

We were astonished to read only a few days ago of the Central Coast Council's proposal to increase our water infrastructure rates from &124.68 to a massive &5427.81 annually. Their justification for this increase was that large blocks generate more runoff and hence more water infrastructure costs. This is largely true, but afteral, water is a valuable community asset which Council collects from designated catchment areas, where most farmers are located, for the community to benefit from as a whole including those outside the catchment areas. Why should farmers (predominantly) have to bear the burden of these costs when the costs to the rest of the community are proposed to be reduced. In Council's own words, all community members benefit from water infrastructure wherever it is placed and logically and ethically the costs should be apportioned more evenly over the beneficiaries.

Farming activities are often borderline, subject to the vagaries of markets and weather. If the Council wants to drive what is really small scale farming off the plateau and out of the valleys we suggest this policy is a good starting point.

In our own case, our property of around 24 acres is about 80% retained bushland for flora and fauna conservation and the balance residential. From a drainage point of view, our property is within the Ourimbah Creek catchment and mainly slopes down to the upper reaches of Ourimbah Creek. Any runoff is filtered through our retained bushland and a large dam before entering the creek. We see no need for any infrastructure work.

Within the residential portion of our property we have erected around 2500 square metres of greenhouses for cut flower/pot plant growing. This activity is at the bottom end of commercial and as such is a passion to keep active in our senior years as anything else. This activity has rendered our property farmland for rating purposes and subjected us to this enormous proposed tax. Should this tax be implemented, we will close the greenhouses and revert to residential status for rating purposes. We just could not afford such an added cost burden.

We strongly urge IPART to reject Council's enormous proposed cost impost on farmers on the Central Coast.

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