

Author name: J. Reilly

Date of submission: Tuesday, 28 February 2023

Please provide any other comments on the council's application that you would like to make here.

I do not support the Special Rate Variation (SRV) submitted by the Walcha council. The SRV is too onerous on the Walcha community, and will cause undue hardship and financial stress on the people. In this current economic climate of very high cost of living the increase is too onerous. It is understood that the Walcha council is asking IPART for a 57.7% increase of rates, which will increase to 65% rate increase over the next 5 years, but was included for community. The TCorp assessment of 2015 was not aware of a new industry coming to Walcha, one that is valued at an estimated \$11 Billion Australian dollars. The Renewable energy market identified the Walcha area as a key location for Wind Farms renewable energy. A community Benefit Scheme will be given to Walcha council, and indications are that the council and community will receive an ongoing \$1,000,000 per year as a community benefit from 2024. Walcha is not an area that has a weak potential for growth, as TCorp indicated in 2015. It also brings into question why the Walcha council omitted to put this information in to the current SRV submission with IPART. In the assessment Prof Drew did not consider the imminent introduction of the renewable energy industry into Walcha, which again is a glaring omission. His report indicated that there would be financial stress on households of rate payers and people renting, and he recommended that further investigation occur, but it is understood council has not investigated this matter, and instead has submitted for the rate variation. Prof Drew showed pictures of a deserted street in Guyra, and said that this is what Walcha would look like if the rate payers did not accept the SRV. This approach is considered blatant scare-mongering and is not worthy of being presented by an eminent professor.

Question 1 (Criterion 1) - Has the council clearly established the need for, and purpose of a different revenue path for the council's General fund?

No the council has not clearly established the need for a different revenue path.

Question 2 (Criterion 1) - Has the council canvassed alternatives to the rate rise?

No, the council presented a rate rise as the only option in maintaining current service levels, and threatened the community with amalgamation with other councils if not approved by the community.

Question 1 (Criterion 2) - Did the council communicate the full cumulative increase of the proposed special variation in percentage terms? And the total increase in dollar terms for the average ratepayer by rating category?

Yes, but not include the increase over the next 5 years which would equate to 65% rate increase.

Question 2 (Criterion 2) - Has the council's community engagement strategy demonstrated an appropriate variety of engagement methods to ensure community awareness?

No. The council did not explore the impact on the community, as suggested by the report author Prof Joseph Drew.

Question 3 (Criterion 2) - Please comment on the action taken by council in response to feedback from the community on the proposed special variation.

The feedback from the community was biased and people were coerced into accepting the proposal and council staff actively influenced people completing the survey feedback form

Question 1 (Criterion 3) - Please comment on the reasonableness of the impact on affected ratepayers of the proposed special variation.

The increase is too onerous and will cause hardship to rate payers and people renting in Walcha

Question 2 (Criterion 3) - Please comment on the council's consideration of the community's capacity and willingness to pay.

Council did not provide further investigation as recommended by prof Drew on the community's capacity and willingness to pay.

Question 3 (Criterion 3) - In its application the council outlined how it intended to address hardship caused by the proposed special variation. Please comment on the council's plan.

Yes. A hardship plan is in place, but the level of the increased cost of living on the community was not considered

Question 1 (Criterion 4) - Have the relevant IP&R documents in the council's application been exhibited, approved and adopted by the council before it applied to IPART for the proposed special variation?

Yes

Question 1 (Criterion 5) - In its application the council is required to explain and quantify the productivity improvements and cost containment strategies the council has realised in past years and plans to realise over the proposed special variation period. Please comment on the council's response here.

Council has proposed cost containment measures, but these measures at this point are not working.