

[REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Sunday, 24 February 2019 7:21 PM

**To:** Local Government Mailbox <localgovernment@ipart.nsw.gov.au>

**Subject:** Port Stephens Council, Special Variation Application

Dear Sir/Madam

Please find, attached three documents relating to my objection to the Port Stephens Council IPART application for a 7.5% SRV annually for the next seven years.

The first documents entitled 'PSC 2018-02118-SRV Submission' is my initial response to the Council proposal to apply for a SRV.

The second document entitled 'second letter to council' was in response to the Council's decision to proceed with the 7.5% SRV application.

The third document entitled 'third letter to council' was in response to a reply from the Mayor (the contents of which cannot be disclosed because of privacy and confidentiality requirements) to the second document mentioned above. The third document details my reasoning behind my decision to object to this SRV application, and highlights the flawed reasoning of the Council's decision to proceed with the application, which does not have majority support from the local community.

I give you permission to publish part or the whole of my submission, including my name and email address.

Yours sincerely

Peter Slater

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
Date: Aug 23, 2018 4:13:05 PM

Subject: PSC 2018-02118

Dear Council

I wish to oppose the Council's proposal to apply for an SRV above the current rate peg as set by the NSW Government. My main reasons for opposing this proposal is as follows:

It is not equitable as some wards/locations will benefit more than others.

The proposed options 2, 3 and 4 have rate hikes which are too high, running much higher than CPI and wage growth and thus affordability of ratepayers, who are already struggling. The current rate peg (option 1) of 2.5% is 4% less than the proposed SRV option 2 at 6.5%. This increase is well in excess of community expectations.

From reading the information booklet I cannot see any of the projects listed that would go beyond the expectations of what should be able to be funded through the prudential use of public money.

Has the council looked at other ways of funding specific pet projects, i.e. by a local levy, local fund raising or grants etc.?

In conclusion, even the option 2 (6.5%), let alone options 3 (7.5%) and 4 (8.5%), is a rate increase well in excess of current CPI and community expectations and the SRV options should not be pursued by Council. Also, please do not attempt to make up any shortfall in funds by increasing the number of rateable properties through high density and high rise development approvals, which would also be to the detriment of the community.

Thank you for the opportunity to express my opinion on this important issue.

Yours sincerely

Peter Slater



[REDACTED]

Date: Oct 19, 2018 8:00:19 PM  
Subject: SRV decision

Dear Mayor

First let me thank you for taking the time to respond to my recent email, relating mainly to the SRV decision; although I still do not agree with the Council process on how this decision was made.

I concede that you did go to the community, to sell the SRV concept on over 20 occasions, but I don't know how you can assert that the majority of people who attended those sessions supported a rate rise above the rate peg rise. I have seen no evidence on the Council website to support this. The only reported figure, that I could find was that out of all the sessions there were only 87 attendees who completed the survey at the end of the sessions, and out of those approximately 50% supported a rate rise and 50% did not (the split may have been 53% for and 47%). Not much of a majority considering such a small sample size.

The figures I based my argument on were the results of the submissions and telephone survey conducted during the public exhibition period, which I believe were 74% and 61% respectively in favour of the Option 1 rate increase. I suspect the results of the telephone survey are also somewhat flawed, again because of the relatively small sample size. Therefore that leaves us with the result of the submissions of which I believe there were well in excess of one thousand received, which is an adequate sample size indicating that there is 95% confidence level that the result is valid. In fact this sample size is similar to that used by Council to assess its perceived community annual performance (currently rated at 85% satisfaction). So, on the evidence available, to me the only valid statistic in the SRV debate is the 74% against the SRV rate increase, derived from the written submissions.

Surely, it is incumbent upon Council to listen and act in the best interests of community expectations. In this instance it would appear that requirement has been ignored. Council should not be seen as just a 'rubber stamp' to the recommendations made by Council management and administration. In the case of the SRV option 3 recommendation, based on the adverse, clear community sentiment, should have been rejected and returned for further assessment and amended to align with the community desires.

Also, taking a step further back to the Community Strategic Plan 2018 - 2028 (CFC), there is no mention of additional funding for proposed projects required from a SRV. In fact the Council boasts that it is meeting its targets and operating with a surplus. I will admit, that buried in the Long Term Financial Plan (LTFP) 2018 - 2028, on page 35 that an SRV is an option to increase revenue, although it does state, quote ' No special variation has been factored into this Plan.' This leads me to believe the Plan is able to be delivered without the need for a SRV?

Also, I could find no records of community involvement in setting and review of projects in the CFC, on the Council website; again, was this anecdotal or by here-say.

I also take offence to the term apathetic you used for the mass of the community you represent. It is a derogatory and offensive term; a more appropriate term would disengaged, and it should be a concern of Council why these people are disengaged and how they can make them more engaged. Perhaps a better way to engage the community in the SRV debate would have been to complete a postal survey. The ballot forms could have sent out with the annual rate notices, to save on cost, and would have probably resulted in a much more participation rate.

You should also not be angered by those that you think are against everything, because these are probably the ones that elected you into office in the first place. I am not sure what motivates people enter public office, but I am sure altruism (if it exists) is not at the top of the list.

Finally, I would just like to reiterate that I am not criticising individual Councillors, but am critical of the Council process and the rationale behind some of the decisions. It makes a mockery of so called democracy which at best appears to be just an illusion.

I hope you can appreciate my concerns and I consider my comments regarding the SRV process made in my earlier email are still valid. I apologise if my comments have offended anyone.

Yours sincerely

Peter Slater