

Dear IPART,

Are we going to witness yet more SRV price increases as we have with our current and future council rates?

IPART recommended a 4.4% increase for Port Stephens Council over 3 years due to being a growth area.

Our council had \$92 million in cash in numerous banks prior to the introduction of our 9.5% rate increase in 2023, i.e. 4.4% IPART recommendation and 5.1% on top as council's recommendation.

When councils put their claims to IPART these recommendations were approved by IPART with further increases on top of the original 4.4% over the next 2 years at least.

Rate increases for Port Stephens for the 2024-25 financial year are now 9.9%, with the 4.4% still in place for the following 2025-26 financial year and who knows what in relation to the SRV application.

I have stated previously that our council is empire-building and at present there is no NSW State Government legislation to check the books, including property, land assets, wealth and viability of all councils within the state.

IPART chose to ignore the pleas of many about the high costs of living at present with the RBA forcing up interest rates, with 13 increases, the high cost of power, and water along with the price-gouging of major supermarkets.

Maitland and other local Hunter Valley councils also received similar recommendations from IPART and then had top-up SRV amounts added to their annual rates.

We now see Hunter Water Corporation ready to slug us a potential \$90 annually due to their incompetence in not securing a proper [REDACTED] tender.

It has been reported in the Newcastle Herald, 24/1/24, that the cost blow-out for the Hunter Water Corporation's Belmont desalination plant from a \$250 million tender to \$530 million, an increase of 112%.

What was reported is that all Lower Hunter residents would be expecting a \$90 annual increase in their water bills. That's only if further cost blow-outs don't happen.

Is IPART going to have further consultations with our communities or are we just expected to again wear this bureaucratic and IPART's incompetence?

We of the public know full-well that all government projects are always quoted to the max and usually blow out as these governments and government authorities are cash cows. It now appears that the tender process has failed miserably and is a complete waste of time and money.

How has this been allowed to happen with the tendering processes already carried out?

BRIAN WATSON-WILL,

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

**Former Port Stephens East Ward Councillor
1991-1995 and 1999-2005**

**Also P.S.C. Hunter Water Corporation
Community Consultation delegate for 6 years**