

28 June 2017

## **Submission**

To IPART:

*In response to the Special Rate Variation Application  
by MidCoast Council*

Tendered by

**Peter Epov,**

Chairman,  
The Manning Alliance Inc.

## **Introduction**

### ***The Manning Alliance Inc.***

The Manning Alliance is a local volunteer based community organisation created in 2011, which advocates on issues and matters of significant concern to the community of the Manning Valley. Some of our work for the local community includes such endeavours as our Transgrid Campaign which was impacting on 1100 landholders in the Manning Valley (Australian Story – “Corridors of Power” 05/08/2013 [www.abc.net.au/austory/specials/corridorsofpower/](http://www.abc.net.au/austory/specials/corridorsofpower/) ).

### **The Author – Peter Epov**

Peter Epov lives in semi retirement on a rural property near the township of Wingham. He was a former Councillor with the Greater Taree City Council 2012-16.

Mr Epov had a highly successful career as a business consultant working with Australian top 100 companies, to facilitate trade and joint ventures in Asia. His particular specialty is The Peoples Republic of China. He has visited China over 100 times between 1991 and 2005. Mr Epov has worked with the CEO’s and management teams of 10 former top 100 Australian companies and has visited over 1000 Chinese corporations.

Prior to moving to mainstream business, Mr Epov was a very successful professional sports administrator and coach. He was National Coaching and Competitions Director of the Surf Life Saving Association of Australia, between 1981 and 1985, where he directed major events such as the National Surf Life Saving Championships, The Coolangatta Gold Ironman Triathlon, Australia Games.

He has extensive experience working with media, government, the corporate sector and volunteers.

He has also worked as a television commentator at two Olympic Games: Los Angeles in 1984 and Seoul in 1988.

In 1985 Mr Epov published the “Marketing and Public Relations Manual” specifically written for Sports, Charities and Community Service Organisations.

## Statement

The phrase "**No Taxation Without Representation**" originating during the 1750s, and it was used for campaigns against tyranny and oppression in England, Ireland, and it most famously summarized a primary grievance of the American colonists in the Thirteen Colonies, leading to the famous peoples' protest known as the 'Boston Tea Party' where 342 chests of Tea were thrown into the sea in response to the British Government's tax on Tea. "**No Taxation Without Representation**" was the flagship slogan and the major central cause of the American Revolution, and led to the formation of the most powerful nation in the world – the United States of America.

In 1860, the suffragette, Sarah E. Wall, invoked the principle of "no taxation without representation", initiating an anti-tax protest in which she encouraged women not to pay taxes until they were granted the right to vote.

On 30 May, the Administrator of MidCoast, John Turner, ignored the 32 extensive submissions, a people's Petition of 267 signatures, (which has now grown to 458 signatures) the plea's of 3 speakers, and brutally endorsed a recommendation to proceed with a Special Rate Variation which will see rates go up by 28.5% over four years, and Gloucester which has the lowest median income in the region go up by 11% just in the first year.

**Chairman of the Manning Alliance, Peter Epov said:**

*"I am disgusted and appalled by the arrogance of the people running MidCoast.*

***We do not believe that this body has neither a mandate nor a social licence nor the legal authority to proceed with an SRV application without an elected Council, nor have they followed the appropriate protocols for an SRV application for 2017/18.***

*MidCoast meeting of 30 May, 2017 was like going back through the twilight zone, It was reminiscent of a movie clip from the post World War II Soviet era of trials of the 1950s, where the four faceless men sat steely eyed at a top table emotionless, ignoring the pleas of the community, determined to drive through their pogroms regardless of the consequences.*

*I am truly tired of the injustice and the sadistic approach where the humble ratepayers and residents have to be constantly slugged and beaten up on council rates. This rate rise that will not resolve the underlining problem but will hurt many, many people in this low socio economic area where the average weekly take home pay is less than \$500 per week.*

*The Administrator should not have made such as decision particularly so close to the pending Council elections.*

The Good Governance Guide defines a Council as:

*"The Council consists of democratically elected members. Council's role is to ensure '...the peace, order, and good governance...' of its municipality."*

By this definition, whilst the name may be 'MidCoast', we do not have a 'Council' as such, but a government imposed amalgam of what were three (3) former local government areas into one regional entity, **an Administration**, governed by an **Administrator**.

And any entity in or under "**Administration**" has and should have limited powers!

A true Council will only commence and exist when there are democratically elected Councillors, and it is they who should decide an issue on rates!

Councils work by resolution!

If MidCoast is a "Council" then it has to act like one.

### **Powers and Authorities:**

- There has been no formal community Consultation regarding an SRV in 2017. And the MidCoast Report to the May meeting demonstrated this!
- The Extraordinary General Meeting of 1 May regarding the Addendum (and the SRV) was not advertised, nor published, nor reported, and IPART should take this into serious consideration!
- MidCoast did not issue any immediate Media Releases informing the community of the decisions made at 1 May meeting. On Friday 5 May at around 5pm after the press had all gone home MidCoast did issue a Media Statement listing 13 items; buried within that was a one paragraph reference to the Addendum and a possible SRV.
- MidCoast only advertised that the Addendum was on public exhibition **on 10 May**, giving the community less than 18 days to respond (and not a full 28 days).
- Why is there such indecent haste and secrecy?
- There has been very limited Media coverage, and no other known media releases issued from MidCoast on the subject of the SRV, on this critically important issue impacting 90,000 residents, across 10,000 square kilometres.
- Going back to 2016 - There were no formal Motions / resolutions of Council in 2016 to go forward with a formal Community Consultation as a lead up for an SRV application.
- No Budget set aside nor approved for an SRV Consultation in 2016.
- No published Community Engagement Strategy for an SRV prior to going forward with an application.
- There was a resolution passed in November 2016 to proceed with an SRV application, which was ultimately rejected by IPART / OLG in December 2016.

- A retrospectively retrofitted Community Engagement Strategy for an SRV has now been published to create the appearance of consultation – this will not work with IPART.
- 2015/16, GTCC lodged a formal application for an SRV and according to discussions with Mr Handford, on Tuesday, it was not going to be approved by IPART due to the community outrage.

## **The Secret Lobbying**

In 2016 Premier Mike Baird, backed up by the entire Cabinet made a solemn promise to the people of NSW and particularly those of newly amalgamated councils that there would be no SRV increases for 4 years!

Instead of secretly lobbying individual members of parliament, and the Government, to break that solemn promise and make the residents of the new LGA pay more rates, perhaps the energies of the MidCoast's Interim General Manager could have been better spent on designing a cogent argument for the NSW Government to make a significant contribution to reduce the \$180 Million backlog in infrastructure.

I've heard the Interim General Manager use the term "Begging Bowl", which I think is just outrageous, this not about begging, it is about the NSW Government stumping up and contributing a fairer share of funding to the bush and if the Council executive can't see this then they should move on!

This backlog in infrastructure was not of our making, why should the residents bear the brunt and the State and Federal Governments not contribute.

It was the NSW Government which forced the amalgamation three Councils each with a significant backlog in infrastructure. The majority of people were against the amalgamation. The NSW government has ownership in this issue, it has skin in the game, and therefore they should be contributing!

When I travel to Sydney there is infrastructure renewal going on everywhere, and you don't see the rates in Sydney going up at such levels! Our rates are higher than some city councils!

There has been no creativity in dealing with the backlog here by MidCoast, they have no solution to the underlying problem, just more smoke and mirrors, and a short term cosmetic solution to a serious underlying problem.

We cannot continually punish the ratepayers of this low socio-economic area with higher taxes.

## **The Council Report on the Addendum and the SRV application.**

- Was a hurried whitewash. They didn't even put any page numbers on the Report.
- No copies of any submissions were attached, so we don't know what the community put forward as objections, just a one paragraph summary.

- “A total of 32 submissions were received by close of business 29 May 2017. All were opposed to the SRV Areas of common concern raised in the submissions were the lack of community engagement; non-democratic decision making process; affordability; and varying levels of average rates across the area. Still the Administrator ignored this.
- A Petition with 267 signatures opposing the SRV was lodged. This was also ignored!
- Not one submission was in favour of the SRV.
- *The next slug to come after this SRV will be the harmonisation of rates across the entire MidCoast area - Rates will go up again!*

## The Economic Argument

- This SRV is a cosmetic approach to a long term structural problem
- Our rates compared to a number of city councils and QLD Councils are already very high.
- The Backlog is \$180 million, possibly more.
- A \$5 million increase in rates will not fix the underlying problem.
- What happens after 4 years ?
- Does Council proceed with further significant SRV increases in subsequent years? The population here is not growing nor is it likely to grow without a major stimulus. So will the rate rates be driven up so high until people can't afford to live here any more, and the backlog in infrastructure continues to blow out?
- This new mob have no solutions, no fresh ideas, and are reverting to the primitive tactic of taxing the masses while they can get away with this.
- Based upon our experience in the electricity industry, this is what is describe as the “death spiral argument”; as more and more people go off the grid, the more electricity prices will have to rise, as there are fewer people to pay for the electricity infrastructure.
- In our case, the death spiral will be relate to lack of population growth and lower wages.

Frankly, there was is insufficient evidence nor support to proceed with an SRV based on the report that was tabled pertaining to the Addendum and the SRV

MidCoast’s own Jetty Survey, **showed that 65% of those surveyed opposed a 5% rate rise.**

MidCoast did not canvass any alternatives to the SRV.

Affordability was not adequately addressed. The fact that MidCoast may have a hardship policy does not solve a the economic problem where inflation is at 2.1%, wages are rising at 1.9%, electricity prices are about to rise by 20%, gas prices are about to rise by 20%, and in a community of massive unemployment, where many people work in services as casuals and penalty rates have been lifted there will be massive stresses with is SRV of 28.5% over four years. This will truly reach the proportions of “heat or eat”?

Nor were no Social impacts or considerations canvassed. There was no consultation with community support groups, church groups, disadvantaged service providers, ie Vinnies etc.

Whilst we understand that there has been an urgent need for a number of years, to address Council's dilapidated and ailing road network, the proposal on the table is full of potholes; its inflationary and not sustainable, and it will only create hardship and frustration at a critical time when our local economy is struggling and frankly, the community should not be the exclusive scapegoat and punished for Council's failure to secure additional funding from other sources.

I am disturbed and very disappointed at the indecent eagerness; the rush and determination to slug the community with such a massive rate hike which contains severe consequences for our entire community; Pensioners, the unemployed, people on Commonwealth benefits, Residential ratepayers, Commercial - merchants, Industrial and Rural – farmers, before we have carefully identified and considered the implications upon all the sectors of our community and most importantly exhausted all other options!

Once again, we also have a problem with process. We understand that IPARTs requirements are for widespread community information, engagement and consultation program before an application is submitted for a proposed SRV this did not happen and particularly in 2017.

In our view MidCoast should have properly and openly consulted with the community on such a major issue and frankly, and there is no need for such indecent haste a democratically elected Council could arrive at a sensible decision in September.

We need to treat people with dignity and respect and engage fairly and transparently if we are to restore some level of institutional trust.

## **WHAT IS MIDCOAST.**

MidCoast is the NSW Government imposed amalgam of the Local Government Areas (LGAs) of the former Greater Taree City Council, The Great Lakes Council and the Gloucester Shire Council.

All three former Council's were found by IPART in 2015 not to be *'Fit For the Future'*, although IPART did indicate in it's Fit for the Future review, that if the former Great Lakes Council was successful in gaining an SRV increase for four years commencing in the 2016/17 year then it could qualify to be Fit For the Future.

It should also be noted that prudently, IPART did not recommend that all three Local Government Areas should be amalgamated. This merger resulted as a consequence of political intervention. IPART did recommend the amalgamation of Great Lakes Council and Gloucester Shire.

It should also be noted, particularly in the context of current SRV application by MidCoast that the overwhelming majority of residents / "electors" in all three Local Government Areas were opposed to the forced amalgamation.

As such the promise by the former Premier Mike Baird, reinforced by the former Minister for Local Government, Paul Toole that all newly amalgamated Council's in NSW would be exempt from rate increases for four years was strongly played out in the region.

Following the proclamation by the Governor, what has effectively occurred is a complete and perhaps rather ruthless take over by the Executive Management of the former Great Lakes Council and the appointment of a former politician with no experience in professional local Government Administration as the Administrator.

The General Managers of Great Taree City Council and Gloucester Shire Council were very swiftly despatched as were the Director Level executives from Greater Taree. Only one Director level executive from the former Greater Taree City Council was retained by the new regime, but in a position outside of his original function at Greater Taree City Council.

This bloodletting has left an indelible mark and a further bad taste on the mouths of many ratepayers and residents throughout the new LGA.

It is important to understand that the function and public perception of a Local Council in a rural / regional setting is very different to that in a major city such as Sydney, and as such this needs to be considered and balanced when considering MidCoast's SRV application in relation to community consultation and engagement.

A local council in a rural area is usually one of the largest employers, and has the greatest influence / and impact on the lives of residents and ratepayers. Having lived in Sydney for 45 years I can attest that local government has a very low profile in Sydney compared to that in the bush.

As such understanding a Local Council, its perception and role in a rural environment is very important in relation to an SRV application.



## The New Local Government Area (LGA).

(See attached images)

The new LGA now starts close to 2 hours drive north of Sydney and it covers a massive **10,060 square kilometre or 1,005,969 hectares** . This is a very significant area to service and maintain so close to Sydney. Recent Census data shows the population of the new LGA is slightly **over 90,000 residents**. The density level is 9 residents to each and every square kilometre or **0.09 persons per hectare**.

Contrast that to a number of other NSW Councils such as:

Mosman 865 hectares and 35.42 persons per hectare or  
Fairfield 10,156 hectares and 20.38 persons per hectare or  
Parramatta 8375 hectares and 28.18 persons per hectare or  
Ryde 4,046 hectares and 29.55 persons per hectare or  
Newcastle 18,687 hectares and 8.71 persons per hectare

This new LGA has many challenges as a result of its size and geography.

In terms of driving time from the southern boarder to the northern border of the new LGA it is approximately 3.5 hours. The population of this LGA is spread across a combination of rural areas, villages, coastal and urban zones in little townships and villages. As such it is a very difficult region to service and communicate with and special measures (targeted) need to be devised and adopted in order to effectively inform and create opportunities for the community to be engaged and participate in 21<sup>st</sup> century inclusive modern government.

Thus far MidCoast has miserably failed to do this. Their attempts at consultation and engagement have been clumsy and rather appalling compared to their city cousins. There is either a complete lack of understand and expertise in consultation, or is it simply deliberate?

The some of the regional challenges **which are all known to MidCoast** are:

- ❖ Geographically challenged through a system of poor roads and access.
  - Distance
  - Span of the LGA
  - Mountains, rivers, poor roads and access.
  - Historically poor maintenance of infrastructure
  - Poor / no accountability
  - Spread of population over a vast area – 60 villages
- ❖ Telecommunications challenged
  - Many residents live in isolated areas with poor telephone reception
  - No mobile phone reception
  - Access to information
  - Poor TV reception / inconsistent reception or unable to receive one or more TV stations.

❖ Internet challenged

- Slow or no fixed line ADSL or broadband.
- Limited Satellite broadband available but with limited speeds and bandwidth and severe restrictions on service plans i.e. maximum plan for satellite NBN is 40/80 gigs and very expensive compare to city rates
- A significant population of aged 'country people' who are internet illiterate.
- A significant population of aged 'country people' who are not familiar with platforms Council websites, or Facebook and twitter etc.

❖ Media challenged

- Local TV- The area is covered by NBN and Prime regional networks
- This may result in one or two local MidCoast stories every few days across the full spectrum of activity on the "News".
- Most news is Metropolitan Sydney based.
- The area is also covered by Ten TV, its news is all Sydney based, apart from an occasional local breaking story or a 30 second news bulletin.
- The area is covered by two local radio stations: one predominantly music based with some local news (2RE) and the other is ABC Mid North Coast covering several LGA's up to Coffs Harbour.
- The LGA is covered by four local Fairfax regional newspapers some of which are published twice per week and some that are published weekly.
- Their print runs have been severely reduced. The sum total of the four newspapers on a weekly basis would be no more that 4000 copies for the entire LGA.
- The collapse of public interest journalism has also had severe impacts in regional centres.
  - Lack of advertising
  - Lack of editorial space
  - Lack of available time for journalists to do a proper job
  - Lack of quality journalists (talent), to investigate and report in a fair, objective and balanced manner.
  - Most publications reprint Media releases from members of parliament and the Council – there is no objective analysis.
  - 5 years ago local media would analyse, investigate and independently inform the community on issues and actions by institutions, authorities, the local council, the State and Federal Members, these days it doesn't happen in the same way anymore, they are all competing in the sphere of 'entertainment', which becomes very critical when its necessary to inform and communicate to 90,000 people in a regionally challenged area on such issues as SRV applications.
- Frustrated with the lack of coverage of important local issues and analysis, Di Morrissey, Australia's most successful female author (having published over 25 books, in 25 years and recently inducted into the Hall of Fame), a local resident, has introduced and publishes a new free bi-monthly newspaper, The Manning Community News, copies of this publication are attached. She has written on the SRV issue. The Manning Community News publishes 5000 copies per edition.

As previously indicated MidCoast clearly understands the communication's challenges within this region, and they deliberately adopt measures to minimise the flow of information out to the community on important issues such as an SRV application.

Since the amalgamation the number of MidCoast staff has practically tripled in the area of community relations yet the quality of information, the timeliness of that information and the effective distribution of that information has been very poor. Leading to poor consultation.

There was no formal explicit community consultation on a 28.5% SRV increase over four years between June and the November 2016 meeting (when the decision was taken by the Administrator to proceed with an SRV application) the information provide by MidCoast in its application and appendices have been retrofitted to imply that there was extensive community consultation on the specific issue of a 28.5% SRV increase over four years. This is plainly untrue.

After reviewing all the local media, particularly the print media it is clear that there were no published stories between June and October 2016 that show MidCoast's intention of applying for an SRV increase and that it was engaging in a community consultation process on the specific subject of 28.5% SRV increase over four years .

Further, in 2016 there was significant Sydney Media coverage of the Council amalgamations across the State, broadcast by the Sydney Media (TV, Newsprint and Radio) to our region. The key message everyone did pick up on and which was publicised throughout the LGA was Premier Mike Baird's promise, reinforced by the Minister for Local Government, Paul Toole that all newly amalgamated Councils were exempt from SRV increases for four years.

This message was indelibly imprinted within the minds of the community and MidCoast understood this. It was also a message that was reinforced during the process of amalgamation from March to May 2016 throughout our community via the local media. So the public's perception was very clear.

Therefore, if MidCoast were intent on applying for an SRV increase and thwarting the Premier's promise whilst he was in power then they needed to go to extra-ordinary lengths to inform and explain to the community their intentions, and how they would by-pass the Premier's promise. This didn't happen!

There was no media coverage of any such community consultation for an SRV up to 23 October 2016 and MidCoast has not provide a list or copies or evidence of any significant SRV Media Coverage in the Period June to October 2016 in relation to its application.

Between 23 October and 23 November there was no formal effective community consultation undertaken for an SRV of 28.5% over four years.

## **Powers and Authorities of a Council.**

Regardless of the fact that there is an Administrator temporarily in place, the 'new' MidCoast Council still derives its powers and authority from: The Local Government Act, Regulations, edicts from the Office of Local Government and other State Legislation and must act like a proper Council.

This also means that even in the absence of actual Councillors, MidCoast, the Administrator, the Interim General Manager (and his staff) must in turn function through a system of State legislation and regulations, and a process of reports, recommendations brought to Council, motions at Council Meetings and resolutions passed / determined by the Administrator at formal and regular Council Meetings.

Indeed this practice, in a sense, occurred during the period after the forced amalgamation of the three former Councils.

The new MidCoast Council published Meeting Agenda and Minutes of all Council Meetings. This is a very important transparency measure which informs the community (Residents and Ratepayers), including Media, and various interest groups of the intentions and the decisions of the "Council" and it is designed to build confidence.

The General Manager (and through him his staff) derives his powers and authorities from relevant legislation, regulation, motions and resolutions passed at Council Meetings and through "delegated authority" by a resolution of Council.

## **Local Representative Committee.**

The Administrator appointed a Local Representative Committee of 12 former "favoured Councillors" many of whom were aligned either directly or indirectly with the NSW National Party or the Local Member.

This Committee had no powers, or any influence and achieved very little, if anything at all. Their appointment was an invention to placate the community and create the perception that there was some level of community representation in the absence of democratically elected Councillors.

It was also a mechanism to keep some former Councillors aligned with the establishment from being disgruntled, quiet and paid.

Initially the members of the LRC were parade out at some of the community public relations events to add credibility to the nature of those events.

The author attended several community meetings and spoke to a number of the LRC members who were at pains (and embarrassment) to publicly declare that they had no authority nor any real influence on any issue.

As such the LRC was generally informed and not consulted on issues, and where consultation did occur, their advice was not adopted.

The Minutes of the MidCoast LRC Meetings were published inconsistently on MidCoast's website and up until recently (two weeks ago) there were no Minutes published for the period December 2016 to May 2017, until the author enquired about this anomaly.

The LRC Minutes reflect the lack of influence and or authority of the LRC.

However, they do confirm that there was **no** formalised Community Consultation process for an SRV of 28.5% over 4 years in 2016.

### **MidCoast's SRV Application.**

In MidCoast's SRV application it asserts that it was engaged with the community on a SRV application increase. This is not accurate.

Whilst it is true that MidCoast conducted a number of information / public relations events in certain selected areas in the new LGA as part of the amalgamation process between June and October 2016. These were generally very poorly attended events, with Members of the Local Representative Committee (LRC) making up close to 25% of the attendance. The author attended a number of these events.

The events were not billed nor advertised as specifically to discuss a **28.5% SRV increase**, over four years, nor was the quantum on the SRV specified at these events.

The events took the form of a presentation over a broad range of issues followed by with some questions.

The events were poorly advertised and promoted in a geographically challenged region spread across 10,000 square kilometres.

Community attendance was very poor as there was considerable public outrage at the amalgamation and the effective takeover by the Great Lakes Council. It is also clear that those MidCoast persons that did conduct these events were very cautious not to inflame the situation by speaking about such contentious issues as an imminent or a potential 28.5 % SRV increase so soon after being amalgamated and in the face of the Premier's promise. It just did not happen!

The MidCoast Council Agenda and Minutes during the period **June to 23 November 2016** Meeting do not contain any recommendations nor any resolutions passed by the Administrator:

- ❖ **Authorising a community engagement process for a 28.5% SRV application for the 2017/18 year.**
- ❖ **Authorising a budget for community engagement process for a 28.5% SRV application for the 2017/18 year.**
- ❖ **Adopting a strategy for community consultation and engagement process for a 28.5% SRV application for the 2017/18 year.**

So clearly no such application / consultation process had been mandated / authorised nor was the community informed through the Agenda and Minutes. This also meant the community was denied the opportunity to participate and put forward formal submissions nor attend Council meetings and speak to the issue.

It is also important to note that there was nothing in the LRC Meeting Minutes reflecting an application for an SRV until 9 November 2016 when there was an oblique reference was made:

**“13.5 - Proposed special rate variation**  
Report for November Council meeting being prepared.”

No reference in LRC Minutes to community engagement for an SRV, nor more specifically for a 28.5% increase over four years.

At the MidCoast Council Meeting of the 23 November Council Meeting a report entitled Special Rate Variation Application to IPART by the Interim General Manager was presented as part of the Agenda for that meeting. This report had only been available to the public for several days.

There was only one speaker, that objected to the SRV. There were no other speakers. No-one knew about the meeting. The community was simply unaware that a decision would be made at that meeting to go forward with a notification to IPART. There was no advanced public knowledge.

This supported by MidCoast’s Jetty Research report where:

➤ For the Survey Question:

***“Were you aware of this proposed special rate variation prior to reading the background material for this survey?”***

**Answers:**

***NO! - 66% of all surveyed.***

Unsure - 1% of all surveyed.

Yes - 33%

There had been no extensive media coverage of the SRV nor the faux community consultation and the vast majority of rate payers and residents were not aware of a proposal for an SRV increase let alone for an increase of 28.5% over four years, and clearly MidCoast failed to provide an adequate opportunity for the rate payers and residents to participate in any consultation.

The Report by the Interim General Manager included a document entitled:

Community Engagement Strategy  
Proposed Special rate Variation Strategy - 2017/18.

This document was not signed nor was the author identified. It was not dated and it was not presented to an earlier Council meeting for endorsement.

Whilst there were events listed as part of the “Community Engagement Strategy” there were no specific dates nor places identified in this document nor did the Interim General Manager’s Report on this SRV application contain any account of results of the Community Engagement Strategy. This is all very dubious and retrofitted to create the appearance of extensive community consultation.

In Interim General Manager’s Report there was the heading of:

**“CONSULTATION**

Consultation has been undertaken in line with the Community Engagement Strategy.”

There was no report nor account of all the community feedback nor events listed in the Community Engagement Strategy.

There was no reference under the heading of ‘Budget Implications’ as to the Budget for the application process nor for the Community Engagement Strategy, nor for any associated research nor surveys such as the Jetty Research.

In the Minutes of that Meeting the Administrator made no further references, comments nor additions to the subject, nor any further resolutions. The Minutes read:

**178/16 RESOLVED (Turner) (as per recommendation)**

That Council notify the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) of its intention to apply for a section 508A special variation to its general income in terms of that set out in the report.

So clearly, neither public opinion nor consultation, was even considered before a decision was made to notify IPART of the intention to apply for a SRV for the 2017/18 year.

The resolution didn’t even refer to the 2017/18 year. This was all so loose and sloppy!

On 22 December 2016 following a Media Release from MidCoast Council the Manning River Times and the Great Lakes Advocate (the two largest paid newspapers) carried the headline: **“MidCoast Council puts SRV application on hold”**.

The article read:

*“The special rate variation proposed by MidCoast Council to address the region’s roads and bridges has been placed on hold, with the Office of Local Government ruling out 2017/18 SRV applications for NSW’s merged councils.”*

The Interim General Manager was quoted as saying:

*“Interim general manager Glenn Handford explains, “While it’s disappointing we’re unable to make an application at this stage, the merger has allowed us to identify other funding opportunities, through efficiencies and savings, that will be dedicated to road renewal.”*

*MidCoast Council will also apply to the State Government to allocate \$14million of the Stronger Communities funding towards the program for the area’s roads and bridges.”*

**This story was also screened by several local TV channels, and radio news.**

So the application could not be continued and the matter terminated. The Public understood the matter was dead.

It was also interesting to see that Mr Handford had identified alternate sources to an SRV increase in the Media Statement.

We have included a copy of our original Submission dated 29 May 2017 to MidCoast, opposing an SRV for 2017/18, within the body of this Submission. It details very specific matters of relevance to MidCoast's application to IPART.

It important to stress that as far as the community was aware an application for an SRV in 2017/18 was totally dead. MidCoast did not make any further statements on this issue until late April 2017.

Previously, I have alluded to authority levels and how Council's develop a mandate and authority to act.

Unbeknownst to the MidCoast community the Interim General Manager initiated secret negotiations with Members of Parliament to override the instruction from the OLG that there could be no SRV applications for newly created Councils.

We do not know whether this was independent or in collaboration with the Administrator.

What we do know is that there was nor authority nor mandate provided to the Interim General Manager to do this, either by way of a Council Report or a Council Resolution. Nor did the Interim General Manager have such a mandate under his delegated authority given to him by Council Resolution.

We would also assert that the Administrator, if he was involved in such activity also did not have the authority to instruct the Interim General Manager to conduct secret meetings and lobby sessions to override the promises made to the Community by the former Premier and former Minister for Local government, and the instruction from the OLG.

Nor was the community informed or consulted on MidCoast's intention to override these commitments and instructions and frankly there was no overwhelming community support for such an action. I might add since the announcement of the amendment to the Local Government Act allowing MidCoast to apply for an SRV there has been staunch community outrage, assertions of betrayal and calls for a demerger. If a SRV is approved then this will add further fuel to the raging fire.

This matter goes to institutional trust and public confidence. And it has implications directly to IPART.

Usually an Administrator is a person appointed that has extensive professional local government experience. Such a person is cautious, conservative and follows due process. An application for an SRV increase is a very serious matter with significant consequence on a community, particularly in a low socio economic region.

This application should not have been made at this time. It could have been left to democratically elected Council to make such a determination.



There was no formal community consultation in 2017 in relation to MidCoast's "recent" application to IPART for a 28.5% SRV over four years commencing in the 2017/18 year.

As previously stated the original application was abandoned and as such an entirely fresh process should have been initiated including a fresh round of community consultation and engagement. This is the only fair, transparent and a reasonable course of action.

Let us be very clear MidCoast has at no time admitted nor indicated to the community that it secretly lobbied Members of Parliament and sought an amendment to be extricated from the Act for the purposes of SRV applications.

It needs to explain to people why it sought this course of action, under what authorities / mandate and why there, is such an urgency that could not wait until a democratically elected Council was established in September.

The fact is by the legislation MidCoast can apply at any time for an SRV so it could have initiated a full and transparent round of community engagement and consultation and made an application at anytime this year.

IPARTs role in this matter of institutional credibility and trust issue is very important.

From the time MidCoast became aware that it was eligible to apply for an SRV, it should have made this very clear to the community and initiated a fresh round of community consultation for this application.

Rather it adopted a very secretive approach to the issue as you will read in our Submission to MidCoast Council dated 29 May.

29 May 2017

Mr John Turner  
The Administrator  
Mid Coast Council  
By Email

## SUBMISSION - SRV 2017

Dear Sir,

I am writing to you **to express my serious opposition to the Addendum to the 2016-2017 Delivery Program / Operational Plan, which includes a Special Rate Variation (SRV) scenario**, which your Administration intends to apply for, and introduce, for the 2017/18 year.

The Good Governance Guide defines a Council as:

*“The Council consists of democratically elected members. Council’s role is to ensure ‘...the peace, order, and good governance...’ of its municipality.”*

By this definition, whilst the name may be ‘MidCoast’, we do not have a Council, but a government imposed amalgam of what were three (3) former local government areas into one regional entity, an Administration, governed by an Administrator. A Council will only commence and exist when there are democratically elected Councillors.

With this in mind, I suggest that you should only be making a very narrow range of decisions, limited to the facilitation of the amalgamation, and not wide-ranging resolutions such as an SRV, which will have significant consequences, particularly as, in a few month’s time, you will not occupy your present role to experience the collateral damage, the harm, and to pick up the pieces.

Most people that I speak to are shocked and outraged by the devious methods and the fallacious manner in which your Administration went about overturning the solemn promises made by the former Premier of NSW, Mike Baird, the former Minister for Local Government, Paul Toole and, indeed, the entire NSW Coalition Government, to the people of this LGA, that there would be no SRV’s for a period of four (4) years for all newly amalgamated Councils. I regard your actions, and those of your Administration in this scandal, as nothing short of outrageous, and a very deep betrayal of our community. This is an issue that people will neither forget nor forgive for a very long time.

In a Statement contained in the NSW Government’s “Stronger Councils Portal: Stronger Councils / Stronger Communities” (accessed of 22 May 2017, which was posted at the time of amalgamation), the NSW Government states (**Appendix 1**):

*“New councils will receive a wide range of additional benefits:*

- *Ratepayers in new council areas will not experience rate rises as a result of mergers. They will pay no more for their rates than they would have, under their old councils, for the next four years.”*

Clearly, by circumventing the intent of this promise and lobbying to have the MidCoast LGA excluded from the NSW Government's promise of a four year SRV freeze to all newly amalgamated councils, your Administration **has denied the people of this new local government area a very clearly defined and announced sworn benefit!**

I might add that neither you, nor your Interim General Manager, had the authority, nor the mandate, to lobby Mr Paul Green of the Christian Democrats, nor any other Members of the NSW Parliament, to introduce an amendment to exclude the MidCoast LGA from the NSW Government's promised four-year SRV-free holiday.

Neither you, nor your administration, announced, canvassed, debated nor advertised throughout the entire LGA of 90,000 residents spread across 10,000 square kilometre, openly and transparently, the intention of your Administration to seek the Amendment to the "*Local Government Amendment (Rates-Merged Council Areas) Bill 2017*". This was done by stealth, and it goes against all the principles of open Government, transparency and community involvement in the decision making process. This is a matter that may be referred to the NSW Ombudsman.

After this duplicitous Amendment was passed by the Parliament into Law, neither did you, nor your Administration, 'come clean' with the community and announce that the Interim General Manager had lobbied members of Parliament with what can best be described as highly dubious results from an unrepresentative survey, to secure support for the exemption of the MidCoast LGA from the provisions of that Act, meaning that this community would now be exposed to SRV's.

Curiously, there have been no printed articles in relation to this entire SRV scandal (nor the Addendum) in the paid newspapers, where MidCoast places weekly half- and full-page advertisements.

## **2016 SRV Consultation**

*"The Community Engagement Strategy must be based on the social justice principles of access, equity, participation and rights."*

Whilst the Addendum claims that your administration undertook a form of community consultation in 2016, very few people in the LGA know or knew anything about this, and it is clear that, if there was any form of consultation, it was not specific to a 21.5% rate increase (over 4 years) to be permanently imbedded in the rates. The indisputable fact is that very few people really seem to know anything about a consultation last year, nor a rate rise proposal.

In the time context of 2016, people from all three LGA's were still getting over the forced amalgamation, and most were aware of the NSW Government's promise of the four year SRV exemption for amalgamated Councils. This was one of the NSW Government's key assertions to support amalgamations, which had been 'blitzed' throughout all of our media, including the Sydney print, TV and radio media that were shown here, for months.

Therefore, if MidCoast had sought to genuinely engage with the Community on an SRV proposal, after the NSW Government made and promoted the promise that there would be no SRV increases for four years, then clearly it needed to resort to some unique and special methods to overcome the community's understanding that there could be no SRVs for four years.

Clearly, your Administration did not do this! A cursory examination of the local print media shows very little coverage, nor does it demonstrate any tangible attempts by your Administration to derail the community's perception that there could or should be an SRV, nor any 'exceptional' case for the justification for an SRV.

Further, in MidCoast's Jetty Survey (November 2016), a document which your Administration has used to justify and misrepresent the community's support for an SRV, there is a question which specifically tests "awareness" to a "proposed special rate variation":

*"Were you aware of this proposed special rate variation prior to reading the background material for this survey?"*

**Answers:**

**NO! - 66% of all surveyed.**

Unsure - 1% of all surveyed.

Yes - 33%

In relation to the Community Consultation for an SRV, the material contained in the Addendum has been dressed up to suggest that there was a range of events, which were all part of the SRV consultation, frankly this is just not true! MidCoast may have conducted a number of events, but these were poorly advertised, there was minimal awareness as to the nature of the events, and a 21.5% SRV increase over four years was not the key announced theme of these events.

The events were very poorly attended and, on average, nearly 25% of those who attended these events were members of MidCoast's LRC.

After examination of MidCoast's meeting Agenda and Minutes between June 2016 and November 2016, there is no reference to, nor any resolutions passed for, an SRV application, nor a budget specifically for Community Engagement, nor a published Community Engagement Strategy for community consultation, nor specifically for an SRV of 5% per annum, for four years (compounded to 21.5%), until the 23rd November MidCoast General Meeting where a resolution was passed:

**INTERIM GENERAL MANAGER**

**1 SPECIAL RATE VARIATION APPLICATION TO IPART**

Steve Embry, Director Corporate & Business Systems

**178/16 RESOLVED (Turner) (as per recommendation)**

That Council notify the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) of its intention to apply for a section 508A special variation to its general income in terms of that set out in the report.

After which there was no 'community consultation'.

So, clearly, there was no legislated authority for a Community Engagement for an SRV, no published Community Engagement Strategy (process) for an SRV, no budget for community information (advertising) and engagement in the relevant period.

As such, there was no way for the community of 90,000 people spread across 10,000 square kilometres, nor the local media, to follow nor to understand what was going on in relation to an SRV!

The Community Engagement element of the Addendum was retrofitted to create the appearance of a concerted community consultation process for an SRV – this is plainly cynical and untrue.

Councils act by resolutions, they derive their authority and mandate from resolutions, there were no resolutions for an SRV application until 23rd November, which is when the contents of the Addendum

claim that community consultation had been completed. Further, IPART does not recommend that community engagement should be conducted immediately prior to the Christmas period.

Following the 23rd November 2016 meeting, MidCoast was advised by IPART that it was ineligible to apply for an SRV, yet the Administration persisted, without any community support nor awareness, nor any legislated mandate (Resolution).

## **The Addendum**

In view of the Community's perceptions regarding the NSW Government's promised SRV exemption for newly amalgamated Councils, and the fact that it had been reported in the media that MidCoast was advised by IPART that it was ineligible to apply for an SRV, MidCoast should have gone to extra-ordinary efforts to ensure that the Addendum (and the 'Intent') was publicised and promoted for the entire community to understand what was being proposed through this Addendum. Regrettably, your Administration adopted cynical tactics of stealth, and chose not to clearly inform the community, nor to use any of the myriad communication tools at its disposal to explain what was being proposed. IPART may not find this acceptable!

There were no media releases, no public announcements explaining the intent of the Addendum, nor were all ratepayers notified of the intent of the Addendum. The vast majority of residents and ratepayers are not even aware of the existence of this 'Addendum'.

There has been no public consultation pertaining to the Addendum.

The Addendum is being retrofitted (a popular tactic by your Administration), to the 2016-2017 Delivery Program / Operational Plan, which has a month to run and is about to expire and, rather ironically, a new Plan has already been placed on exhibition by MidCoast.

These are not acceptable tactics for a local government body to adopt and, frankly, there is no justification for such indecent haste to initiate an SRV. The backlog in infrastructure has been around for decades, and a few more months will make no significant difference.

A new Council will be elected in September, and it should have the authority and mandate to deal with an SRV issue. An elected council of community representatives should make such a decision, and not a government-imposed Administrator.

Let us be very clear that the NSW Government imposed this amalgamation against the wishes of the people of three local government areas, the NSW Government owns and has the responsibility for the mess it has created and, as such, IT should be responsible for the consequences, not the people of the newly formed LGA. If there is a short fall, then perhaps the NSW Government should pay for it, rather than the people of this LGA

The people should not be made to pay for the Government's mistakes. Nor should you attempt to mask or disguise the Government's mistakes by increasing our rates.

Your Addendum does not explain the compounding effect of a 5% increase each year for four years, nor whether the rate increase will be permanently imbedded in the rate structure!

## **Awareness to the Addendum.**

On 1 May 2017, "MidCoast Council" held an Extraordinary Council Meeting in Forster that lasted a total of 19 minutes.

In that Meeting, the "Council" (Administrator) passed a resolution adding an "Addendum" to the Delivery Program / Operational Plan 2016/17 (which at the time had only two months to run). Rather interestingly, the new 2017/18 Operational Plan has now also been placed on exhibition.

The effect of this retrofitted "Addendum" to the Delivery Program / Operational Plan 2016/17 **will now allow** "MidCoast Council" to apply for a Special Rate Variation (a rate rise above the rate peg) to IPART.

There was no advance media coverage, nor any press releases or other announcements by Council, to inform the Community of "Council's" proposed "retrospective changes / additions" to the Delivery Program / Operational Plan 2016/17, which would result in opening the door for "Council" to apply to IPART for an SRV in 2017.

Following this decision by the Administrator, there was no immediate announcement nor media release to inform the community of the passing of the resolution by the Administrator, nor of "Council's" immediate intentions for an SRV application, nor that the Delivery Program / Operational Plan 2016/17 Addendum was on public exhibition starting from **1 May 2017**.

On Friday 5th May 2017, at roughly 4pm when all the local media had already finished and most had left for the weekend, MidCoast issued a Media Release known as *“News Briefs - Week beginning Monday 8th May 2017”*. Buried in the thirteen items of that Media release was a brief snippet containing a confusing single paragraph reference to “Council” applying for a rate rise in 2017.

**Clearly, no-one in the local media has picked up on this, as there has been no media coverage as at 26th May 2017.** The Manning Alliance issued a Media Release on 11 May 2017 (updated on 15 May 2017, but this was not reported by the local Media (**Appendix 3**).

On Wednesday 10th May, ten days out of the 28 day exhibition period, there was no print media coverage (with the exception of the free Manning Community News – **Appendix 2**) of “MidCoast Council’s” plan to increase rates nor of the fact that the Addendum was now on public exhibition. (With only 18 days left for Submissions).

On 10 May 2017, “MidCoast Council” did publish a full page advertisement in the Manning River Times, The Wingham Chronicle, (and presumably the Great Lakes Advocate and the Gloucester Advocate) (**Appendix 5**). Buried within that full page advert in small print are several obscure references:

**Under the heading “Council Meetings” (Appendix 6) :**

“The purpose of this Meeting is to adopt the addendum (small “a”) to the Delivery Program / Operational Plan 2016/17.”

**Under the heading “Have Your Say”:**

“Council has placed on public exhibition an addendum (again small “a”) to the 2016-2017 Delivery Program / Operational Plan to include a Special Rate variation scenario.”

Given your Administration’s practices one has to assume that the intent of using a small ‘a’ in the word Addendum was a further cynical attempt at minimising attention to this serious issue.

On any reasonable objective assessment, it would be very hard for the average person to decode the information in the above two published statements, nor interpret them as MidCoast Council’s intention to fully inform the community of its objective to pursue a Special Rate Variation in June & July, for introduction in August of this year.

So much for transparency, engaging and informing the community of MidCoast Council’s intentions to apply for a Special Rate Variation in June / July 2017.

Public submissions relating to the Addendum close on 29th May 2017, yet MidCoast only advertised the Addendum on 10th May 2017, this was not adequate notice, nor did it provided the requisite 28 days exhibition period (from date of MidCoast’s advertisement announcing that the Addendum was on public exhibition. This is particularly serious given the overall context of the SRV and the potential imposition of a significant SRV on a community totally in the dark about the Addendum.

MidCoast has scheduled a “Council Meeting” for 31st May 2017 (two days after the close of Submissions), to adopt the Addendum to the 2016-2017 Delivery Program / Operational Plan.

Clearly MidCoast is not anticipating many public submissions!

In its haste to rush this through, MidCoast appears to have ignored one small “little” technical hitch, and that is that MidCoast’s Meeting Agenda (including reports) should be published one week before the scheduled meeting day. **This is a transparency measure, to allow the Community to be aware of what is proposed.**

So, the Agenda for this meeting (and Reports) should have been published on 24th May, 2017. **This did not occur!** It will be interesting to see how Council’s Interim General Manager explains away the fact that the Agenda and Reports are to be published on 24 May 2017, but Council would still be accepting submissions on the Addendum (and the SRV) for a further 5 days.

By this timetable, MidCoast would have less than 40 hours to review, analyse and report on all public Submissions in relation to the Addendum (and a potential 21.5% SRV increase over four years), which were not included in their Meeting Agenda.

The Meeting Agenda for MidCoast Council Meeting of the 31st May 2017, was not been published on MidCoast’s website as at 11am Friday 26th May, 2017. In fact, even the Meeting of 31st May 2017 did not even appear on the schedule of Meetings on the Council’s Website. **(Appendix 7)**, an image of the MidCoast’s Website taken at 11am Friday 26th May, 2017. Curiously MidCoast’s the SRV site was down for a number of days from around 16 May **(Appendix 8)**.

The community has not had a full 28 days to be aware of the existence of the Addendum and to lodge Submissions, as MidCoast only advertised that the Addendum was placed on exhibition on 10th May 2017.

## **Rate Peg**

On 29th November 2016, IPART announced the rate peg as 1.5% for the financial year 2017/18, yet the contents of MidCoast’s Addendum suggest a rate peg of 2.5%. This is inaccurate and misleading particularly in the context that the rate peg, over the past 3 years, has been under 2% and is likely to stay that way for some time. As such, the financial information in the Addendum document is inaccurate. The community should be informed that MidCoast would be harvesting 3.5% on top of the annual rate peg!

It is important to note that in MidCoast’s own Jetty Survey, only 32% supported an SRV of 5%. **A significant 65% of those polled did not support a 5% SRV. There is no public mandate for a 5% SRV!**

## **Affordability.**



The proposed SRV will come into effect at a time when a range of other major increases in levies and taxes will have a severe impact upon a significant section of our community.

As one example, an SRV, in August 2017, will coincide with the introduction of the Fire and Emergency Services Levy (FESL) that will burden the average ratepayer on a residential block by \$233 in 2017.

The new LGA has some of the poorest postcodes in the nation.

Median Total income in 2013 (ABS):

**Greater Taree:**

Median total income (excl. Government pensions and allowances) in 2013 was \$35,336

**Gloucester:**

Median total income (excl. Government pensions and allowances) in 2013 was \$30,544

**Great Lakes:**

Median total income (excl. Government pensions and allowances) in 2013 was 31,961

**The average median total income for the three amalgamated LGA's (2013) was \$32,614.**

**This is pre-tax!!!**

This is against a State Average Median total income of \$44,940 (2013).

Currently, national inflation is running at 2.1% (which may be higher in regional centres) and national wage growth is at 1.9% and likely to be much, much lower in regional centres **(Appendix 9)**.

Therefore, a rate rise at this time will significantly impact and hurt many ratepayers and residents.

MidCoast did not consult any key stakeholders that provide services to the underprivileged sectors of this community.

It is clear, on any objective assessment of the demographics as well as the socio-economic circumstances, that this community cannot afford a 21.5% SRV increase over four years.

Other factors mitigating against a rate rise at this time are as follows:

- Very high unemployment in the LGA.
- There is a higher proportion of older residents and a lower proportion in the 20-30s age group in the LGA.
- 30% of our population is aged 60 and above.
- The new LGA has a significant Indigenous population.
- The LGA is ranked as the 12th most disadvantaged in the state.
- The area has a higher than average rate of home ownership, with 43% of residents owning their own home, and a further 27% paying off a mortgage.

- Most dwellings (75%) are 'single' houses.
- The Manning has a higher proportion of single person households (25%) and this is expected to increase as the population ages.
- A high level of the population is on a fixed income, with close to 30% receiving pensioner rebates.

## The Jetty Survey

MidCoast has used this survey to secure an Amendment to the *“Local Government Amendment (Rates-Merged Council Areas) Bill 2017,”* and is now attempting to purport through this survey that the entire LGA is in support of a rate rise. This is plainly untrue!

This survey, at best, is greatly inaccurate and unrepresentative of the real situation and, therefore, statistically and interpretatively invalid.

### Key Points:

- The survey was limited to persons who had a fixed residential telephone line. Data released by the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) on 30th November 2016 shows that **31% of Australians do not have a fixed landline at home.**
- The initial sample of 570 was selected from a “pool” of 4130. There is no data to indicate whether this “pool” is accurately reflective of the new LGA as the data base was sourced by Jetty Research from a third party. We know that the survey was limited to persons with a landline, so 31% of the population of the new LGA was immediately excluded from the poll.
- 570 persons from a population of 90,500 (2016) were **“recruited”** for the poll, this is less than 0.63 of 1 % of the entire population of the LGA. In the Jetty Research Report under the heading of Methodology:

*“Residents were initially contacted and **recruited** to participate in a telephone survey at a later date. This random **recruitment** was conducted from November 14th to 17th, with 570 people agreeing at that stage to complete a survey.”*

- Only 60 people participated in MidCoast’s online survey, and the results of this poll were effectively discounted by MidCoast’s own research company, Jetty Research, and described as being **“opt in.”** (See qualification further on). This absence of participation highlights and demonstrates the clear lack of awareness to MidCoast’s online poll.
- In it’s Report the Survey Company has stated:
  - *Please note that due to the nature of the survey, not all respondents answered every question.*

- *Caution should be taken in analysing some questions due to the small sample size.*
- The survey company, Jetty Research, claims that it was a “*random and representative telephone survey*”. In actual fact this may not be the case!
- The Company contacted and “recruited” a number of people (total unknown) to participate in the Survey. It appears that in total, 570 persons agreed to participate and were all sent an information pack (essentially promoting the merits of an SRV).
- In the Methodology Section of their report, Jetty Research states:
 

*“Quotas were applied by region, with a designated minimum of 225 in each of the Great Lakes and Greater Taree Councils. and 100 in the former Gloucester Council **recruited**. This was designed to reflect differences in population size<sup>3</sup> while still maintaining an adequate sample size for cross analysis. No other formal quotas were applied, although attempts were made to ensure an adequate mix of respondents across age groups and sub-regions.”*
- Whilst Jetty Research asserts in the statement above, that they attempted to “*reflect differences in population*”, the result was that rather imbalanced quotas were imposed for each former LGAs. One assumes this occurred with the total knowledge and agreement of MidCoast’s Administration. Of the 570 persons preselected and recruited:
  - **A quota of only 225** persons were allocated to the former Greater Taree Council area, which had a total population of **50,000**, **thus** representing **0.45** of 1% of the entire Taree Council population.
  - **A quota of 225** persons were allocated to the former Great Lakes Council area, which had a total population of **36,500**, **thus** representing **0.62** of 1% of the entire Great Lakes population.
  - **An extra-ordinary quota of 100** persons were allocated to the former Gloucester Shire Council area, which had a total population of **5,064**, **thus** representing **2%** of the entire Gloucester population.
  - These quotas were significantly imbalanced in relation to the populations of the former LGA’s and, therefore, the “representative” element is clearly corrupt! This imbalanced and unrealistic representation of populations (the quota for each LGA) immediately and significantly compromises and corrupts the accuracy and the statistical validity of the poll, particularly as there are severe socio-economic disparities between the three former LGAs, as well as political views / sentiment).
  - Rather mysteriously, **the balance of 20 persons to make up the 570 were not even accounted for by the Survey**. This represents 5% of the final total of 407 that were surveyed.

- Much sampling theory suggests that for construct validity, you start applying the sampling validity proportions at the lowest level upon which you want to report. i.e. at each of the former councils. THEN enlarge samples in some areas to reflect the differences in actual populations. This does not appear to have occurred.
- Of the initial sample of 570, only 407 actually participated (or agreed to participate) in the survey. This reduced the survey to only 0.45 of 1% of the total population.
- In the “Methodology” Section of their report, Jetty Research states:
 

*“All those recruited were contacted at least once and, where successfully reached, given the opportunity to complete a survey. In all, 407 of the original 570 people recruited followed through and completed a telephone interview.”*
- The survey does not account for, nor does it include, **the 163 persons who refused or did not participate in the Survey after receiving MidCoast’s literature**. These people should have been considered and included in the Survey and perhaps as a negative response to the SRV. Particularly when the Survey Report admits that: ***“All those recruited were contacted at least once and, where successfully reached, given the opportunity to complete a survey”*** (that is in the Survey period November 23rd and 30<sup>th</sup>).”
- This admission also suggests (following Jetty Research’s methodology) that the survey was now no longer ‘random’, as 163 people chose to ‘**opt-out**’, therefore those that did participate chose to ‘**opt-in**’, and clearly this compromises the ‘random and representative’ assertions of the Survey Report.
- In the Executive Summary, the survey company states in relation to MidCoast’s online Survey:
 

***“The online survey was opt-in and, therefore, is not statistically representative of the community. Rather, the online survey was designed to allow those who wished to express an opinion the opportunity to do so.”***

Clearly, this is also what happened with the Jetty Telephone survey, when 163 people chose to ‘**opt-out**’ and 407 people chose to ‘**opt-in**’, to participate in the Survey, after receiving MidCoast’s literature. As Jetty suggests: ***“those who wished to express a opinion had the opportunity to do so”*** after reading MidCoast literature.

Therefore the Survey ceased to be statistically representative as it was ‘**opt-in**’!
- A well-founded argument can be put that those that did participate **were predisposed to an SRV increase**, so the survey was no longer “random or representative”.
- The ‘interpretative analysis’ is therefore inaccurate.
- Following Jetty Research’s statement above, in relation to MidCoast’s online

survey, there are two very obvious questions that arise: *“Was the online survey a simple appeasement of the community, or did people in the LGA simply not know anything about an SRV proposal?”* According to the Jetty Research report: *“The online survey went live on November 23rd and closed on December 8<sup>th</sup>”*. This was a period of 15 days yet only 60 people participated.

- Jetty also claims: *“The online survey was promoted via a prominent link on the homepage to all SRV information (including the information pack and survey.) Council also promoted it at public meetings and in media releases. Clearly that “promotion” was not very effective!*
- In 2015, Greater Taree City Council (GTCC) conducted an online SRV poll, nearly 400 persons participated. The GTCC LGA population is roughly 55% of the new MidCoast LGA population. Had the community of the new LGA been aware of the SRV proposal one could reasonably conclude (based on the GTCC poll participation) that in excess of 730 people could have participated in MidCoast’s online poll. In this case, there were only 60 people that participated in MidCoast’s online poll, this represents 8.25% of a possible poll sample of 730.
- Other serious considerations in assessing the accuracy and reliability of the information, and the interpretative analysis of the Survey are that the Survey company also nominated **an error rate of 4.9%**. This is quite significant when one also factors in **20 lost participants (5%)**, and that **10% of people surveyed were not even ratepayers**.
- Jetty Research also makes the following admission:

*“In addition to the random sampling error, above, there may also be some forms of non-random sampling error which may have affected results. These include respondents without fixed line phones, the proportion of non-respondents (refusals, no answers etc.) and/or imperfections in the survey database.”*

- At the beginning of the Survey Report, the company also states:

**Disclaimer:**

*While all care and diligence has been exercised in the preparation of this report, Jetty Research Pty. Ltd. **does not warrant the accuracy of the information contained within and accepts no liability for any loss or damage that may be suffered as a result of reliance on this information**, whether or not there has been any error, omission or negligence on the part of Jetty Research Pty. Ltd. or its employees.*

- For the Survey Question:

***“Were you aware of this proposed special rate variation prior to reading the background material for this survey?”***

**Answers:**

***NO! - 66% of all surveyed.***

***Unsure - 1% of all surveyed.***

***Yes - 33%***

- Just one third of those polled (33%) were aware of the SRV prior to reading the background material. When one looks at the breakdown of this figure, it is highly suspect. This is broken up as follows:
  - Gloucester had the highest at 55% or 38 people were 'aware' (out of a total 69 surveyed)
  - The Manning had 24%, 42 people were 'aware' (out of a total 175 surveyed)
  - The Great Lakes awareness figure is not even listed in the report, but based on an overall average of 33% we calculate this to be 20% or only 32 people (out of a total 162 surveyed).
  - The above figures from the Survey, clearly confirm **that overall awareness to MidCoast's SRV proposal was very poor!** In addition the sample is really just too small to accurately represent a population of 90,500 people.
  - So, from the combined total participation of Great Lakes and Greater Taree (total population 85,000 people), only 74 persons, out of a total of 337 surveyed, were aware of the SRV prior to reading Council's material. This represents only 22% of the combined sample (337) of Great Lakes and Greater Taree and only 18% of the overall sample of 407 persons.
- The lack of awareness is further accentuated in the case of those aged 18-39 years, where awareness was only 20%, **a demographic which covers young families with multiple children.**
- 70% of the surveyed sample did not have any children under 15 in the household; this would skew any questions **relating the ability to pay significantly higher rates.**
- According to *"MidCoast Council area / id profile"* data in 2011, the total number of households in the MidCoast LGA was 36,303. Of these there were 7398 household or 20% with children under 15 years of age. The total percentage of households with children (in 2011) was 31%. Clearly the survey did not represent households with children.
- 90% of those surveyed were aged 40 years plus! Meaning only 10% of the under 40 age group was represented in the survey. Families with children etc were ignored.
- According to *"MidCoast Council area / id profile"* data in 2011, the total population of MidCoast LGA was 85,848, and the population under 40 years was 33,449 or 40% of the total population. These figures confirm that the survey sample only represented 25% of those aged under 40 or 8585 people, out of a possible 33,449 people.
- **Poll Corruption:**

The poll was further corrupted by the fact that 8% of those polled were **not even ratepayers**. This figure was even higher in the Manning, as 11% of all those polled were not ratepayers and, in Gloucester, the figure of polled non-rate-payers was 12%.

- The survey contained a number of very “leading” questions. Particularly questions 5, 6,10,16, 19-25.
- The phrasing of questions was “tricky” and sometimes misleading. As an example Question 11:

*“MidCoast Council has proposed a special rate variation of 5% (including the 2.5% rate peg) for four years. The variation is designed to fund the maintenance of existing sealed roads and to start addressing the backlog of works required to bring roads and bridges in poor condition back to standard. Were you aware of this proposed special rate variation prior to our initial call?”*

- The preamble to the question influenced the answer by “telling” and “selling” people on the substance of the SRV proposal.
  - The rate peg for 2017/18 is not 2.5%.
  - There is no reference to the compounding effect of the SRV – 21.5% over 4 years.
  - This question was asked of people who had received (and studied) an information pack spruiking the SRV, as such many may have answered this question on the basis of receiving the information pack with information about MidCoast’s SRV Proposal and not from “general” awareness.
  - Clearly one has to be suspicious as to why the preamble (sales pitch was even read out to people who had already received and read the information pack).
  - The obvious simple question that should have been asked, without preamble: should have been: *Were you aware of this proposed special rate variation prior to our initial call?*
  - *This should have been immediately followed by a further question: How did you come to be aware of the SRV proposal, (with the consultant then listing a number of options). This is normal industry practice!*
- Council is seeking a 5% SRV increase per year, for four years which, when compounded, equals an overall increase of 21.5%. However, the Survey question, aimed at establishing the community’s support for an SRV, does not state this, and so it is misleading:

***“Which of the following statements most closely aligns with your views on the proposed special rate variation of 5%?”***

- The survey question did not indicate that the SRV was **for at least 4 years, and that it would become a compounded rate increase, nor that it would be permanently imbedded in the rate base.**
- For this question, **only 32% supported an outright SRV increase of 5%.** This is the only mandate that the MidCoast Administration can claim to have for a 5% SRV - 32%.
- A further 44% supported an SRV, **but believed that a rate of 5% was too high.** Yet MidCoast wishes to ignore this response and forge ahead with an SRV of 5%.
- A further 21% totally rejected the need for an SRV and 3% were unsure.

Clearly, 65% of those surveyed were opposed to an SRV of 5%! **This is indisputable!**

**A 32% response is hardly an overwhelming mandate,** nor is it any form of tangible evidence from a very dubious survey outcome, to justify the breaking of the NSW Government's solemn promise to the people of New South Wales and the MidCoast LGA, nor to cast the people of the new LGA into the purgatory abyss of unaffordable and unsustainable rate rises as a further punishment for being amalgamated.

- For the question: *"Were you aware of the proposed Environmental Levy prior to reading the background material for this survey?"* **A staggering 87 % of survey participants said No!**
- Only 13% were aware of the proposed Environmental Levy prior to being involved in the survey. The figure was even less for what the survey report described as the "Manning", being only 9%. That is 9% of 50,000 people. Hardly an endorsement of Council's communications strategy, nor support for an increase to the Environmental Levy. Only 4% of those aged 18 to 39 years were aware of the Environmental Levy.
- There was a failure in terminology by the Survey Company as at times they referred to Taree and other times it was "the Manning" and other times Greater Taree, this is just sloppy and inaccurate!

### **Other Technical Observations pertaining to the Jetty Survey.**

- Roads and Bridges have large impacts on businesses and workers who use these in their regular work. Should these people's/firms resources also be considered for a tax or rates charge?
- Was the phone respondent the person who manages the home finances or not? i.e. were they speaking from an informed position re family finances?



- Sending out an information pack just days before the phone survey, sending only one side of the argument, is a psychological weapon, akin to a dictator gaining the support of the people before his pogroms.
- Surely to get a valid response, one must present both sides of an argument before asking someone to for an opinion! What was done was attempted brainwashing.
- There was a clear bias in the sample against younger people, those with young families, starting on their careers (i.e. with lower incomes as a result); those with mortgages; etc
- While other statistical terms are thrown in to give the appearance of face validity, construct validity, and imbue confidence, this procedure is not explained.
- If the sample from Gloucester rural was too small, then multiplying those results by a factor does NOT in itself improve the validity.
- In the Survey Report (Methodology page 9). The report uses the term “*statistically significant*” states:

*“Cleaned data was entered into statistical database SPSS for analysis. Where differences in this report are classed as significant, this implies they are statistically significant based on independent sample t-scores, Chi-square or other analysis of variation (ANOVA) calculations.”*

#### **What is not explained is: at what level? Nor why was this level chosen?**

- From page 15 onwards of the Survey – It is NOT VALID to take the mean for categorical variables! The responses are categories, using words (e.g. “satisfied”); there is no guarantee that these are spread evenly, along a linear or a ratio scale. **It is NOT appropriate to try to average categories, just by allocating numbers to these.**

## **Social Impact - WHAT HAPPENS TO ALL THE PEOPLE?**

- Only 32% supported the proposal as suggested (page 20). **65% did not support an SRV of 5%!**
- 24% overall said that the SRV would be a struggle;
- 37% overall said that they would struggle with the double rise (ie including the environmental levy).
- Even if a majority can afford to pay the rises what impact does this extra impost have on the society as a whole, and on individuals?

- Some families will struggle, may end up losing their house, car, etc. Will they end up on welfare, asking for other governmental support – this merely comes back to bite society on the other side of the ledger!
- This could lead to and create more poverty, disadvantage, and a larger dependent welfare-based society, which leads to many other problems for society (welfare, crime, drugs, etc)

## Conclusion

The evidence provided herein clearly demonstrates that MidCoast has failed to adequately inform and engage with the community of 90,500 people, spread across 10,000 square kilometres with regard to the need for an SRV and, specifically, the Addendum to facilitate the SRV at this particular time.

Nor is there any significant justification for circumventing proper practices and community engagement with such indecent haste.

The community has not had a reasonable opportunity to be aware of nor to understand the proposal, nor has it been given adequate opportunity to participate in an open and transparent 'process' and, particularly in circumstances where there are very serious questions relating to the affordability of an SRV by the bulk of community, at this time.

Whatever attempts MidCoast may have made to consult with the Community in 2016 regarding an SRV, (which we would assert were negligible) and in circumstances (and context) where various Ministers of the NSW Government had made solemn promises that there be no SRV increases for newly amalgamated Councils, this all terminated when IPART advised MidCoast that it was ineligible for an SRV application.

As such, if MidCoast wanted to go forward with a new SRV application in 2017 (outside of the normal SRV cycle), it should have initiated a fresh round of Community Engagement and initiated a fresh Community Consultation Strategy in 2017, one that accurately represented community sentiment, and the 90,500 persons in the new LGA, rather than embarking on this clandestine approach to arriving at an SRV by stealth.

The simple fact is the Community has been aware, and has understood, that all newly amalgamated Councils were exempt from SRV increases for four years. MidCoast chose to ignore this and expressed an intent to IPART in December 2016 that it would apply for an SRV. IPART subsequently declared MidCoast ineligible to apply for an SRV.

The Community has been aware that MidCoast was not allowed to apply for an SRV, but they are clearly unaware of the Addendum (and its consequences), which can only be described as a underhanded attempt to circumvent the need for a fresh round of Community Consultation for an SRV increase, which this unelected MidCoast Administration has foreshadowed for 2017/18.

This form of retrospective legislation and devious activity is neither morally nor ethically appropriate, and it will severely erode the public's confidence in local government, particularly in a new MidCoast Council!

This initiative is not in the public interest, nor does it have either a mandate or any tangible form of community support.

**Therefore, we urge the Administrator not to adopt the Addendum to the Delivery Program / Operational Plan 2016/17 and not to proceed with an SRV Application to IPART for the 2017/18 financial year.**

**The prospect of any SRV should be left to a newly elected Council of community representatives!**

Peter Epov

**Chairman  
Manning Alliance Inc.**

## **Appendices:**

**Appendix 1** Extract - (<https://portal.strongercouncils.nsw.gov.au>)

**Appendix 2** Manning Community News- Article/s

**Appendix 3** Manning Alliance Media Release – SRV – 11 May 2017a

**Appendix 4** Manning Alliance Media Release – SRV 29 May 2017

**Appendix 5** MidCoast Manning River Times advertisement dated: 10 May 2017

**Appendix 6** MidCoast extract from Manning River Times advertisement dated 10 May 2017

**Appendix 7** MidCoast Webpage image showing 'no listing' for the Extraordinary Council Meeting 31 May 2017.

**Appendix 8** MidCoast Webpage image showing no public access to SRV Page

**Appendix 9** RBA Wage Price Index forecast.

(<https://www.strongercouncils.nsw.gov.au/>)

# Stronger Councils | Stronger Communities

## New stronger councils

## Introduction

On 12 May 2016 the NSW Government announced the formation of 19 new councils.

The proclamation of the new Bayside Council occurred on 9 September 2016, following the conclusion of legal action by Botany Bay City Council in the Court of Appeal.

**This took the total number of new councils created in 2016 to 20.**

Read the progress report outlining the achievements of these councils (<https://dpcsc-ss.s3.amazonaws.com/Uploads/1487025380/Stronger-Communities-Report.pdf>)

**On 14 February 2017, the Government announced it is continuing its in-principle support for the creation of a further five new councils in metropolitan Sydney, subject to decisions of the courts.**

This would see the number of councils in Greater Sydney reduced from 41 to 24.

There will be no further regional council mergers. Regional councils have already undergone much more consolidation than the city – prior to the new councils created in 2016, regional council numbers had already decreased from 133 to 111 in the past 15 years. By comparison, in Sydney, most council boundaries have not changed since the 1940s, and some have remained unchanged for more than 100 years.

The 20 new stronger, more efficient councils that have already been established will remain in place and are working harder for residents and delivering better services and infrastructure such as roads, parks, playgrounds and sporting facilities.

New councils will receive a wide range of additional benefits:

- Each new council will receive up to \$15 million to invest in community projects like junior sporting facilities, playgrounds and library or pool upgrades.
- Each new council will receive up to \$10 million to streamline administrative processes and cut red tape, with the option of redirecting unspent funds into community projects.
- Ratepayers in new council areas will not experience rate rises as a result of mergers. They will pay no more for their rates than they would have under their old council for the next four years.

## Media release

### Download Media release

- All NSW merged councils to remain in place (<https://dpcsc-ss.s3.amazonaws.com/Uploads/1487038848/14022017-Gladys-Berejiklian-med-rel-All-merged-councils-to-remain-in-place.pdf>) - 14/02/2017
- 19 new councils created in NSW today (<https://dpcsc-ss.s3.amazonaws.com/Uploads/1463439942/Media-Release-19-new-councils-created-in-NSW-today-120516.pdf>) - 12/05/2016
- New Bayside council proclaimed (<https://dpcsc-ss.s3.amazonaws.com/Uploads/1473395314/New-Bayside-Council-proclaimed.pdf>) - 09/09/2016

This website contains details on the process of the implementation of the new councils and further information that communities affected areas may be interested in.

Where an \* is displayed next to a council name this means it is a part of that council area.

### Council Login

Login to Council Portal or request access

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(<https://portal.strongercouncils.nsw.gov.au>)

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Newspaper articles not published due to copyright concerns

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**MANNING ALLIANCE INC.**

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**PATRON: DI MORRISSEY**

**15 May 2017**

(Updated Version of 11 May 2017.)

## **Media Release**

### ***“Rate Rise By Stealth”***

There are now only 14 days left for the 86,000 residents and ratepayers of MidCoast Council to lodge Submissions in response to the recent retrofit by Mid Coast Council to the Delivery Program / Operational Plan 2016/17; the addition of an **Addendum** on 1 May 2017, which will pave the way for a Special Rate Variation application to IPART that could result in a 21.5% rate hike (over four years) commencing in August 2017, and yet no-one in the MidCoast LGA seems to know anything about this.

You will all remember that the former Premier of NSW and indeed the entire NSW Government faithfully promised and promoted the fact that all newly amalgamated Councils in NSW would have a four (4) year exemption from Special Rate Variations. That is no rate rises above the “rate peg” (cost of living increase) for four (4) years.

On 1 March 2017, a bill known as *“Local Government Amendment (Rates-Merged Council Areas) Bill 2017”* was introduced into the NSW Parliament to enshrine those promises by former Premier Baird and the NSW Coalition Government.

As background please read the article in the Manning Community News (May 2017) it is available for free in paper form and on line at [www.manningcommunitynews.com](http://www.manningcommunitynews.com)

In this article you will see that MidCoast Council lobbied a little known member of the NSW Upper House, Paul Green, to move an Amendment to the *“Local Government Amendment (Rates-Merged Council Areas) Bill 2017”*.

On 28 March, Paul Green did move an amendment in the NSW Upper House, which enabled MidCoast Council, the only newly amalgamated Council of 20 throughout the State, to be eligible to apply for Special Rate Variations.

This Amendment had the effect of trashing the promises made by Premier Baird and the NSW Coalition Government. That amendment included a clause that allowed the MidCoast Council to apply for a rate rise at any time of the year; disregarding the normal annual regulated SRV application cycle.

The Amendment quickly breezed through the Parliament and several days later the Bill was signed into Law by the Governor of NSW.

Why, you may ask did Mr Green move that Amendment? To understand this you will need to read the article in the Manning Community News (copy attached)!

On 1 May 2017, MidCoast Council held an Extraordinary Council Meeting in Forster, **that lasted a total of 19 minutes.**



In that Meeting, the Council (Administrator) passed a resolution adding an “**Addendum**” to the Delivery Program / Operational Plan 2016/17 (which only has less than two months to run). Rather interestingly the new 2017/18 Operational Plan has now also been placed on exhibition (yesterday).

The effect of this retrofitted “**Addendum**” to the Delivery Program / Operational Plan 2016/17 is that **it will now allow MidCoast Council to apply for a Special Rate Variation** (a rate rise above the rate peg) to IPART in June/July and IPART must consider it!

There was no advance Media coverage, nor any press releases nor any other announcements by Council to inform the community of Council’s intention to put forward proposed “retrospective changes / additions” to the Delivery Program / Operational Plan 2016/17 which would result in opening the door for Council to apply to IPART for an SRV in 2017.

This clearly highlights the issues, the dangers, and the harm from not having an elected Council representing the Community, and a government appointed Administrator who is not accountable to the Community but acts like a Council, with impunity!

Following this decision by the Administrator, there was no immediate announcement nor media release to inform the community of the passing of the resolution by the Administrator nor of Council’s immediate intentions for an SRV application, nor that the Delivery Program / Operational Plan 2016/17 **Addendum** was even placed on public exhibition starting from **1 May 2017** (immediately after the meeting closed?).

On Friday 5 May 2017, after 4pm, when all the local media had already finished work and in most cases had left for the weekend, Council issued a **Media Release** known as “*News Briefs - Week beginning Monday 8 May 2017*”, **buried in the thirteen items listed in that Media release was a brief and confusing single paragraph reference to Council applying for a rate rise in 2017.**

**Clearly no-one in the local media has picked up on this as there has been no local media coverage on this SRV subject in the period of 5 May to 15 May.**

Now with only 14 days to go to the close of Submissions the community is still none the wiser (with the exception of an article in Di Morrissey’s Manning Community News) of Council’s plan to increase rates nor to the fact that the **Addendum** is now on public exhibition.

On 10 May 2017, after ten days had expired of the exhibition period, Council did published a full page advert in the Manning River Times, The Wingham Chronicle, (and we presume the Great Lakes Advocate and the Gloucester Advocate); buried within that full page advert containing other material, in small print, are several obscure references:

**Under the heading “Council Meetings”:**

“The purpose of this Meeting is to adopt the addendum (small “a”) to the Delivery Program / Operational Plan 2016/17.”

**Under the heading “Have Your Say”:**

“Council has placed on public exhibition an addendum (again small “a”) to the 2016-2017 Delivery Program / Operational Plan to include a Special Rate variation scenario.”

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<https://www.facebook.com/SaveOurPoolWingham/>

**PATRON: DI MORRISSEY**

**29 May 2017**

## **Media Release**

### ***MIDCOAST’S SRV Catastrophe Continues.***

Late last Friday afternoon, MidCoast, finally posted the Agenda for the Extraordinary Meeting to consider its Addendum and the 21.5% rate hike. The meeting will be held on Wednesday 31 May 2017 at 2pm in Foster. Prior to this posted notice this meeting wasn’t even listed on their website! (see attached image taken 11am Friday 26 May 2017)

Usually Council Agenda is posted 7 days prior to the Meeting. This is a transparency measure aimed at ensuring that the public (and the Media) have adequate notice and can view all relevant Council reports and decide whether they would like to apply to attend the meeting and speak on a particular matter at that Council Meeting.

This Extraordinary Meeting Agenda contains no reports regarding any public submissions pertaining to the proposed SRV and Council’s much reviled Addendum. MidCoast’s published Agenda document states:

*“Submissions will be reviewed and a report will be published on Council’s website by close of business on 30 May”.*

That is, close of business this Tuesday (tomorrow), less than 21 hours before the scheduled meeting time of 2pm on the 31<sup>st</sup> May ( Wednesday)!

This is just outrageous! That such an important matter to the community will be treated and manipulated in such a shameful manner!

By the rules, people have to apply to the Council to speak to a published report several days before the nominated meeting date (in this case the latest is today Monday 29th). How can people apply to speak to the SRV Report when they haven’t even seen the contents of the SRV Report?

This is just out of the Soviet Russia era of the 1960s!

Is it reasonable that this MidCoast *“Council”* would give the 90,000 people spread across 10,000 square kilometres less than 21 hours notice about the contents of an SRV Submission’s Report, which may lead to a 21.5% rate increase and cause a great deal of harm and pain to many struggling families in this low socio-economic area?

What about all those people who don’t have any or easy access to the Internet? **Clearly they just don’t count! OR Is it that our Submissions just don’t count?**

MidCoast has had at least 28 days, if not months to address this time anomaly, but in their brutal arrogance they have chosen simply to forge ahead regardless of the rules and the consequences. Welcome to our new, “beautifully branded” Council.

Perhaps we should be looking to demerge?

**The Manning Alliance Inc.**

For Further Information please contact.

Peter Epov Chairman



On any reasonable objective assessment it would be very hard for the average person to decode the information in the above two statements, nor interpret them as Council's intention to fully inform the Community of its objective to pursue a Special Rate Variation in June & July, for introduction in August of this year. Nor even to inform the community that they had only 18 days left to have input to the process through submissions.

So much for transparency, engaging and informing the community of Council's intentions to apply for a Special Rate Variation in June / July 2017.

**Now there are only 14 days before public submissions close on 29 May 2017.**

Council has already announced and scheduled a Council Meeting for 31 May 2017, that is two days after the close of Submissions, to adopt the Addendum to the 2016-2017 Delivery Program / Operational Plan.

Clearly Council is not anticipating many public submissions! Or is this just being rammed through before the Council elections regardless of community sentiment?

In its haste to rush this "Addendum" through, Council appears to have ignored one small "little" technical hitch; and that is Council's Meeting Agenda (including reports) should be published one week before the scheduled meeting day. This is a transparency measure to allow the Community to be aware of what is proposed.

So the Agenda for this meeting (and Reports) should be published on 24 May, 2017. It will be interesting to see how Council's Interim General Manager explains away the fact that the Agenda and Reports are to be published on 24 May 2017, but Council would still be accepting Submissions re the "Addendum" for a further 5 days.

By this timetable Council would have less than 40 hours to review, analyse and report on all public Submissions, which were not included in their Agenda.

Tokenism and lip service anyone???

A rate increase at this time will seriously impact and hurt many people in this low socio-economic area, with high unemployment and a significant retiree population.

Clearly Council has not consulted with the Community nor with any of the service providers who support the underprivileged sectors in our Community. A detailed public debate is required before there are any increases in rates.

An SRV in August 2017, will coincide with the introduction of the Fire and Emergency Services Levy (FESL) that will burden the average rate payer on a residential block by \$233 in 2017.

The Community needs to be made aware that Submissions will close on 29 May 2017. A submission is only a letter!

**The Manning Alliance Inc.**

For Further Information please contact.

Peter Epov Chairman

**A copy of the article from the Manning Community News is attached.**

Council has placed on public exhibition an addendum to the 2016-2017 Delivery Program / Operational Plan to include a Special Rate Variation scenario.

**Exhibition period:** Monday 1 May - Monday 29 May 2017.

**View addendum:** Visit our website 'Have your Say' page or Council offices during normal business hours.

**Make a submission:** Please visit our website to make an online submission, or provide a written submission by email or post before the end of the exhibition period.

Please quote the reference [SRV2017] and provide full postal address, telephone number and email address when making a submission.

[24 May 2017 Ordinary Meeting](#)[10 May 2017 DCU](#)[10 May 2017 Extraordinary Meeting](#)[01 May 2017 Extraordinary Meeting](#)[19 April 2017 DCU](#)[19 April 2017 Ordinary Meeting](#)[12 April 2017 DCU](#)[29 March 2017 DCU](#)[22 March 2017 Ordinary Meeting](#)[14 March 2017 Extraordinary Meeting](#)

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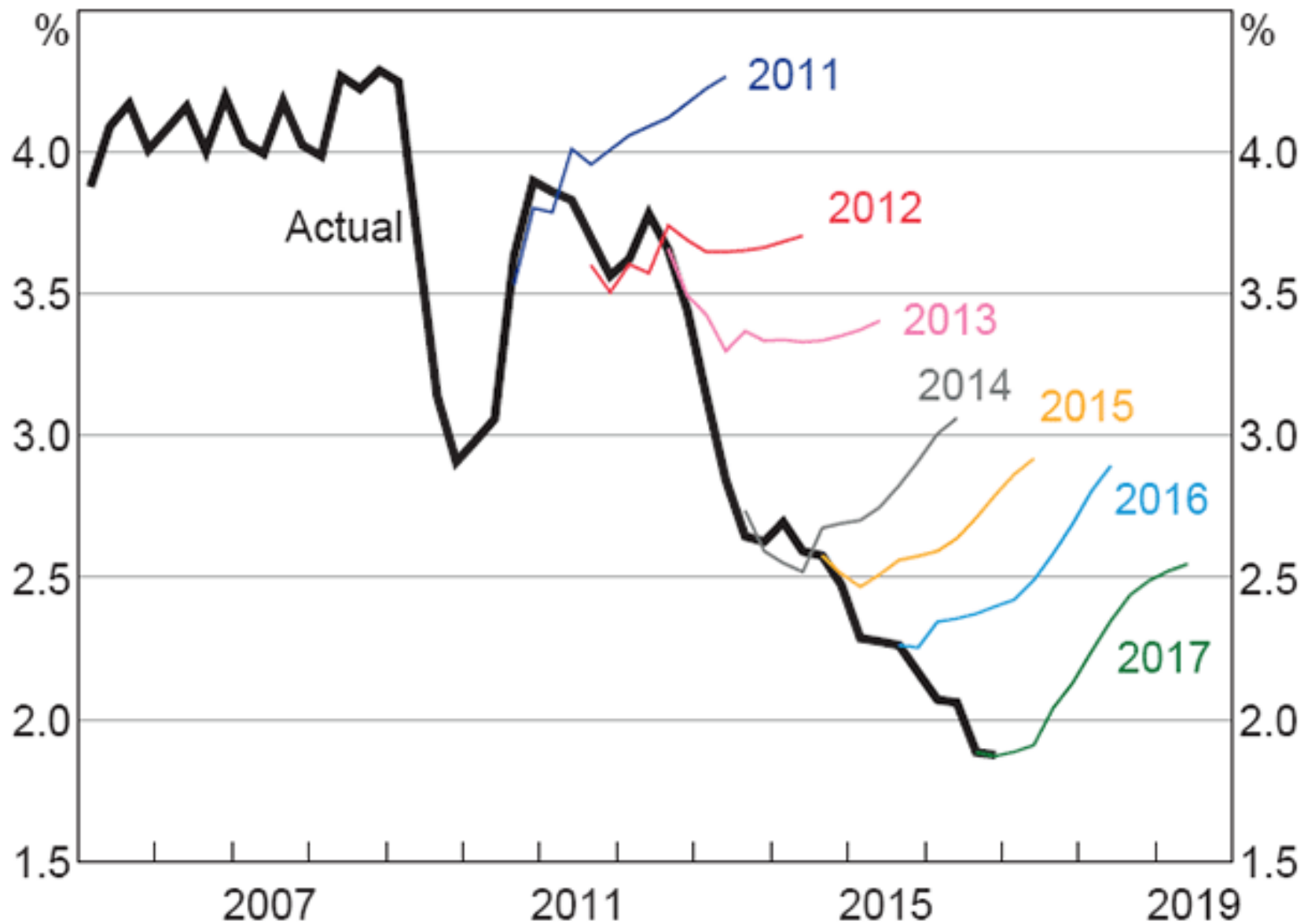
2017



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Graph 1  
**Wage Price Index Forecasts\***  
Year-ended



\* February SMP forecasts  
Sources: ABS; RBA