

Author name: w. hall

Date of submission: Friday, 8 March 2024

Please write your submission below:

My name is W [REDACTED] Hall and I am Chairperson of the Narrandera Concerned Ratepayers Group. I am a CPA based in Narrandera and have 11 Years Local Government experience as a Councillor with Narrandera Shire Council. Our group knows Narrandera Shire Council and we are appalled at their execution of this SRV and we are very concerned that our low socioeconomic population will not be able to afford this massive increase. Execution of this SRV has been appalling right from the very start. Council engaged Morrison Low Consultants to give them the result that they wanted. Our Group has requested the Engagement Letter between Council and these Consultants but have been unsuccessful to date. The [REDACTED] could then tick that one off his SRV Checklist. Next came a series of Public Meetings where the [REDACTED] of the [REDACTED] has been questionable. The feeling of all meetings was that if a Constituent asked a question, he or she was asked to submit a submission. Questions were not [REDACTED] if at all. However, another tick off his SRV Checklist. Then we move on to Submissions to Council. Our Group sent a personal letter to each Councillor outlining our position to the SRV in addition to a progress tally on a community petition. We received no response from any or nor [REDACTED] Submissions made by October. Another tick on the [REDACTED] SRV Checklist. Prior to the November Meeting of Council where Council voted in favour of applying to IPART with an SRV, I gave Council in the Public Forum the opportunity to receive our large petition to the [REDACTED] could not have [REDACTED] but eventually showed some interest and the large petition was tabled. Another tick on the [REDACTED] SRV Checklist. Due to the behaviour of Council in the leadup to the November decision being made, we made a request to the Member For Cootamundra to meet with the Local Government Minister. We are still waiting for our Local Member to get back to us. Appalling to say the least. On the subject of affordability, our community cannot absorb this massive SRV Increase. We are a low socioeconomic community and several media outlets have documented and recorded our plight. Council needs to reduce its bloated bureaucracy and look at reducing its expenditure and live within their means. We note that in the 2023 Annual Report of Council, the General Manager is on a Total Salary Package of \$324,000. How can this Remuneration be justified in running a small Rural Council? The [REDACTED] has continually stated that the SRV will make Council more financially sustainable but in the next breath tells the community that it will be allocated into special areas such as approximately \$800,000 going into Wages to attract "Better Quality Staff". The General Manager needs to be made aware that the Organisational Culture of any Council is more important than the level of remuneration in attracting and maintaining good staff. We encourage you to peruse our attached documents which includes a Public Petition of 1085 Signatures which is a high turnout for Narrandera Shire. This SRV is unwarranted and will inflict unnecessary economic pain on our community. We are happy to meet with you at any time to go into greater depth on this SRV Matter. Yours Faithfully W [REDACTED] Hall Chairperson Narrandera Concerned Ratepayers Group

W [redacted] Hall

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**From:** W [redacted] Hall  
**Sent:** Tuesday, 27 February 2024 10:19 AM

[redacted]

**Subject:** RE: Council Submission

Good Morning Happy Warriors

Hope all is well. IPART have just opened Submissions for the Narrandera Shire Council Special Rate Variation. Submissions close on 18<sup>th</sup> March. Could we please have a meeting on Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> March at 5pm at New Criterion Hotel . Please let me know if you can make it. Of course, everyone is free to make individual submissions too.

Kind Regards

W [redacted] Hall

[redacted]

**From:** W [redacted] Hall  
**Sent:** Thursday, November 16, 2023 5:29 PM

[redacted]

**Subject:** RE: Council Submission

Hi Team

Just letting you know that the November Business Paper has hit the website of Council. Item 10.1 addresses the SRV and the General Manager has given his direct opinion on our Submission sent on 27<sup>th</sup> October 2023. I have not heard from



26<sup>th</sup> October 2023

W [REDACTED] Hall  
Chairperson  
Narrandera Concerned Ratepayers Group Committee  
100 East Street  
NARRANDERA NSW 2700

Cr [REDACTED]  
Narrandera Shire Council  
141 East Street  
Narrandera NSW 2700

Dear Cr [REDACTED]

Personally Sent to  
9 Councillors And GM  
on 27/10/2023.  
Absolutely No Response!

**RE: OBJECTION TO PROPOSED SPECIAL RATE VARIATION**

**Background:**

The Narrandera Concerned Ratepayers Group Committee strongly objects to the Special Rate Variation currently proposed by the Narrandera Shire Council.

By way of background information, our committee was formed as a result of a strong attendance at a heavily advertised Community Meeting on 16<sup>th</sup> of October 2023. At that meeting, a Shire Petition was first instigated, and we had 124 Residents sign that Petition then and there. This Petition is ongoing, and the up-to-date Petition is enclosed. We also enclose a photo of that first successful meeting. We were disappointed that only one Councillor, [REDACTED] was in attendance and our community were perplexed and also disappointed with the low Councillor attendance.

Our first Committee meeting was held on 25<sup>th</sup> October 2023 and W [REDACTED] Hall was elected Chairperson.

**Objection:**

This Objection will be structured in 2 Parts. The First Part will concentrate on Council Execution of the proposed SRV, and the Second Part will concentrate on the Financial Data as it has been presented to our community. Both parts look at the Integrity of Narrandera Shire Council and demonstrate why Council has a poor reputation in our community. We believe Council has lost the confidence of the Community and an Administrator urgently needs to be appointed.

**1a Adoption of Morrison Low SRV:**

Our understanding is that Council initially voted to engage Morrison Low at a cost of \$120,000 to conduct Due Diligence on a potential SRV. We have serious concerns as to why the Finance Section of Narrandera Shire Council did not have the capacity to carry out this task and produce work that our Community can understand. The Morrison Low Reports cannot be understood by the vast majority of our community but appear to be biased towards implementation of an SRV. We would like to respectfully request an electronic copy of the Letter of Engagement between Council and Morrison Low. Could we also please respectfully request a meeting with Morrison Low to discuss their Reports. The Morrison Low Reports will be a major focus for us if we have to extend our Objection to IPART in February 2024. We would also like to respectfully request a breakdown on the likely further cost of

Morrison Low lodging the SRV Application with IPART and how much to date has been wasted on Advertising, Postage and Staff Time. We are estimating the Total Cost at \$200,000.

### **1b Community Meetings:**

Council has held various Public Meetings throughout the Shire. It is worth noting that the first Meeting at Narrandera was held before the major Mailout exercise occurred. The Mailout should have occurred well before the First Public Meeting. This clearly indicates a lack of Council authenticity in the conduct of their Public Meetings. Moreover, the Public Meetings appear to simply be going through the motions so as to qualify/satisfy the need for Community Consultation as part of the SRV Submission. We have been surprised that very few of our elected Councillors have attended these meetings. However, what surprises us the most is the attitude of both the [REDACTED] and the [REDACTED] at the meetings. They have given our community the impression that the SRV will happen no matter what our community says,

This strikes at the heart of the Integrity and Trust Issues at Narrandera Shire Council. Our understanding is that the decision on the SRV rests with our elected Councillors on 21<sup>st</sup> November 2023. However, both the [REDACTED] and the [REDACTED] have pre-empted their decision. At the Community Meeting of 26<sup>th</sup> of October 2023, the [REDACTED] was asked this question "Does he have a Contingency Plan if the SRV is not implemented?" his answer was No. He was also quite clear in his response in so far as there is NO Contingency Document currently in existence in the event of the SRV submission failure. The [REDACTED] then stated that if the Councillors wanted such a Document, all they had to do was ask him to prepare one. This clearly demonstrates a lack of confidence in the Councillors and particularly the [REDACTED]. The [REDACTED] then went further to state that the forward Budget included the SRV. He was vague when asked if a forward Budget was prepared that did not have the SRV.

### **1c Integrity:**

We would like to indicate Integrity issues pertaining to the [REDACTED] at the 19<sup>th</sup> of September 2023 Monthly Council Meeting. At that Livestream meeting, the [REDACTED] convinces the Councillors to vote in favour of making an SRV Application by stating that Council is no longer financially viable and that without the SRV, essential services would be cut. However, at the 27<sup>th</sup> of September 2023, Public Meeting, The [REDACTED] presented a PowerPoint slide with dot points of all the Projects they will be able to fund with the additional money from the SRV. He has contradicted himself in the most extraordinary way. If he needs to raise Rates to cover essential services, how then will Council be able to afford these other Projects?

We also take issue with the SurveyMonkey Questionnaire. This Survey is particularly popular amongst our younger community members. However, there have been many complaints about the Survey in that you cannot choose "I am not in favour of an SRV". To complete the Survey, there are only 2 Options to choose from. Either you choose the 41.5% Option Over one Year or 48.1% Over Two Years. This will give a wrong survey response as our community have not been given the opportunity to vote for "No Change". This is indicative of poor Community engagement by our Council.

### **2a Financial Data:**

The Financial Data which we have so far analysed raise many issues that we wish to bring to your attention.

We know that Council satisfied Fit for The Future Financial Criteria in 2014 and that it received substantial funds from the sale of Teloca House in 2015. Our Council has traditionally been regarded as having one of the strongest Balance Sheets amongst Group 10 with large Cash Reserves. However, Council Expenditure appears to have got right out of control over the past 6 years. It smacks of Financial Mismanagement whereby suddenly Council are transferring the mismanagement onto our Ratepayers.

By way of example, Payroll Expense has increased by \$1.9 Million between 2017 and 2023. That is an extraordinary increase and includes at least 18 Months of Covid Lockdowns when Productivity was naturally low. At the Public Meeting on 26<sup>th</sup> of October 2023, The [REDACTED] stated that he had lost a lot of staff and believed that these staff would have stayed if Council could have offered them a salary increase. Not only is this an irresponsible and unfounded statement, it clearly demonstrates the weakness of his argument. What makes the [REDACTED] think that if Council were to obtain an extra \$800,000, that it would entice staff to remain in a toxic and mismanaged environment? Further, he stated that he wanted the best people in positions and yet Council still insists on maintaining a mandatory Covid Vaccination requirement as an employment requirement. This itself is bordering on illegal, is prejudiced and should immediately cease.

We would also request a current electronic copy of your Organisational Chart. We believe that Council is currently a Bloated Bureaucracy particularly among the white collared workers. There appears to be a "Manager for Everything" and a reduction in the payroll is well overdue. Why does this Council have two Deputy General Managers? It strikes of indolence and arrogance that if an SRV is implemented, another \$810,000 will be added to Payroll Expense and be classed as "Staff Salary System Improvements". In 2021, Councillors are responsible for bleeding \$500,000 from the council Budget by ignoring a Recommendation to accept a Swimming Pool Management Tender which satisfied all of the Tender Criteria.

#### **2b Grants and Consultants:**

We are most concerned about Council grabbing every Grant available even if it means a substantial co-contribution and this has depleted Reserves. We are also concerned about Contract Selection within Council. Are there Policy Documents and Process Map for applying for a Grant? Is there any consideration given to the need for the service or improvement or is it the case of grab the money and worry later? Are there any Policy Documents in relation to Contract Selection? A lack of a significant Policy in this regard points to poor management at a minimum.

With regards to the extensive number of consultants engaged by Council in 2022/23, we are at a loss as to understand why Council Staff have not been engaged to complete such work. Are the Consultants engaged only to add credibility to a process/case and to save Staff from extra work? Consultant Costs appear to be significant at this Council. We would like to respectfully request a list detailing all Consultants engaged over the past 3 Financial Years, the purpose of their engagement, the cost of their services and who approved their appointment?

#### **2c SRV Proposal:**

We would now like to comment on what the proposed SRV will be used for. This is where matters turn really bizarre.

Other than a contribution towards the newly mandatory ARIC, the other funds of approximately \$2.18 Million are to be spent on pet projects seemingly of the [REDACTED]

Our community has indicated loud and clear that it does not want a \$16.5 Stormwater Scheme. How much have Council paid Consultants to come up with this Overengineered and Expensive Project? Furthermore, there have been a number of previous Consultant driven reports on the Stormwater in Narrandera. Despite costing our community large amounts of money, they appear to have been for the most part ignored.

We believe that Productivity Increases will be able to sustain current service levels and eliminate the need to offer financial incentives under the Staff Salary System Improvements. Whilst it is clear that Council do require Technology Upgrades including Software that permits them to go about their daily requirements, it seems very strange that Council has chosen the cheap option of MagiQ. Most of our surrounding Councils use Civica for their Software. Civica offers the opportunity for significant cost savings through sharing cloud space, product knowledge and staff training.

#### 2(d) Projects:

Finally, our committee has major concerns over a number of current and planned Council Projects which the [REDACTED] has alluded to at Council Community Meetings. Why is Council providing facilities at Narrandera Airport for a Flight Academy? Council does not have a Narrandera/Leeton Airport Strategic or Masterplan that has gone to public consultation and adopted by Council. Council has indicated that a significant amount of Council spending will be required for the next stage of the proposed flying school. There has been no Development Application lodged by AAPA for such a large project that will affect those living within the airport precinct along with their land and property values and re-sale ability. Council has provided no costs analysis for this project nor sought any public comment or submission on the benefits/negatives of such a project such as noise pollution. It makes no commercial sense to simply commit ratepayer funds to this project without first having the abovementioned in place.

Who came up with a cost of \$2 Million to deepen Lake Talbot? Can we see the costings?

Is it true that Council is spending \$5 Million on the next stage of the Red Hill Industrial Estate? Red Hill so far has yielded no profit back to the ratepayers. It has struggled to break even and taking into consideration holding costs while waiting for sales, it has likely run at a loss to ratepayers. Council has demonstrated that it does not have the commercial expertise to manage such a large development project. The ethos of Council is to construct first and sell later. This is in direct conflict with private development principles whereby Banks always require presales before any construction takes place. This measures the viability of the project before commencing. No Bank would ever lend money to a developer based on this strategy of developing the next stage of Red Hill.

Should Council ignore the will of our community and vote on a SVR on 21<sup>st</sup> November 2023, our committee will vigorously oppose it right up to IPART and State Government level.

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] Hall

Chairperson

Narrandera Concerned Ratepayers Group.

IPART Note: The Group has also submitted a 38 page petition with the names and signatures of people who have signed the petition. In line with our Submissions and Privacy policy we have removed those 38 pages.



## **IPART Submission - Special Variations and Minimum Rates 2024-25**

### **Narrandera Shire Council**

I do not wish to pay increased rates. I have not met anyone who does and do not expect to do so in the future. However, I do support Council's application to IPART for a special variation (SV). I prefer an increase in rates over the alternative, which can only be a decrease in services.

This support is on the proviso that Council continues to seek improvements to processes and adopts revised practices that will help to avoid another SV being required in the short to medium term. Every organisation has scope for improvement; efficiencies can be achieved and need to be actively pursued.

My connection with Narrandera Shire is strong. My great-grandfather came to Brewarrena Station in 1861 and over the following 162 years my family has continued to farm at Sandigo. I have lived in Narrandera Shire my entire life; at Sandigo, Grong Grong, and at various Narrandera addresses as a ratepayer. I chose to remain in Narrandera to raise my family in the home we built. My work history has been with three major employers based in Narrandera Shire. I am very involved in community sports which gives me a good understanding of the infrastructure we have, and the expenses involved in upkeep and renewal. I have a strong belief that we need to do whatever we can to help retain and grow services and make Narrandera a destination of choice for those wishing to relocate to a regional area.

I attended three of the evening public meetings hosted by Council (two in Narrandera and one at Sandigo) to be able to make an informed decision. Going with an open mind, it allowed me to listen to feedback from others and reflect on matters I had not previously considered. Instead of trying to shield the public from budget bad news over the past few years, in hindsight it would have been wise to flag the potential issues to limit the surprise factor – particularly in light of the current cost of living pressures.

As a ratepayer I attended a meeting in 2022 regarding stormwater flooding. Council was emphatically instructed by the community to fix the issue once and for all. I am keen to retain services in our town and am unsure whether all existing businesses would continue in the event of another East Street stormwater flood event. I noted comments made recently that this has only happened twice in 50 years, however it is pertinent to consider it has happened twice recently. Weather patterns are changing and potentially the recent patterns (or worse) may be what we can expect in the future, making the stormwater project a necessity.

There is an ongoing theme that Council should not use consultants/contractors and staff should do that work instead. It is obvious that some tasks require specialised qualifications and experience. That expertise may be needed once only, once every 10-20 years, etc. No employer could afford or keep engaged a staff member who could only work very infrequently in their field. At the same time, it would be negligent for an organisation to commission works to be undertaken based on specs prepared by an unqualified or inexperienced person and of course do-overs can be very expensive. It would be inefficient for staff to spend large amounts of time learning, hopefully adequately, how to do a job

once when a highly skilled, competent consultant/contractor can do the job in a set timeframe for a set figure complete with some form of warranty.

Some of the same people also say Council's salary structure does not need review. Staff by and large are not enticed to work at Council based on pay. Comments on local vacant position adverts include "can't get anyone to work ... for what we want to pay them", "good luck ... terrible money", "make more money traffic control". Plenty of surveys rank remuneration around sixth in the list of valued outcomes behind other factors like job satisfaction, the people, flexibility, etc. However, ideal candidates with no existing connection to Narrandera Shire are less likely to consider Narrandera when compared to employers offering more attractive wages and conditions.

Each meeting raised concerns about the impost of any SV on the farming community. Farmland is about 98% of the shire's rateable land area, is charged at the lowest rate and currently generates 58% of the rate revenue. I have 40+ years of being directly dependent upon farming and the agricultural sector, and my extended family and friends would be unfavourably affected by any increase which is extremely saddening. However unlike residential property owners, farmland owners have an opportunity to gain income from their properties and accordingly can claim rates as a business input.

There has been much comment about the Playground on the Murrumbidgee grant, including new Destination & Discovery Hub, Lake Talbot Skywalk, Lake Talbot Water Park upgrades, pedestrian bridge, etc. Drought has an insidious flow-on effect through rural communities, and I do not believe locals appreciate the benefits of tourism and the backup it provides. Reduced farming income is felt by not only farmers, but also by associated businesses, retail, services, and trades. Tourism money comes from outside the shire. Investing in new attractions that help grow the tourism dollar is important, especially when a significant amount can be grant funded. The old Visitor Information Centre was not fit for purpose 15 years ago. A minority was opposed to the Skywalk, but it and the pedestrian bridge are already popular attractions to visitors, and the Water Park continues to be a big drawcard. Not applying for grants leads governments to assume that funding is not needed. I agree it would be better if Federal and State governments allowed organisations to pinpoint their priorities for funding, but that is not currently the model.

Narrandera Shire is one of many councils needing to pursue an SV. I am pleased to hear a review of rate capping is planned, with potential variations for rural shires. Given the current arrangement ludicrously applies a flawed one-size fits all mentality, this seems quite overdue. Hopefully changes will reduce the necessity for councils to take the SV route in the future.

H [REDACTED] Ryan

15 March 2024

Author name: J. Korhonen

Date of submission: Wednesday, 6 March 2024

Please write your submission below:

Narrandera Shire Council has major issues that need attention within the local government area. Issues of concern: Drinking water, staff numbers and remuneration (already too high), shire maintenance and development and transparency within the community in regard to major decisions that affect the broader community. Narrandera Shire has consistently stagnated in regard to population growth and has failed to retain a large percentage of the emerging younger demographic. In Narrandera there are approximately 2000 dwellings for a population of less than 5000 (less than half of the population of Leeton Shire) Leeton shire rejected this application after effective consultation from the community and chose to source further revenue from alternative channels. Why has Narrandera failed to listen to the community? This proposed increase will force a large number of families and individuals to leave the Shire as the general feel from the community that even at current levels, the rates do not seem to provide value to current services provided within the shire. Narrandera Shire council should be looking at ways to bring more people into the community and not drive them away.

Author name: M. Cottom

Date of submission: Wednesday, 6 March 2024

Please write your submission below:

This increase is a joke, Narrandera Shire Council have mismanaged their finances over the last 10 or so years. Now we the rate payer's are left to fix the problem when the cost of living In the current economic climate has put enormous pressure on families, the elderly and low income earners, this type of increase is just absurd.

Author name: P. Turner

Date of submission: Thursday, 29 February 2024

Please write your submission below:

As a residential ratepayer I am in strong objection to the council srv proposal. I am a pensioner who cannot afford this as I have been inundated with a lot of high price increases in many areas. My pension doesn't cope with all the price gouging increases that have gone on, and if this srv should go forward I would have to cut out the house and contents insurance to pay for that, leaving me vulnerable should some unforeseen thing happen. Regarding council, this is a council that when the amalgamations were on showed they had the resources to go it alone, and 5 years later saying they can't manage. Bad management and wasteful spending is the result of this. They got greedy and grabbed every grant they could and all against community interest and misspent monies that could have been directed to infrastructure, some of which is aging and needs replacing but doesn't get done. They want this srv so they can borrow 20 million to upgrade stormwater pipes which won't fix the problem as it is a build up of rubbish in system, not inadequacy of pipes. They need monies to upgrade computer system (genuine), and they want to give themselves a pay rise for the fantastic job they are doing of mispending our money. Something is not right at council and the [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] seem to blindly follow the [REDACTED] who is a big part of the problem. Giving them the srv would only enable them to continue to spend money in all the wrong places, and keep ignoring aging infrastructure as in town water pipes. They have 20 million restricted for service infrastructure that they don't utilise as well as they should like renewing water pipes. They also have internally restricted 16 million for vehicles which seems excessive. I am sure they could change this and use some of that money to give them a boost. However the problem still remains of mismanagement of funds and that is what needs to be addressed not special rate increases.

Author name: R. Heckendorf

Date of submission: Saturday, 2 March 2024

Please write your submission below:

As a rural ratepayer our needs of council services are very limited and because of our low population compared to the town we have very little representation as to our needs being expressed to council. We get very little if any benefit from tourism or any other town infrastructure but we are still expected to pay for the upkeep and depreciation of these assets that we don't need or use. We have for many years had to put up with substandard roads until the commonwealth government ( not Council) spent money on sealing some of the rural roads. A user pay system would establish very quickly the need for a lot of assets the council builds. The council gets grants from the government for various assets and services without making any assessments as to the ongoing viability or needs of the ratepayers. The proposed increase in rates will deliver nothing to rural ratepayers. With the variability in commodity prices and weather conditions will just add another cost burden on rural ratepayers. It is high time IPART considered the linkage that automatically increases wages and salaries when council revenue increases to be the main driving force behind this rate increase proposal. The council has not made any attempt to reduce its costs and The [REDACTED] [REDACTED] at the Sandigo meeting of ratepayers said that [REDACTED] The council staff numbers have almost doubled in the last twenty years when the area , population, and commercial activity have remained static . Many past and present council staff have said that the proposed new drainage scheme is unnecessary and before this expenditure is undertaken then a proper review of the operation of the present drainage system should be undertaken by an independent expert with proper risk analysis.

## SUBMISSION AGAINST SPECIAL RATE VARIATION FOR NARRANDERA SHIRE COUNCIL

Dear Committee

We wish to submit an objection to the proposed rate increase applied for by Narrandera Shire Council. We wish to object on three points and have provided these as succinctly as possible.

Part A outlines an anomaly on the approval process that has the potential for catastrophic impact, and questions where the accountability will fall. This section might apply equally to all applications by councils this year and might be considered in relation to all applications, however our interest lies only with the Narrandera Shire application. Part B outlines inconsistencies in the Narrandera Shire Council roadshow consultation process and the information given to both stakeholders and submitted as part of the application. Part C reports on findings from discussions with local charities and providers evaluating likely socioeconomic impact of a large rate increase.

### PART A: FACTORS THAT WILL LIKELY IMPACT RATES CALCULATIONS FOR THIS COMING RATING PERIOD ONLY

A win for the Office of Local Government (OLG) was the approval of a new rate pegging system that offers a fairer system for increasing property rates across residential, business, farming and mining sectors that uses forward thinking measures of council's base costs. The result is a more accurate maximum percentage that reflects an individual council's cost of current services and prevents increases greater than those required to maintain them. This system will be implemented from the 2024/25 rating period and represents a modest percentage increase over the previous method for Narrandera Shire for the rating period under discussion. On its own, it is a welcome boon for the local government sector and ratepayers alike. However, the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) has also removed for the 2024/25 rating period any restriction on increases to domestic waste management. NSW local councils will be able to charge whatever they feel appropriate and is independent of general rate increases. Where the potential for a catastrophe lies is in the approval system where each rate rise is treated as an independent factor, with no cross reference to previous, impending, or concurrent rises across other rating factors. Further strain will be placed on residential and business ratepayers as Narrandera Shire Council attempts to appease the rural sector with a promised redistribution of the income percentages across sectors. While the maximum amount a council can receive from general rates is set, the distribution is not. For the Narrandera Shire Council where 58% of rates are currently apportioned to the rural sector, the general manager has made an undertaking to review this percentage due to massive increases expected if the SVA for 2024/25 is approved. A statement advising that Council has until June 2024, past the closing date for SVA's, adds to the ambiguity of rate increases for the 2024/25 period.

The problem here is one of accountability, as each stakeholder complies with the requirements for reporting and due process, no one single body will become responsible for the fallout. Local councils will implement increases in accordance with the outcome,

and council staff will follow set protocols for processing charges. While many have hardship provisions written into policy it remains that in real terms this equates to increased payment periods without penalty or interest accrual, but the council will still at some point require payment. Otherwise, it might result in the forced sale of properties for unpaid rates. IPART will also follow protocols when approving increases, based solely on the criteria for Special Variation and the careful box ticking of General Managers who enlist consultants at a cost of tens of thousands of dollars to advise them how to ensure compliance is met, and prepare the necessary documents. The Office of Local Government have fought a hard battle on behalf of all constituents for fair and equitable distribution of the burden of the cost of services and infrastructure. So, who will be to blame when it all unravels in a momentous bombshell, and at what cost to ratepayers. Of recent times we have heard the statement “the number one priority of any government is ensuring the safety of its people”. This statement has been bandied about in reference to the Robodebt fiasco and NDIS Royal Commission, as examples, without any visible investment by said governments in doing exactly that. Increases in property rates from the new method of calculating the base rate for annual rate pegging, a redistribution of apportionment of the rating revenue to give relief to the rural sector, the potential to increase waste management charges without restriction, and a SVA application beyond anything previous applied, with each considered individually on their own merits but have the potential to result in a collaborative catastrophic burden on the ratepayers. It is worth mentioning here that the term ‘relief to the rural sector’ refers to a lessening of the catastrophe and will in no real terms represent relief when all three fiscal policies are applied.

#### PART B: INCONSISTENCIES IN COUNCIL APPLICATION

As recently as the 2020/21 rating period the Narrandera Shire Council was granted a modest additional increase in the base rate and as a part of that application process provided financial data and assurances that the increase would stand them in good stead in the coming years. It is questionable then that such a large percentage increase is being sought without looking at the increase in spending that has occurred. During the consultation process the council representatives were adamant in their support of the recent approval of major works that have been a drain on council resources with the reasoning being that “we can’t afford to knock back grants” for items such as the skywalk, a project that drew much attention and opposition from locals as it did not increase revenue at a time when essential services needed attention. An example is the poor water quality endured by some areas of the town, with council’s resolution being to offer a limited number of water cartridges, after which residents would need to purchase their own.

Council states that they have adopted policies and made changes to increase revenue but the shire still does not even have a compliance officer on staff. Narrandera Shire must be in the minority to not consider the appointment of an ordinance officer, one example of how simple strategies might increase revenue.



Council's application refers to upgrades in storm water but even here there are factors being ignored that would reduce and, in some sectors, eliminate the need for upgrade. General maintenance and cleaning of existing storm water drains was a practice in recent times that seems to have been relaxed. When heavy rains come it is not unusual to drive around and see large volumes of rubbish, both vegetation and general waste, blocking the drains and causing water to run up over gutters. This is akin to never cleaning the gutters on your home and then thinking that they need replacing when rainwater runs inside the house walls, whereas simply cleaning the gutters would have made an impact.

Our council appears to have grandiose ideas of what constitutes reasonable spending, with a focus on appearances and how the shire is perceived from those outside the jurisdiction rather than focus on the basic tenets of overseeing the maintenance and development of the town in the interests of the ratepayers.

### PART C: SOCIOECONOMIC AND PSYCHOSOCIAL FACTORS

Narrandera Shire is nestled in the food growing Riverina with a land area of 4116 km<sup>2</sup> and population of 5663 people (narrandera.nsw.gov.au). At the November Council meeting, following a process of community consultation as required by IPART, councillors voted 8 to 1 in favour of making an SVA to increase the general rates levy by 25% in the 2024/25 rating period, followed by an additional 18% in the 2025/26 rating period. At the meeting, it was noted that a petition of 1,057 signatures voicing objection to the increase had been received by council, and many submissions had been made independently. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] It is statements such as this one, and a history of ignoring what the public want despite opposition and backlash, that has led to the apathy and general sense of defeat that we have encountered during the process of trying to get Council to listen to reason where the special rate variation is concerned. We, the undersigned, have experienced responses from residents that indicate they feel there is no point in completing the IPART survey or making a submission, as the process appears to be a box ticking exercise, from the appointment of consultants to prepare the application to the approval itself.

During this process several approaches were made to charities that service the Narrandera Shire and while all reported increased demand on services, none were willing to commit to a statement that an increase in rates would specifically impact their services. It should be noted, however, that many of them did admit that services were stretched, with one charity who usually supplies hampers to the Narrandera area over Christmas admitting that Christmas 2023 was the first time since their inception that they had to limit hampers to their Leeton Shire, where they were based. Strain on services were reaching breaking point. Narrandera Shire falls within the second highest index for socio-economic disadvantage according to ABS statistics with a diminishing population and higher than state average levels of concession card holders and indigenous peoples. Despite the reluctance of charitable organisations to specifically relate strain on services provided to an increase in rates, any increase in property rates will impact negatively across this population.

## RECOMMENDATION

While parts B and C have been included here for general comment and support of the objection, it is the trilogy of factors discussed in Part A that cause the greatest concern for ratepayers in the Narrandera Shire. It is the recommendation of the undersigned that any additional increase in rates for the Narrandera Shire be deferred until the following year, until the full effect of compounding factors can be evaluated. These factors are the newly introduced method of calculating the annual rate peg, the one-off removal of a cap on rates for waste removal, and the redistribution of rate income across sectors within the Shire. This would result in a fairer and more transparent process and avoid a situation where the combined effect of too many individual increases results in rates charges beyond the capacity of residents to pay.

Thank you taking the time to read our submission and we hope that you will give it your full consideration.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Author name: D. ORourke

Date of submission: Saturday, 9 March 2024

Please write your submission below:

I and the majority of the town are angry at the increases Council did not need to spend the money on upgrading the infrastructure especially at a time of cost of living crisis and especially when they had no money to pay for this The town has been crying out for years to have the town water fixed it is currently a dirty brown and un drinkable In addition the stormwater will be a additional cost on top of ipart that will come by raising our water rates council has already admitted this. The majority of people in the town are battling pensioners and cannot sustain the increases that council will be flogging us with Council needs to be stood down or at the very least looked into D [REDACTED] ORourke



Author name: M. Cameron

Date of submission: Wednesday, 28 February 2024

Please write your submission below:

Narrandera Council are unable to run a chook raffle, for instance the council gets contractors in to prune and remove deadwood from our streets trees! Lots of trees are left with no removal of the dead branches. Resulting in 3 major dropped branches and broken power lines near our home over a 2 week period. And now council are looking to get another lot of contractors in. Why are they paying out MORE money while not calling these contractors back to complete the job they were paid to do in the 1st place. We have seen similar to this with drains and other works. Oh, and it took me near 30 years just to get a overhanging branch removed from over our power line into our building! Council are just too wasteful with our rate payer's money. We have to tighten our belts and budget with what we have, so why not council?

Our ref: RE/ap:

14/10/2022

The Owner  
NARRANDERA NSW 2700



Dear Sir/ Madam

**RE: [REDACTED] street Tree maintenance works**

Please be advised that as part of the Narrandera Shire Council tree maintenance program Council staff and Contractors will be commencing tree maintenance works on [REDACTED] street and the [REDACTED] street on Monday 17 October 2022.

The purpose of the works is to ~~create a uniform street~~scape. Works include under pruning, directional pruning and ~~dead wooding~~.

Council staff will try and minimise any disruption and will only limit traffic movements in the sections in the immediate vicinity of works where possible.

Council's Tree Management Policy is available on Council's website <http://www.narrandera.nsw.gov.au> or at Council chambers if you would like a copy of the policy.

If you have any further enquiries concerning this matter please contact Council's Open Space and Recreation Manager on telephone [REDACTED] or email [council@narrandera.nsw.gov.au](mailto:council@narrandera.nsw.gov.au).

Yours faithfully

[REDACTED]  
***Open Space and Recreation***

