

Author name: P. Port Stephens Greens

Date of submission: Wednesday, 20 March 2019

[REDACTED]
Sent: Sunday, 10 March 2019 12:30 PM

To: Local Government Mailbox

Subject: Submission on Port Stephens Council SRV application

I attach our submission

Please acknowledge receipt

Thanks

BTW We note that Council's full page notices in local media incorrectly give a closing date of 11 March – we are concerned that this may have the effect of limiting the number of submissions made – if people had been correctly advised that your deadline is 14 March more of them may have found time to make one.

Secretary, Port Stephens Greens
[REDACTED]



Port Stephens Greens

Facebook: PtStephGreens

Local Government Team

Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal of NSW

PO Box K35

Haymarket Post Shop,

NSW 1240.

email: localgovernment@ipart.nsw.gov.au

8th March 2019

Re: PSC2017-01717-001 Port Stephens Council Proposed Special Rate Variation of 7.5% per annum for 7 years

Port Stephens Greens object to the special rate variation proposed by Port Stephens Council on a number of grounds, as follows:

- The size and duration of the rate increase proposed will be unaffordable to a large number of residents – both low income owners and renters (the Pensioner concession, waste levy reduction and special hardship arrangements go nowhere near addressing this problem). As a regressive form of taxation, rates are a disproportionate burden on those who can least afford to pay.
- Council has largely ignored the clear majority of those who expressed a view during Council's consultation who opposed a large, or any, rate increase over and above the 'cap'. As well as the submissions documented by Council (but with a misleading conclusion) a current local newspaper online poll has recorded more than 90% of more than 550 votes opposed to the SRV – see <http://www.newsofthearea.com.au/>. While not statistically representative, we suggest that this is relevant further evidence of the strong opposition to the proposal.
- Claims by Council that the projects it proposes to fund with the SRV are ones that the community has asked for is misleading in that support for most of these was given before it was disclosed that an SRV would be needed – it is easy to obtain expressions of support for new facilities and services in the abstract.
- Council has failed to make a convincing case for why such a significant rate increase is necessary, other than to fund a range of 'nice to have' projects and other works which it should be able to fund out of standard rate income and other sources such as grants.
- Many of the works proposed to be funded by the SRV have no detailed business case.
- The case made for the SRV is inconsistent with claims made by Council during the merger/amalgamation debates only a few years ago that it was 'Fit for the Future' and expressly that it did not need an SRV



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- Council's track record of financial management is in any case questionable – despite a large quantity of 'spin' there are serious question marks over decisions currently being litigated (including the Lagoons Estate debacle), and over the performance of Council run holiday parks, to give just two examples.
- We are not aware of any of the current Councillors (including the Mayor) having foreshadowed an SRV during the 2017 Council election campaign – an SRV should really only be proposed following a mandate for it in an election, or in emergency circumstances which have not been established in this case.
- The proposed SRV would extend well beyond the next Council election due in September 2020, and burden the next Council with commitments (and loan repayments leveraged by the SRV) to which it will not have been party.

We submit that IPART should not approve the proposed SRV. A smaller SRV, and/or a shorter period might be acceptable, if accompanied by better justification and business cases for projects to be funded.

Secretary, Port Stephens Greens
[REDACTED]

Port Stephens Greens Campaigning locally, thinking globally for a sustainable future for all