

18 January 2017

The General Manager
Byron Shire Council
PO Box 219
Mullumbimby NSW 2482

Submission : Special Rate Variation - Byron Shire Council

My objection to any special variation to rate increase is based in my request that as General Manager you first address the following significant questions, before the Community can trust your claims and summations re the need for it:

1. How could you claim that Council could afford the construction of a very expensive rock wall at Belongil, and now only a few months later, justify the need for steep rate rises?
2. Reducing Council staff numbers may be warranted. A recent visit inside Byron Council revealed just how large an edifice it is, with multiple offices and staff. Qld Councils have reduced staff as this article shows.

<http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/queensland/queensland-councils-lay-off-5000-staff-to-stay-financially-viable-lgaq-20161012-gs0k5c.html>

3. Byron Shire's compromised roads and infrastructure, as well as long-term permanent residents' loss of peaceful amenity, are *overwhelmingly* the result of huge proliferation of tourist traffic, and of absentee (and some resident) property owners who reap huge commercial income from high-rent holiday tourism.

Have you explored ways to address this anomaly, to ensure that tourist visitors and their landlords, are paying sufficiently for these deleterious effects?

Such ways could include :

1. Visitors' bed tax ;
2. Levees (increased rates and/or contributions) for absentee and secondary dwelling property owners who cannot prove they are not engaged in high-cost commercial tourism rentals ;
3. Compliance enforcement of new secondary dwellings approved for low-cost accommodation, that are in fact predominantly being built for the express purpose of high-cost short-term tourist rentals. Evidence of this is currently being provided by Mullumbimby Residents Association to Byron Council Compliance Office ;
4. Increase in paid parking fees ;
5. Automatic toll levee (such as GoVia Qld uses) for visitor vehicles entering and departing. Low-income residents can be granted exemption, as with paid parking.

It is unfair to disadvantage low-income and long-term permanent residents, by introducing a precedent of a huge rate increase variation. Many of us are now dependent on an age pension, which has decreased significantly for many on 1/1/17. Even if in receipt of a full pension, it only pays about \$22,000. I am in this category, having been a rate-payer in sequential residences in [REDACTED], since 1994, and now in my 60s.

Council needs strong and creative leadership and management now, to address the issues I have posed above - not resorting to the easy uncreative and unethical solution of a big rate hike. Under *The Community Charter for Good Planning in NSW*, adopted by Byron Shire Council in 2014, it is your duty that Council "provides certainty and fairness to communities" (see Page 1, Section 2) - to earn our trust and to earn your high income.

Yours sincerely

Susan Skyvington