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Date of submission: Saturday, 22 March 2014

Submission:

I am a rate payer in the Armidale Dumaresq local government area. I am writing to register my opposition to the special rate variation which has been requested by the Armidale Dumaresq Council to cover the operations budget shortfall which has arisen.

The principal reason for my (and my family's) opposition is personal. We were small retail business operators in Armidale for more than

Many others of our acquaintance in Armidale are in a similar position, with little to no income and a family to raise. An increase in rates payable, with no increase in service provided is an unfair impost on people in our position. The priority for a town like Armidale should be to revive the centre of town, where there are so many empty premises, and encourage people to invest in the town, by spending money in local shops and supporting local businesses. An increase in rates is not going to aid this process.

Secondly, through articles and letters in the local press, we have been led to understand that a large part of the Council's woes is due to mismanagement of funds, rather than a shortfall. I understand that Armidale spends proportionally more on wages and salaries, and proportionally less on roads and infrastructure than other comparable councils. I do not see how a rate increase can address this mismanagement. I believe, rather, that an increase in rates will increase the likelihood of further mismanagement. Individuals and businesses must tighten their belts in times lean times, and I believe the Armidale Dumaresq Council must learn to do the same. Ratepayers in our local area are not a bottomless pit of money, and the past few years have been difficult for many of us. I would urge the Council to listen to the residents and ratepayers, and to respect our opposition to this unreasonable proposal.

Finally, I was extremely disappointed with the "consultation" process which led to what amounted to a fait accompli for many ratepayers, as we received a letter some days before Christmas 2013, informing us that we must voice our response to the proposal before the 10th January 2014. Council would be well aware that many people are away on holidays at that time of year, and may not even have had access to their mail in the period, let alone the time to respond, or the technical know-how to fill in an online survey form. As such it was a cynical attempt to pull the wool over our eyes, all while maintaining a fig-leaf of "consultation", and Armidale ratepayers are making our displeasure known, in spite of the obstacles which have been put in our way to prevent us from expressing it.