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Submission: Dear IPART

I wish to register that I object to Port Stephens Council's ridiculous proposal to increase rates by 66% over 7 years.

Over 70% of submissions to Council's proposal were against the increase. Over 2,000 people made their voices heard. Council ignored every single one of these people. Thousands more locals have signed online and paper petitions. Local businesses are against this proposal.

I would also like to point out that Port Stephens Council decided to embark on the process leading to the submission of this application just some 6 months after the current council was elected. Not one candidate who stood for election raised the need for a Special Rate Variation (SRV).

This decision to press for a massive rate increase really does not make a lot of sense. On 9 June, 2015 Port Stephens Council resolved that "Council will reduce its underlying deficit to break even in 2014-2015 financial year. Council will increase its revenue from non-rates sources. Manage risks across Council. Attract, retain and develop staff to meet current and future workforce needs. Provide enabling business support services for Council's operations" (source: Ordinary Council Minutes 9 June 2015: <http://www.portstephens.nsw.gov.au/your-council/about-council/council-meetings-and-minutes/previous-years/council-minutes-2015>).

Indeed, in Port Stephens Councils Improvement Proposal stated: "Council's Long Term Financial Plan 2015-2025 takes a relatively conservative view of its financial performance but notes revenue streams that when realised, will maintain Council's Scale and Capacity. To address the asset maintenance ratio, from 2016-2017 year Council will adjust its Long Term Financial Plan 2016-2026 to provide an additional \$1.1 million per annum for asset maintenance."

The Improvement Proposal went on to state: "Port Stephens Council has demonstrated that it has scale and capacity; is sustainable into the future; has a strong path to improvement in its asset management; and

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The Improvement Proposal went on to state: "Port Stephens Council has demonstrated that it has scale and capacity; is sustainable into the future; has a strong path to improvement in its asset management; and has the resources in place to deliver the actions in this proposal"

(source [https://www.ipart.nsw.gov.au/files/9a74384a-da39-4b73-a9d4-c57ec053e622/Council\\_Improvement\\_Proposal.pdf](https://www.ipart.nsw.gov.au/files/9a74384a-da39-4b73-a9d4-c57ec053e622/Council_Improvement_Proposal.pdf))

It is beyond belief that the fortunes of Port Stephens Council could have turned around so abruptly in the space of just 3 years, and this not be made an election issue

There is also poor awareness about Council's proposed projects. This lack of awareness has been fuelled by Council changing amounts of money being allocated to projects, between when this proposal first went out for public submission, and what has been submitted to you.

This includes \$25million less over 10 years for roads. Perhaps the 30% of people who indicated a willingness for a rate rise in the first round of consultation may have opted for no increase had they seen the most recent proposal from Council.

There is no evidence that any of the projects proposed by Council are 'needs'. Rather, they appear to be 'wants'. I agree that most of the projects would be nice to have, but none of them are essential to Council continuing to operate.

Council has, in recent years, demonstrated a sound capacity to fund large-scale projects without the need for a rate increase.

Wages are stagnant, power prices are soaring, and the cost of petrol, insurances, and consumer goods is only increasing. Cost of living is rising and many people are already struggling. Pensioners are already deciding between turning the heater on in the dead of winter, or not spending that money so they can pay bills. Parents are already deciding whether they can afford to buy bigger shoes to send their kids to school in, or whether they can afford a bigger school uniform. This is without a rate increase!

However, despite this, at a Community Consultation session held in Lemon Tree Passage in November 2018 council representatives blithely pointed out that after the 7 years of rate increases, Port Stephens rates would be on par with those of Newcastle. This would be fine if Port Stephens could offer the same levels of infrastructure as Australia's largest non-capital city, such as hospitals with operating theatre facilities, light rail, major sports arenas, extensive public transport, art galleries capable of world class international exhibitions etc.

In the same meeting, it was pointed out that Port Stephens Council currently has a low level of household rates arrears, and this was used as another reason as to how Port Stephens ratepayers would have the capacity to pay. In other words, Council believe there is still money to be squeezed out of its ratepayers.

Port Stephens Council has ignored residents, and I ask that you listen to us when we say: this rate rise is unnecessary, unaffordable, and will cause extreme hardship for many. I ask that you reject this application outright.

Regards

Dr Trevor Glasbey