

Mayoral Column
Proposed Special Rate Variation

21 January 2014

The Council is considering a rate rise over and above the rate pegging limit allowed. However the proposed 15% is only applicable on the base rate not the other Council charges like water, sewerage or waste and includes the rate pegging allowance. In the case of the urban ratepayer the increase will be roughly equivalent to an extra cup of coffee down town per month. The 15% is not on top of your current rate notice total, only the actual rates amount.

The final decision about any rate increase will be made by the Council in February.

Gwydir Shire Council has never sought any additional rate increases over and above the allowable rate pegging limits. Likewise the former Yallaroi and Bingara Shires never sought any additional increases and, in fact, some years did not even take the allowable increases, which has had a cumulative detrimental impact.

The allowable rate pegging limits usually do not even adequately fund the cost increases that are imposed on the Council. For example several years ago the allowable rate pegging limit was only sufficient to cover the increased electricity costs for that year. Rate pegging has reduced the Council's income in real terms over the last 30 years and a catch up has become essential.

Whether the Council is eventually merged or not a significant rate rise is inevitable unless the range of services provided by the Council is substantially reduced. These services would include some of the services that many would consider basic and have come to rely on within the Shire. The Council does not want to reduce services if it can be avoided because it would greatly reduce the wonderful social capital that the Gwydir community has available to it.

The Council wrote to every ratepayer outlining its rating option proposal in December to ensure that the proposed rate increase was widely known.

The survey that the Council initiated late last year has had a large response and the results are still being tabulated and the final results will assist the Councillors when they make a decision on any rate increase.