

To whom it may concern

I am writing to vehemently object to the Central Coast Councils outrageous proposal to increase storm water charges for rural farmland by up to 5000%. An increase of this magnitude is nothing short of criminal. Aside from the totally unjustifiable increase my objection is based on the following:

1. Insensitivity – Our country is once again in the throws of drought with 98% of the country having been declared including the Central Coast region. For the Central Coast Council to have the audacity to even mention an increased storm water charge during this difficult time as farmers struggle to keep their crops and livestock alive is at best insensitive and at worst an absolute kick in the teeth for us struggling farmers.
2. Act of God – water that falls on our farmland has done so for millennia. It falls on our crops, pastures and forested areas and is generally soaked into the ground. During extreme events however it creates runoff that enters our creeks and ultimately our rivers lakes and oceans. Other than the odd culvert or rural roadside drain, which incidentally require very little maintenance, this runoff does not come in contact with the Central Coast Council's storm water infrastructure and therefore a 5000% increase in fees is disproportionate. Furthermore these extreme events that cause runoff are acts of God that are obviously beyond the control of the farmer and therefore they should not be the ones to solely be burdened with this responsibility.
3. A path to suicide – Suicide in farming related enterprises is a very real problem with recent statistics showing suicide rates in this sector being almost double that of the general population and other references of farmer deaths by suicide occurring on average every 4 days in Australia. Obviously one of the greatest causes that lead to these tragic deaths are financial burden due to the erratic nature of farming in this country. Does the Central Coast Council really want to contribute to these statistics by increasing the financial burden on these farmers by up to \$100 per week.
4. A grab for cash – This really appears to be nothing more than a grab for cash from a sector that in many years really cannot afford it. If this is truly not the intention of council and they really can justify the effects that water falling on our farmland has an effect on storm water infrastructure then I put forward the following alternative proposal:

An Alternative Proposal -

1. Council to provide free property assessment for all effected properties to determine if they meet the criteria for a low impact exemption.
2. Assuming a property fails the above assessment, council to provide clear guidelines on how said property can achieve low impact exemption. I envision this could be done either at the initial property assessment or through group workshops. Both of which should be provided at no charge by council.
3. For any works required to meet the low impact status above council to waive any fees for development applications or for these works to be done under exempt development.
4. Council to provide low interest/no interest loans to implement the above changes to meet the low impact status. Or provide clear information/workshops on how effected properties can apply for all available loans, rebates or tax concessions for implementing the above works such as the NSW Government Farm Innovation Fund or the various Water Tank Rebates and Subsidies.
5. Council to provide a 2 year period from the initial property assessment to implement any required works before charging the full Storm Water Levy.
6. Until all the above criteria have been met any effected properties to remain on the low impact rate.

The above proposal would be a far more equitable approach to helping to relieve any perceived impact water falling on our farm land has on the storm water infrastructure of the Central Coast Council.

Any attempt by the council to continue with their proposal without offering a more equitable solution that takes into consideration my objections along with all the other submissions will be met with severe and unrelenting local, regional and national media attention, followed by legal action.

Regards

Matthew Allen