

Robert Newland
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]



23 February 2018

Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal of New South Wales
Level 15
2-24 Rawson Place
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Sir,

Objection to the Application for a Special Rate Variation by the Hawkesbury City Council

I wish to lodge an objection to the application from the Hawkesbury City Council (HCC) on the 1st February 2018 for a Special Rate Variation (SRV).

Please refer to the attachment to the HCC submission prepared by Micromex Research dated July 2017 which was prepared from a telephone survey of 401 people out of a total Hawkesbury LGA of approx. 70,000, or 0.57% of the total.

This survey shows that 64% of the HCC LGA ratepayers were not aware the HCC was even considering applying for an SRV. This negative response rejects the HCC statements that an extensive public consultation took place

Also this survey shows the following support for the 3 options presented by the HCC were:-

	Supportive	Not Supportive
Option 1	61%	39%
Option 2	61%	39%
Option 3	51%	49%

Given this result, why does the HCC support option 3, when it is clearly the least preferred option?

In addition from the graphs presented option 1 has a 33% very supportive / supportive response compared to the HCC preferred option 3 which only has a 25% support for the same categories.

I very strongly object that any further increase in our rates is approved and request that this application be refused for the following reasons:-

1. As a resident of Oakville which is within the HCC LGA, our rates were increased for the current financial year by 46% over the previous financial year. Obviously an astronomical increase and well beyond any cost pressures due to inflation. If approved the SRV would have a cumulative effect of giving us an approx. 77% increase on our rates paid for the financial year 2016/2017.

2. We are on a low/ fixed income as part pensioners and with other recent increases such as electricity and water will struggle to pay this exorbitant increase. A further 31% increase in our rates is beyond belief, and must be stopped. This increase represents an unacceptable hardship on our local community, many of whom are also pensioners.
3. The HCC deliberately voted to alter the previous method of charging residential rates for the 2017/2018 financial year from the 2016/2017 financial year by altering the base rate from 50% to 30%, which therefore increased the Valuer General's component from 50% to 70% of the rates. The HCC has not provided any reasonable information for this savage alteration.
4. This has also meant that we are now paying at least 2 to 4 times more than residents in other areas of the HCC LGA. Before any SRV is even considered, the HCC should be asked to review their current rating structure to make it fairer for all their residents.
5. In December 2015 the NSW State Government proposed that the HCC merge with The Hills Shire Council as it was deemed that the HCC 'was not fit for the future'. The HCC very strongly rejected the proposal and claimed that they are '**fit for the future**'. Many public comments were issued by the HCC declaring their strong objection to the proposed merger and the statement that they were not fit for the future was incorrect. Therefore what dramatic event has occurred recently to now alter their position so much, and why did they mislead their residents into such a false picture of the true facts? They must be held accountable for the previously grossly deceptive actions and be held to their previous statements. It is now plainly obvious that a merger should have occurred to strengthen the HCC financial base, and there would be no need for the proposed SRV.
6. Had the HCC merged with The Hills Shire Council there would be no need to apply for an SRV, as the combined Councils had a secure financial base.
7. A check of The Hills Shire Council website reveals that they have included in it a rate estimator. Using this estimator, our rates would be very significantly lower even for the current financial year, and no SRV in sight.
8. The current Council wastes money on delving into areas beyond their responsibilities, an example being that the HCC commissioned a very expensive report that is really in the province of the RMS, and the RMS advised the HCC of this. I understand that a figure well in excess of \$100K was authorised for this traffic report that they are unable to take any real actions other than provide commentary. A complete waste of our money. There are many other examples of wasting money on issues outside the province of a Local Council.
9. As a side issue, I believe it is time for a review of the rating system for Local Councils, and a more equitable scheme is introduced.

It is plainly ridiculous that a huge variation exists in Council rate charges to residents the same LGA when the real cost the Council to provide more or less the same services to all residents is very similar.

How can it be justified that some residents pay 2, 3 4, or more times others within the same LGA?

It can be reasonably argued that those living in 'rural residential' areas actually receive less services than their urban counterparts, for example those in so called rural residential areas do not receive green waste collection, have no footpaths, guttering and street lights. Council roads in rural residential areas are generally more poorly maintained than those roads in urban areas. Any costs that may be incurred by local councils to provide services to rural residential areas are offset by the reduced level of services provided by the Council.

The current system is severely flawed and should be based on a user pays system to provide services, rather on property values set by the Value General. I believe this review should be given priority and a much fairer system be introduced.

On all the above grounds, I request that the SRV from the HCC be refused.

Regards,

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of Robert Newland.

Robert Newland