

IPART NSW
Level 8
1 Market Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Special Rates Variation
Local Government

Dear Sir/Madam

Application by Richmond Valley Council for a Special Rate Variation



I am writing to object to Richmond Valley Council's application for a Special Rate Variation on the following grounds:

1. Council did not consult adequately with the community about the proposed SRV. Most of us did not know about the meeting organised by council for Evans Head which was attended by only 7 people. A Casino meeting was also poorly attended. The General Manager did not mention a meeting date in the letter posted out to all of us dated 20 November about the SRV. Why not? It would have been easy to do. Why did council not post out a post-paid reply questionnaire with his letter to all of us to get our views? Council had additional separate mail outs about paying rates on-line. Why wasn't that opportunity used to mail out a questionnaire about the SRV? It seems to me that council had several opportunities to obtain community views about the proposed SRV but failed to do so.
2. Council failed to tell us in the material it sent out and in the SRV application about the cumulative effects of the proposed rate rises over the five year period. Council has an obligation to provide such information and failed to do so. Why?
3. Council failed to provide information about the cumulative effects of the proposed rate rise for Evans Head, a location in the local government area which has much higher UCV's than Casino. For many years we have been paying much higher rates than other non-coastal locations because of this and council has not been responsive to requests from the community to take this into consideration in its rating process. In its application council mentions that it had a consultant look at this issue but this report has not been made available to the community. The proposed SRV will affect us differentially over time. This is not in keeping with the requirements of council's Charter under the local government act which provides for the 'fair' imposition of rates. This matter needs to be investigated further.
4. Council says that it believes we can afford to pay the proposed increase but provides very little evidence to support its claim. Just because we live in a location with higher UCVs does not mean we have a higher capacity to pay. There are many people on fixed pensions at Evans Head. Richmond Valley Council is one of the most socially disadvantaged areas in NSW. They do not seem to have taken full account of this problem. I question the value of comparison with other Group 4 councils with regard to rates as we are near the very bottom of the profile for Group 4 councils and nowhere near the average. Is the comparison appropriate? And council has not examined the full package of rates and charges in considering the impact of the SRV. Rates should not be reviewed alone.
5. Council needs to look at its own performance. Council has undertaken a number of projects over the years which have cost ratepayers dearly. A good example of this is its current

proposal to sell of the entire Evans Head Memorial Aerodrome for \$2.5 million without the sale coming to public tender. This proposed sale has raised concern in the community about the realisation of the full value of council's limited assets.

6. The proposal for a SRV from council was an "all-or-none" proposal with no opportunity given to us to determine priorities. I note that the information sent to us by the General Manager in November was different from the final proposal which went to council on the 18th of February for which we had only 4 days for review, hardly a decent time to review the application particularly if you live at Evans Head where council offices are closed on Fridays meaning we have to wait until Monday to see council business papers for Tuesday. I note that council signed off on the reports on which the SRV is based on the same day that it agreed to the SRV, the 18th of February, 6 days before the application to IPART closed. Where was the time for adequate community consultation about its final proposal?

Council's application for an SRV demands close scrutiny with regard to the evidence it uses to support its claims. In my view council has done a very poor job of communication with the community and has failed to tell us about the cumulative impacts of its proposal particularly for Evans Head where our property values will create a much higher rates burden than for other parts of the council area. I believe council's application for an SRV should be rejected.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Betty Hyde

