

Dear Sir,

I am writing this submission in order to wholly reject the Eurobodalla Shire's proposed SRV. Firstly I think that it is an appalling treatment of ratepayers and IPART that so many councils have applied for a rate rise in a transparent attempt to swell their budgets in order to avoid amalgamation. This is no longer a secret but is common knowledge. When the government tabled plans for amalgamation I'm sure they were trying to send a message to councils to 'clean house' and learn to live within their means. However as councils struggle to retain their power (independence) ratepayers are seen only as a source of money and a necessary inconvenience to council. In fact, our council has portrayed IPART and the government as the cause of their problems and that the rate peg set by IPART is unrealistic for councils to live within. If this is truly the case then IPART are deliberately trying to ensure that councils go broke, however, I actually think that IPART knows exactly what they are doing and it is council's ineptitude that is at the root of the problem and they are now going back to the umpire to query their decision and extort money from ratepayers.

Council's submission to IPART fails to convey the heated opposition to the rate rise that the community displayed at the information nights. In fact, at the Batemans Bay info night an informal vote was conducted with 2 people supporting the SRV and approximately 80 opposing it (i.e. 98% opposition). In addition, during the public exhibition period, council received a total of 265 submissions opposing the SRV and only 6 in favour (again a 98% opposition). Council even had the hide to say that they did not require a majority of support in order to apply to IPART, however, there is a vast difference between 'majority of support' and UNANIMOUS opposition.

The community consultation was a complete farce and it was soon apparent that council had concocted the proposed list of works with such haste that at the first info night they had no idea of the costing of the projects and couldn't even verify the amount of money the SRV would raise. Further, the GM told the gallery that council had \$11M in unrestricted funds. By the third info night (2 weeks later), the unrestricted funds had grown to \$26M and for the first time the community was advised that the money raised by the SRV would actually be used as collateral to borrow a much larger amount. Everything about council's proposal has the hallmarks of desperate people doing desperate things to avoid amalgamation with ratepayers are being used as pawns.

The first brochure about the phone survey said that ratepayers would be surveyed (as suggested by IPART), however by the time of the survey it had been changed to a survey of residents. Given the fact that more than 30% of ratepayers are absentee owners who don't live in the shire, they were TOTALLY EXCLUDED from participating. [REDACTED] these ratepayers get very little value from the rates and charges they pay and hence are the least likely to support a rise.

[REDACTED] Council (extremely sneakily and surprisingly cleverly for them) decided to COMBINE the survey of acceptance level of the SRV with a survey of community satisfaction with council. While this may seem innocuous enough, [REDACTED] it guaranteed that council would have something positive to report to councillors and IPART. IPART will note that council's submission fails to highlight the fact that 77% of people surveyed opposed the SRV (the actual purpose of the survey) but instead highlights the community's "apparently" high level of satisfaction with council. I say "apparently" because we were basically forced to say that we were at least "somewhat" satisfied with council services due to the fact that council were telling us that service levels would fall if we didn't accept the SRV. In fact, you can see that the questionnaire specifically instructs interviewers to "make sure that their response reflects the rating" Therefore, if we wanted to oppose the rate rise then logically we had to say we were happy with the current level of council service. In other words we were 'stitched up' from the get go and the surveys were combined because council knew that they were going to get a bad result if they just did the SRV survey alone (if only they would be this clever for the

betterment of the community).

The phone survey was further flawed because, as can be seen from the attached questionnaire that was used, ALL respondents were first asked if they were in the 18-34 demographic even though the eventual results were to be weighted using ABS data for RESIDENTS (and not RATEPAYERS) negating the need to specifically target any age group, especially not an age group that is well below the age of the average ratepayer. As a side result of this attempt to bias the outcome, many respondents felt that they were not going to be surveyed and simply lied that they were in the 18-34 age group, thereby showing the kind of pressure that we have been put under. Attached also is the actual data from the survey and you will note the surprisingly high percentage of respondents in the 18-34 age group that said that they are ratepayers when, in fact, most ratepayers are retirees. This leads me to the next point and that is IPART's requirement that the SRV be affordable by ratepayers. It is well documented that the Eurobodalla is an aging population. The (approximately 70%) resident ratepayers are largely retirees on pensions (personally, I am on the Disability Support Pension) and struggle to make ends meet on a weekly basis. With the federal government talking of pension cutbacks, I hope IPART can see that we are already living on a knife's edge and ANY rate rise above the necessary rate peg will be an enormous burden to us. As can be seen from the questionnaire used in the survey, not one question was asked as to the affect that the SRV would have on our finances. Council brag that not many people use their hardship policy, but they don't consider the humiliation that people who have worked all their lives feel when they have to put their hand out. We still have our dignity and most of us would rather 'do it tough' and go without heating in winter and even skimp on meals before we admit we need help. Council, by contrast, has no concept of 'doing it tough' and are blatantly wasteful with one hand and constantly asking for more money with the other.

A final point I wish to make is that council's base case for sewerage in the financial plan indicates that council will spend \$48M over the next 5-6 years! No doubt, as this is not rate pegged, this expenditure will simply be passed on to us as increased sewerage rates. This is in addition to the \$13.6M water and sewerage indexation that occurred during 2013/2014. If IPART approve this SRV then they are leaving us at the mercy of desperate people who will stop at nothing in order to avoid amalgamation. I firmly believe in accepting the umpire's decision and I think council should do the same and learn to live within the rate peg. If they cannot do this then I do not believe that they are 'fit for the future' and should be amalgamated for everyone's benefit. I am certainly not in favour of temporarily propping up a failing business with money that I simply don't have. I hope that I have been able to demonstrate to IPART that council has deliberately manipulated the consultation process and still got 77% opposition (98% in reality, as I have shown). Further, hope I have shown that council has not seriously considered the affordability of the SRV to ratepayers or has accurately represented the views of ratepayers to IPART.

Yours in hope,

Vivek Sethi