

From: [REDACTED]
To: [REDACTED] [Local](#)
[Government Mailbox](#): [REDACTED]
Subject: KEMPSEY SHIRE COUNCIL RATE RISE 2014
Date: Monday, 3 March 2014 4:19:52 PM

I am sending this submission to councillors, IPART and the Argus in the vain hope that someone will take a harder look into the situation where Kempsey Shire will lose more appeal than it will gain as a place to live and thrive.

Dear all,

Unfortunately, this submission is very long. It should have taken one day to complete, instead of two weeks. This can be expected if dealing with a bloated bureaucracy.

I object to the level of the proposed rate rise in Kempsey Shire. In fact if the secrecy windows were opened, the unlimited bulldust shovelled out and sold for fertiliser, our council would not only smell better but would probably be in surplus.

At a time when many Macleay residents and businesses are feeling the pinch after the highway deviation, a general decline in employment and continued effects of the economic downturn, council's decision to whack on a massive rate increase could not have come at a worse time.

Is it justified? Well, council received \$56.6 million dollars in income last year and spent \$15.6 million above that (16.7 million overspent in the previous year), so there is no doubt that situation is not sustainable.

As a fact-finding exercise, I put five questions to council through Customer First starting at 3.15pm Monday Feb. 17 which I thought could be answered then and there over the counter. Not so. The 'simple' exercise is still not concluded 14 days later. Visits to council, library, e-mails and on-line research yielded information appearing in this submission. Only part (a) of question 1 remains to be resolved. Apparently asking if an employee of council lives in the shire or not is a breach of privacy.

Council must think the General Manager is worth his weight as they are happy to sign him up for another five years. He has reined in spending. He has warned that tough decisions had to be made. He is doing a great job, no doubt. He got \$200,000 for it last year and is 'the only designated senior staff member within council's structure' (whatever that means). Under council's 'Organisational Structure', he has four directors under him, probably worth at least half of the GM's package. They would have to be very competent people working flat out to manage their designated responsibilities.

Whilst Kempsey Shire Council is a big business employing 300 people, it does not work like a private business. When things are tough, businesses concentrate on core services, greater efficiency and generally work harder and smarter. If that does not work, they go out of business (a common occurrence in the shire for some time).

Council, being a government organisation, has the luxury of saying 'bugger it, bung up rates and charges!' If a non-government business goes too far beyond

the pain threshold with its charges it does not last long.

Council says it needs a large rate rise or major cuts to services, singled out the library and said no-one wants to see cuts in services, which is true as we all want champagne services on a beer income.

So far as the library is concerned, there are nine staff members employed in Library Services at a full time equivalent of 6.8; the services cost \$857,025; income was \$69,314 so library services were \$787,711 in the red. A library is a highly desirable community service, as are roads, bridges, water, sewerage and parks.

Without 'council bashing' I can relate at least five instances where results from dealing with council have been less than satisfactory (an experience shared by many ratepayers/residents) so it is little wonder there is such widespread opposition to council's proposed rate-grab.

Not so long ago, the public had full and easy access to all councillors and council had two senior staff: The shire clerk and the shire engineer. Customers came in to a counter where they were directed to staff members involved with their enquiry by someone manning the front counter. Staff had easy contact with the community and customers were dealt with in an efficient manner.

Then, at great expense, a taj-mahal was built and named the Customer First Centre, along with a new directorship which was supposed to improve community engagement.

The result: We still have full and easy access to councillors but a wall of secrecy and obstruction surrounding council staff, thanks to the Customer First Barrier Centre. This no doubt enables staff more time to look after the 'Organisational Structure' without distractions from the community.

The reason I asked whether the five major employees of council lived in the shire or not was that some years ago a wise man explained 'community of interest' to me: Your community of interest is where you live. It is where you spend most of your time, buy most of the things you use, where you send your children to school, where you join local organisations, and your community gains the advantage. For a 'local' council which stresses the word 'community' in its reason for being it seems quite reasonable to ask staff members if they live in the shire or not and has nothing to do with 'privacy' protection unless it is just one more thing council is trying to hide from its community.

There are many reasons why people live where they do and whilst it is preferable for employees to live in the community they serve in their work, it should not be a 'secret'. In the end I had to e-mail the question to each of the five staff at 10am on February 28 ([REDACTED]). As at 4.15 pm on March 3, I have had only one reply from a director. [REDACTED]

In an attempt to be all things to all people, council is now involved with all sorts of activities which seem to be either far removed from core services or the responsibility of other organisations.

It is for council to identify non-core activities before hitting ratepayers with a

massive rate rise, which seems to be universally opposed by the community. Whilst the General Manager has saved money, there seems a lot more fat to be trimmed. Please do it.

Sincerely,
John Cruickshanks,
Kempsey.