

10th March, 2015

Re: Formal Objection to the Jerilderie Application for a Rate Rise



I am writing to put forward my objections to the application to IPART by the Jerilderie Shire for a rate rise of 10% in the year 15/16 followed by a further rise of 10% in the year 16/17. I am speaking for the 40 people, out of 58, who attended the second public meeting on September 25th 2014 and voted against the rate rise.

Our shire is fortunate to be a one town shire which means that all efforts have always been concentrated in one area. We have a history in the past of strong and wise councillors who were successful business people and who made very good decisions with foresight. This has meant that our towns-people enjoy a very high standard of services and infrastructure. A lot of money has been spent in recent years improving historic and public buildings, replacing and adding miles of paving, building a library complex, refurbishing council chambers, upgrading roads and restructuring and landscaping the main street – all without accumulating debt.

The government has made a decision to halt the indexing of grants to shires for 4 years and this has prompted our shire, led by a CEO who wields a lot of power, to go for what I call 'a money grab'. I am sure many shires would have good evidence to show that a rate rise is probably required but the Jerilderie Shire is certainly not one of those. For a town our size our people enjoy services and infrastructure that is second to none.

The consultation period was based around threats of cutting back services. This of course meant good support from the townspeople who faced an increase of \$25 - \$30, nothing. For the rural ratepayers the story is very different and the figures are well documented in the application. It bothers me that there are staff in the shire office who will pay \$250 - \$300 for their rates while drawing a salary far in excess of what many farmers earn. Many farmers would not be viable without having a wife working off-farm and they are being asked to pay \$3,000 - \$5,000 in shire rates. A rate rise of 20% would see these people being asked to find a further \$600 - \$1,000 per year.

The CEO acknowledges our point of view when making a deputation to him, even feigning consideration and empathy. After we leave he forges ahead with his own agenda and states that the position is not negotiable. It bothers me that I have heard from a source within the council that the first rise had been granted before the submission had been formally accepted.

As I suspected, the application is based around the claim of deteriorating roads. This ascertain has not been independently verified. After living here for 54 years I observe the roads to be in as good or better condition than they have ever been. I spend far more time driving on these roads than the engineer does. This shire is lucky. It is serviced by the Newell Highway (funded by the Fuel Grant Levy), the Kidman Way and another major east-west road (both funded by the State). In comparison to other shires internal shire maintained roads are few. The rainfall is low, the country is flat and roads are easier to maintain than in areas that are wet and hilly.

I have made enquiries to neighbouring shires –Berrigan, Conargo, Carrathool, Urana, Murrumbidgee, Lockhart- all of whom I consider to be more 'needy' than Jerilderie and have learnt that none of them are applying for a rise above the cap.

I believe that the CEO's influence on decision making amongst current councillors is extreme. Unfortunately these days, men who have business and managerial skills are too busy keeping their own, necessarily lean, operations afloat. They find themselves too busy to stand for council, go to meetings or make submissions. We fear that we will be hit with two very large rate rises and then find ourselves amalgamated with a neighbouring shire, that does need a rise, and be hit with another rise on top of what is now proposed.

I have attached photos to my email addressed to Adrienne Bailey - that show some of the recent improvements and following is a brief list:

- *upgrading and replacement of footpaths
- *new lighting in main street
- *power supply buried underground in main street
- *expansive library and meeting complex
- *new housing estate and surrounding landscape
- *shire works depot
- *removing cenotaph from town centre and relocating to lake area
- *restructuring parking in the town centre

As you can see from the photos in the submission the town looks very good. But looking at my photos anyone would also be able to see that this is not a town where small businesses are bustling, nor are the farmers in the area - they are all running very lean. They are resilient and they know about 'belt tightening'. When everyone across the state is being asked to share some of the pain we think that our shire council should be able to reign in on spending too.

We hope that IPART is an organisation that really does listen to the concerns of ratepayers. We hope it is not just an enabler helping other governing bodies work their way through legitimising processes.

Yours faithfully,

Ross Wells OAM

