road and the bus doesn't stop there.

In December 2014, council received about \$270,000 in disaster funding after 150ml of rain fell overnight on the coast. But 200ml fell upriver causing considerable erosion damage to Araluen road – none of the funding was used by council to repair this damage. When locals complain, council simply reiterates that the routine grade will occur before Christmas – that's 12 months of no repair work, no maintenance and more erosion, resulting in higher costs of rehabilitation in the future.

This example contradicts council's statement on p. 15 of its Improvement Proposal which says that natural disaster funding has been used effectively "responding to matters of public safety, access and infrastructure sustainability." And it certainly isn't responding to community needs.

Missing from council's proposal is any mention of Dargues Reef gold mine. As Unity Mining intends to construct a cyanide processing plant and a 16 hectare tailings dam at the headwaters of Eurobodalla's water supply catchment, it is an essential consideration in future planning. It represents a potential catastrophic threat to the shire's water supply, as well as ecological communities, farmers and residents that rely on the Deua River. This threat is not confined to the processing operation but years into the future as the huge tailings dam will simply be covered and left in situ for ever.

To be fit for the future, council needs to not only 'consult', but 'respond' to community input, otherwise it is a pointless gesture and does not improve council's effectiveness in providing infrastructure and services that the community needs. The Eurobodalla community's frustration with council's poor record in responding to its input and needs is evidenced by the number of ratepayer presentations at council meetings, petitions, public meetings of concerned ratepayers, numerous letters in the local paper and the involvement of the local state member of parliament. I do not believe that Eurobodalla Shire Council's Improvement Proposal meets Fit for the Future requirements.

Patricia Gardiner

