

I wish to voice my strong concerns to IPART regarding the SVR of a 10% rate increase by Armidale Dumaresq Council (ADC) in 2014-15, with a possible further increase of 10% increase in 2015-16 on the following grounds:

- The Armidale Dumaresq area is currently experiencing a severe drought and a severe downturn in the local business economy, with a vast number of businesses closing their doors.
- There is also a growing number of unemployed, of which I am one, having been made redundant in 2012 and unable to secure any kind of work since, in spite my strenuous efforts and being highly qualified. Any rate rise will place severe hardship on myself and many others in my position.
- There is also, as everywhere, a vastly growing ageing population many of whom are on fixed incomes or pensions who will be able to ill afford a rate increase. Currently pensioners receive a modest reduction on their rates but this will be largely absorbed by any rate increase.
- I feel that ADC has been not been transparent nor entirely truthful with all stakeholders, principally with ratepayers, as well as in their submission to IPART regarding the level of public support for the rate rise. The lack of this support was evidenced by a public meeting which turned into uproar with approximately 350 people raising their angry resistance to the rate increase.
- This has culminated in the recent formation of the Armidale Dumaresq Ratepayers' Association to be incorporated in an attempt to encourage Armidale Dumaresq Council to take a more sympathetic approach to the plight of ratepayers.
- Members of the Association are seriously concerned at Council's backlog of infrastructure maintenance costs of \$11.7m and their annual shortfall of \$2.15m. They feel that Council needs to be making substantial savings internally before asking ratepayers to fund the shortfall and backlog, including reducing the rapidly increased staffing levels through natural attrition.
- In this time of severe drought, economic difficulty for many businesses and severe hardship in the community, ratepayers are not prepared to accept every rate rise that Council initiates.