

From: sharron short [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, 13 March 2017 4:51 PM
To: Local Government Mailbox
Subject: Ballina Shire rate variation

12 March 2017

I wish to record my strong objections to the proposed rate variation in the Ballina Shire.

Two years ago I expressed my objection to the proposed rate variation at that time, a rise cited as necessary to improve the swimming pools at Ballina and Alstonville. The rise went ahead despite the many objections sent to both the Council and IPART. It is only this year that work on the pools has started. It has also been stated that the \$8,000,000 estimate has already blown out to \$14,000,000. Part of the proposed improvement includes a beautification plan. The car park built at Lennox Head also involved a beautification programme. As a volunteer in the Friends of Lake Ainsworth group which, each Monday morning, removes litter from the area around the lake, I was appalled today by the condition of the plants in the car park. Almost all the plants have died, bar the lomandras which are half dead, despite lomandras being extremely hardy. FOLA volunteered to water the plants for the Council but there is no tap and no hose. What a thoughtless, gross waste of money! Obviously, residents are loth to entrust Council with more money to waste so object to the rate variation.

When Council presents its *Fit for the Future* plan to IPART, everything proposed in the Council's budget/plan should be included in it. There should be no consideration given to add-on plans, no allowance for variations **after** IPART has stated what the pegged amount should be for the given period. Otherwise, it seems that both Council and IPART are falling down on their jobs. IPART should peg the increase permissible based on the *Fit for the Future* plan put forward by Council and that's it.

The rate variation requested is for the waterways in the Ballina Shire, the big emphasis being placed on the Richmond River. The mouth of the Richmond River is in the Ballina Shire, the source is not. The responsibility for the river does not lie with the Ballina Council, there are at least three Councils involved. On top of that, government grants have been received for waterways. I believe that money was allocated for the maintenance/care of Lake Ainsworth in Lennox Head but that area has been greatly neglected by Council, to the point that it has now become a contentious issue in the town, with legal action a possibility. Should this happen, obviously, court costs will come out of rate-payers' contributions. Had the area been cared for with the government grant (I heard, but have not verified, it was in the realm of \$100,000 p.a.) then the present problem need not have developed. Again, rate-payers object to their contributions being mismanaged and, furthermore, for a waterway which is not totally in the Ballina Shire's jurisdiction.

It was interesting to note that the Mayor cited \$943 as the average rate for properties in the Ballina Shire. I pay four times this amount. I realise that the amount is dependent on land value, address, etc. but, since the amount quoted here is the average, I am intrigued as to where there would be places whose annual rate payment comes well below \$943.

Community consultation has figured strongly in recent times, on paper, at least. In reality, in most cases, community consultation is what is done **after** a decision has been made. This appears to be the case concerning the proposed rate variation for "healthy waterways". Council made the decision to close the road east of Lake Ainsworth in Lennox Head. However, it has become obvious that this was such an unpopular decision that action has been taken against the Council. Most people do not stir themselves to write to various authorities as they see many proposals as *fait accompli* however, through actions this time, it is obvious that community consultation did not figure strongly in Council's decision to shut the eastern road. This is only one example. The "Ballina Advocate" has printed many letters objecting to the rate variation. Also, it is due to one letter in the paper that I found that objections had to be in by today, 13 March.

Rate rises seem to be a way of life these days but I object vehemently to the add-ons, the rate variations Council puts forward to IPART. Neglect, mismanagement of funds, community consultation being a ticked box rather than an honest survey, these are just some of the reasons for my objection to the variation.

Regards,

Sharron Short (Ballina Shire rate-payer)