

From: Lisa Caban
Sent: Wed, 6 Feb 2019 09:05:38 +1100
To: t1connect prod
Subject: Special rate variation

#ECMBODY
#QAP DEFAULT
#NOREG

-----Original Message-----

From: The Russells <jefferyrussell@bigpond.com>
Sent: Tuesday, 5 February 2019 2:00 PM
To: council <council@richmondvalley.nsw.gov.au>
Subject: Special rate variation

Dear General Manager

Although we would rather not have a special rate variation occur we do understand the why Council is seeking one.
With this in mind we would only support the 5.5% special rate variation.

Kind Regards
Lisa Russell and Mavis Mohammed

9 Sunderland Street
Evans Head NSW 2473

RECEIVED
06 FEB 2019
BY: *tc* 11:20 a.m.

6 February 2019

General Manager
Richmond Valley Council
Locked Bag 10
Casino NSW 2470

Dear General Manager,

Submission: Proposed special rate variation

Richmond Valley Council (RVC) have proposed two special rate variation (SRV) scenarios, either a SRV of 7% over four years (2019/20 – 2022/23) or 5.5% over the same four year period. The Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) rate peg for 2019/20 is 2.7%.

The community is being asked to choose between the three options, either one of the two SRV scenarios or the rate peg.

I note that a rate increase below the rate peg or the 'do nothing' option of not increasing rates at all for 2019/20, is not being canvassed by RVC.

I am opposed to both proposed SRV scenarios and submit the following comments.

NEED FOR SRV: WHERE'S THE FIRE?

By its very name SRV means 'special', but there is nothing special or extraordinary about the published reasons for the SRV by RVC. There is no emergency. What there is are everyday bread and butter issues, in fact, roads:

We will help you understand how much roads cost to build and maintain and we'll be asking you whether the extra cost will give you bang for your buck. This will be important as Council considers the case for applying for a further special rate variation when the current one expires in 2018/19.

(Foreword by Mayor and General Manager, RVC Community Strategic Plan, adopted 27 June 2017, version 2 • 23 January 2018 (*sic*), p. 3).

How the SRV will be applied is further confirmed in the RVC newsletter 'Valley Views' Issue 10, December 2018 – the SRV edition – where five of the seven items detailed relate to roads.

With RVC one of only seven rural and regional councils expected to submit SRVs (IPART media release 3 December 2018), having satisfied its 'Fit for the Future' obligations and been adjudged financially sustainable, and being the recipient of over a \$1M windfall profit

from the sale of its land for the proposed HealthOne facility at Evans Head, what is going on here? Will RVC ever be satisfied?

Moreover, RVC have normalised SRV applications having been consistent appliers since 2004/05 (see below). It is time for RVC to wean itself off SRVs and cut ones coat according to ones cloth, to live within its means, because they say so themselves:

We also know you [residents] value a council which is financially sustainable and one which **lives within its means** [emphasis added]. That is why as the basis of all our decisions is the need to make sure **that we only spend what we can afford** [emphasis added] in the long term."

(Foreword by Mayor and General Manager, RVC Community Strategic Plan, adopted 27 June 2017, version 2 • 23 January 2018 (*sic*), p. 3).

RVC ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES 1: GENERAL SRV PROCESSES

Tight timeline

I note that the RVC timeframe for the conduct of community meetings and the receipt of submissions is:

- Monday, 4 February 2019, 6pm – scheduled public meeting Casino Community Centre. I believe six people turned up.
- Wednesday, 6 February, 12 noon – submissions close.
- Wednesday, 6 February, 6pm – scheduled public meeting at Evans Head Surf Club.
- Thursday 7 February, 5pm – RVC SRV Extraordinary council meeting, Casino, to consider the proposed SRV, submissions and feedback.
- Monday 11 February – RVC SRV application due IPART.

This schedule is far too tight for the council's internal processes to do the SRV process justice due to significant time pressure. This time pressure provides opportunities for mistakes to be made and short cuts taken in order to meet deadlines. I believe there will be insufficient time to properly review and consider community submissions and so do them justice. Why did not the council allow more time? It appears that annual leave taken in January 2019 by senior staff involved with the SRV may have been a reason.

In any case, RVC could have requested IPART for an extension of time should they apply like Camden Council and Randwick City Council who were given until 14 February 2019 (<https://www.ipart.nsw.gov.au/Home/Industries/Local-Government/For-Ratepayers/Making-a-submission-on-a-2019-20-special-variation-application>; viewed 4 February 2019).

Of concern is that submissions close at midday on Wednesday, 6 February (RVC advertisement on the front page of the Richmond River Express Examiner 16 January 2019), however the Evans Head community meeting is not until 6pm that same day. This conflict of timing disadvantages Evans Head residents. Information provided by the council at the meeting will not be available to submission writers. If the encouragement of written submissions is to be believed as per the subject advertisement, then the deadline for submissions should have been extended until *after* the Evans Head meeting. Kate Flynn, RVC Revenue Coordinator, agrees with this sentiment (telephone conversation 22 January 2019).

Else it is undemocratic.

I note that the relatively junior staffer, Kate Flynn, was left to handle SRV queries in the absence of the General Manager and the Chief Financial Officer while on annual leave in January 2019.

Capacity to pay – affordability – not evidenced

Ratepayers' ability to pay the proposed SRV increase including pensioners has not been demonstrated anywhere, including in the telephone survey. There has been no evidence proffered whatsoever. Therefore the council has not supported its case insofar as the community's capacity to pay and is therefore a massive failure on the part of the council. Any SRV application to IPART should not be approved by them on this point alone.

Misleading information

The RVC newsletter 'Valley Views' Issue 10, December 2018 shows a graph comparing RVC with six other nearby councils, the text claiming that RVC "continues to have the lowest or second lowest rates across the Northern Rivers per head of population". The accompanying graph shows an average RVC rate of (only) \$825-57. Using an average helps RVC sell its message of course, even though I consider it misleading and meaningless.

RVCs General Manager has also lamented that rates have "been at the same level for the past four years" (Richmond River Express Examiner, 16 January 2019 p. 4). What is not said is that the last four years (at 5.5%) is the result of the current SRV that commenced 2014/15 and concludes 30 June 2019. This saw rates increase by 39.1% cumulative. Comments like this are misleading in my book, because they are purposed on making the public think that the council has been doing it tough when of course it has not.

RVC ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES 2: THE SRV SURVEY

Survey administration methodology

The SRV survey was sold to the public as a telephone survey (RVC newsletter 'Valley Views' Issue 10, December 2018) but quickly degenerated into three disparate streams:

1. Telephone
2. Self-completed hard copy questionnaire
3. Self-completed online questionnaire

We were told that "Around 400 residents will be called [telephoned] and asked to participate. Those receiving a call will be representative of our population" (RVC newsletter 'Valley Views' Issue 10, December 2018). Will they? How do we know? Where did the phone numbers come from? What about residents with only a mobile (not landline) and *vice versa*? How was the "around 400" derived? Why this particular number? In any case, the effectiveness of the telephone survey would be mitigated by the likelihood of residents thinking an unsolicited survey request over the phone a scam, despite prior public information.

Surprisingly, hard copies of the survey were found freely available to the public on the counter at the council's Evans Head office *circa* 29 January 2019. People were told that completed surveys closed on Wednesday, 6 February 2019 at midday (*i.e.* the same closing date and time for submissions; see above), this information being written on the top of the first page and yellow highlighted. I have a copy.

However, when someone went to deliver their completed survey to the Evans Head office in the morning of Monday, 4 February 2019, they were told that surveys closed the previous Friday, 1 February 2019. Consequently the survey was not accepted. This person and other members of the public in the same situation were therefore disenfranchised.

As to the online option for the survey, I was told that "The questionnaire is **now** [emphasis added] available on our website for completion by interested members of the community" (General Manager's email 1 February 2019). This online version was still operational on RVCs website in the afternoon of Monday, 4 February 2019 at least.

Telephone survey instrument critique

1. I note that the rate scenarios did not include a 'do nothing' option. Rates do not have to increase each year (however impractical this may sound), inclusion of a 'leave things as they are' option being more statistically rigorous.
2. A value judgement is made at Question 8 (Demographics) which categorises pensioners with the unemployed. This could be perceived by participants that RVC undervalues pensioners.
3. There are no questions asking whether the proposed rate increase scenarios are deemed affordable.

Initial conclusions re survey

I expect that there will be more to say on the survey once the expected survey report is released to the public (General Manager's email 1 February 2019 refers). In the meantime my initial conclusions are that RVC do not appear to possess the necessary statistical expertise to oversee the survey. The situation of multiple survey administration techniques and changing the due date for return of hard copy surveys (above) points to council incompetence frankly.

ON IPART

The council has made numerous SRV applications over recent years. This is witnessed by the following verbatim extract of information supplied to me by IPART (their email 22 January 2019 refers):

"List of SV applications approved for Richmond Valley.

1. 2004/05 – single year increase of 12.71% under section 508(2) for a fixed term of 5 years to fund infrastructure purchases and maintenance.
2. 2007/08 – permanent increase of 6.42% under section 508(2) to provide infrastructure and increase service provision.
3. 2008/09 – permanent increase of 7.5% under section 508(2) to provide infrastructure and increase service provision.
4. 2014/15 – multi-year under section 508A. The council requested an increase of 12.3% in 2014/15 followed by annual increases of 5.5% over the subsequent four years (cumulative increase of 39% [actually 39.1%. PA] by 2018/19).

In 2011/12, Richmond Valley applied for a permanent increase of 5.96% under section 508(2). This application was **not approved** [emphasis in original] due to no support from ratepayers, and concerns about the capacity for ratepayers to pay for the proposed rate rises."

As may be observed, RVC is a serial IPART applicant, having made five since 2004/05.

Additionally, the council has been silent on the ability of the community to make representations direct to IPART. This legitimate and additional avenue for giving voice to the

community should have been advertised along with the SRV material. It was not. Has the code of silence returned? This lack of transparency re due process should simply not occur.

PENSIONERS RATE CONCESSION INEQUITY

The Local Government Act 1995, s.575 'Reductions for eligible pensioners' states at s.575(3) that the following concession amounts apply:

- (3) The total amount by which:
 - (a) all ordinary rates and charges for domestic waste management services levied on any land for the same year are reduced is not to exceed \$250, and
 - (b) all water supply special rates or charges so levied are reduced is not to exceed \$87.50, and
 - (c) all sewerage special rates or charges so levied are reduced is not to exceed \$87.50.

The above amounts are still the same today, 26 years later. This 'free riding' by the council is a legacy of over a quarter of a century of neglect and inaction on the rate front.

And yet rates continue to rise and rise particularly due to the council's serial applications to IPART (above). As you would be aware, RVC is in the final year of a five year 39.1% cumulative SRV concluding 30 June 2019. If the mooted 7% increase over the next four years (31.1% cumulative) is approved by IPART, the increase in council rates over nine years will be 70.2%. This is a massive increase in a very short time. So what then has been the increase over 26 years? The Australian Bureau of Statistics has advised me that inflation has gone up about 89% between 1993 and December, 2018. And if RVC rates can go up 70% in just nine years, then let's say they have doubled since 1993.

This means that pensioners are now carrying a disproportionate and unfair share of the rate burden than they were in 1993.

Furthermore, there is a social justice principle at stake here. Pensioners seem to be the forgotten people and easily overlooked and ignored (see above re pensioners being categorised with the unemployed in the SRV survey), as has been the case for 26 years when it comes to the pensioner rate rebate.

I argue that RVC rate rises could be deemed excessive in contradiction of NSW Government policy confirming its "commitment to protect residents against excessive rate increases" (*Review of the Local Government Rating System*, Local Government — Draft Report, August 2016, IPART Sydney, pps. 16 and 127).

If RVC rate rises are excessive, they are most likely to be also unsustainable for pensioners requiring immediate relief in my opinion. But what can RVC do?

Recommended RVC options

1. The council can amend its Financial Hardship Policy to increase the concession amounts granted pensioners thus recognising social justice principles prescribed at Section 8A 'Guiding principles for councils' of the Local Government Act 1993.
2. Amend its Financial Hardship Policy to include s.582 'Abandonment of pensioners rates and charges' of the Local Government Act 1993 which states:

"A council may waive or reduce rates, charges and interest due by any person prescribed by the regulations who is in receipt of a pension, benefit or allowance under the Social Security Act 1991 of the Commonwealth."

CONCLUSION

- I cannot support the SRV based as it is on funding roads. The council receives enough already from Federal and State Governments grant monies plus rates without having to rely on an SRV. If it does, then there is something very wrong.
- The Community Strategic Plan is an aspirational document put together by council staff with limited public input representing a wish list of un-costed projects. A required publication by the State Government on the one hand but whose greater functionality is to support RVC SRV applications to IPART.
- The HealthOne windfall of over \$1M negates asking more from ratepayers.
- There has been no metric whatsoever on the impact of the SRV on ratepayer's ability to pay.
- Rate increases have become excessive.
- The council needs to do more for pensioners after a quarter of a century of neglect.
- If there is to be a rate increase, then let it be the 2.7% rate peg only.

Yours faithfully,



Dr Peter Ashley

From: Lisa Caban
Sent: Mon, 4 Feb 2019 11:07:40 +1100
To: t1connect prod
Subject: Submission Objecting to Proposed Rate Increase - Wendy Thompson

#ECMBODY
#QAP DEFAULT
#NOREG

From: Wendy T <wendyt2010@gmail.com>
Sent: Friday, 1 February 2019 12:14 PM
To: council <council@richmondvalley.nsw.gov.au>
Subject: Submission Objecting to Proposed Rate Increase - Wendy Thompson

Good morning,

I am writing to oppose the intended Rates rise by the Richmond Valley Council.
Another rise will put financial pressure on the already stretched community in Casino.

I ask you to reconsider this decision to apply for yet another Rates rise. I strongly oppose this.

Regards
Wendy Thompson
Casino 2470.

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From: Lisa Caban
Sent: Mon, 4 Feb 2019 09:01:55 +1100
To: t1connect prod
Subject: Submission on Proposed Rates Increase - Shirley Scott

#ECMBODY
#QAP DEFAULT
#NOREG

From: Shirley Scott <givesup2470@yahoo.com.au>
Sent: Saturday, 2 February 2019 6:52 PM
To: council <council@richmondvalley.nsw.gov.au>
Subject: Submission on Proposed Rates Increase - Shirley Scott

How many ways can I say this?

NO, NO, NO, NO, NO, NO!!! NO MORE!!!!

You are the greediest council in existence! You have applied for AND GOTTEN above lpart's rates rise allowance for what is it now, 6 of the last 7 years!

How about you stop padding your pockets at the expense of YOUR EMPLOYERS, us ratepayers!?!?!

I am an aged pensioner and you now take 2/3 of one whole pay from me every quarter - how the hell are we aged pensioners supposed to keep on EATING for heaven's sake, let alone continue to pay all our other bills when you are SO GREEDY?

Oh, and by the way, what do we have to show for all your greed of the past 10 years or so? A beautiful NEW, exquisite office building for YOU to work in and an absolute monstrosity of a Community Centre - tell me, who on earth thought an Art Deco building would suit the town of Casino which has NO Art Deco anywhere in it???

I have reported you to lpart the past 4 years now & will very definitely get in before you submit your disgusting request for extra increases this year, now that I have been made aware that you are at it yet again!

Yours in complete disgust,

Shirley Scott

From: Lisa Caban
Sent: Mon, 4 Feb 2019 09:00:59 +1100
To: t1connect prod
Subject: Submission on Proposed Rate Increase - Michelle Cray

#ECMBODY
#QAP DEFAULT
#NOREG

From: Michelle McCray <shellandmatt@live.com.au>
Sent: Friday, 1 February 2019 12:46 PM
To: council <council@richmondvalley.nsw.gov.au>
Subject: Submission on Proposed Rate Increase - Michelle Cray

Good Morning ,

I am voicing my opinion in regards to the intended rate rise by Richmond Valley Council. Whilst I appreciate that local government need to fund infrastructure and maintain current services, I am opposed to another rate rise given the current conditions our town is currently under.

Everyone is struggling. The whole of town is buying fresh water to drink. Yet I am still charged for the supply of "fresh" drinking and bathing water.

I am also charged a significant rate each year for garbage services and yet it seems RVC is the only LCA that do not offer curb side clean up or vouchers for garbage disposal for any items that may be disposed of that dont conform to the appropriate bin size or requirements. I dumped a trailer load of waste, some which could be recycled and some green waste at the Namoon Station last year whilst buying and moving into our new home and was charged \$47! And this was cheap compared to some other loads.

Further to this, I must say that the town looks very tired and dirty. I am ashamed to have family and visitors come for a visit and take them down the main street or near the river where it is littered with rubbish, dirt and other unsightly objects. Is it possible for the council to possibly run a "work for the dole" program, utilising the services of the currently unemployed to assist in cleaning and general caretaking to assist in the reduction of fees associated with these services?

I am proud to live in Casino...I believe it is a town with significant potential, said reason why we have bought our second home now in Casino, however I cant agree to another rate rise without evidence of what benefit to the town this will provide.

Please, we are all struggling. I cant see another rate rise is going to assist at this time.

Kind regards,
Michelle McCray

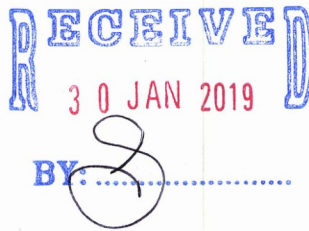
Sent from my Samsung Galaxy smartphone.

31 JAN 2019

SCANNED

31 JAN 2019

17 Evans Road
Evans Head NSW 2473
elainesanders298@hotmail.com



Doc. No.

General Manager
Richmond Valley Council
Locked Bag 10
Casino NSW 2470

29 January 2019

Dear General Manager

Re Special Rate Variation Proposal 2019-2020

I should like it put on record that I oppose the granting of a Special Rate Variation 2019-2020 running over 4 years.

As far as I am aware Richmond Valley Council (RVC) is one of only 7 regional and rural NSW local councils that are requesting rises above the ordinary rate for this period. RVC is just coming to the end of its previous Special Rate Variation (SRV) that ran from 2014/15 that saw a cumulative increase of some 39% over 5 years. Prior to that time RVC has a history of being granted SRVs on a regular basis.

Pegged rate rises were put in place to protect rate payers and local residents from exploitation by inefficient and poorly managed local councils. SRVs, as I understand it, should be for some special reason over and above the general running of a local council area. As I understand it an SRV is not intended to be a yearly supplement for what would be considered ordinary operations. It appears to me that RVC uses the SRVs in order to do its general business. This general business should be covered by the pegged annual increase as determined by IPART. I believe that RVC and other small local authorities should not be able to use SRVs to prop up what are essentially unviable local government areas.

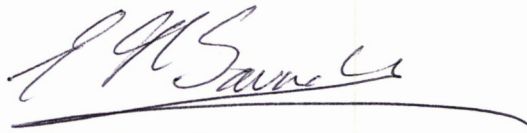
As a rate payer in Evans Head on a block of less than 600 square metres my rates were \$2,066.36 for the current financial year plus another approximately \$1,123 for water and sewage charges. This is a total of over \$3,000, a significant amount for someone whose only income is the aged pension. I do get the pensioner rebate but this is a modest amount and has not increased for around 26 years. In this period my rates have increased exponentially! The rates and water rates are the bills that create the most financial stress in my life and this must be the case for many other older rate payers in Evans Head. In comparison power bills which make the news regularly are easy to cover. It might be added that I can economise the use of power & shop around for a better deal. I cannot do that with my rates and continue to stay in my much loved home of 17 years. No matter how well I sort my rubbish, limit my use of the road or return my library books on time I will not be offered a rate reduction.

If the current SRV 2019-2020 for 7% is granted then the overall increase since 2014-15 to the end of the next 4 year period (9 years), will be around 70%. This is untenable.

In addition I would like to take issue with RVC for information put forward in their News Letter "Valley Views" Issue 10 (sic) December 2018 in which a variety of graphs and tiny tables were used to show that RVC local council area had the lowest rates on the far north coast using average rates for each local government area for the rateable year 2016-17. Averages are a very misleading way of showing the rates in local government areas especially for those containing very disparate land values. RVC came in with the lowest average at \$825.57 for the year. Any one in Evans Head would be very happy to have such a rate! My rates for the same year (before rebate) were \$1811.98 more than twice the 'average'. Shame on you RVC for such hubris. I can't help thinking that part of the reason for this disingenuous release was to neutralise protest against the current SRV request.

If this SRV goes ahead the residents of Evans Head ^{will} be used yet again as the cash cow for the Richmond Valley Council area. ^

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Elaine M Saunders', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Elaine M Saunders BA(Hons) LLB Grad dip LP

SCANNED

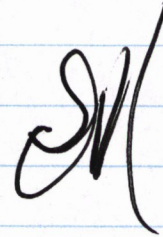
29 JAN 2019

Doc. No.

To the Mayor of
the Richmond
Valley Council -
Robert Mustow.

Douglas Marsden
90 Dobies Bright Rd
Via - Cadno.
23-1-2019

To the Mayor -
enclosed is a copy of
a letter, mainly addressed and intended
for the general manager, but it also
is for you as well.



General Manager
& the Mayor
Richmond Valley Council,
Casino

Douglas Marsden.
90 Dobies Bight Rd
Via. Casino.
2470
23-1-2019.

To the General Manager, I read that you want even more monies from the Ratepayers to fund your 'Can-do' schemes. I would like to know what 'Can do' means!

While you are good at 'mouthing off' on the local Hick radio station, telling us all what a good job you're doing, or standing in front of a camera at some Non event just to get your face in the local rag, along with the other Non entities at such events.

It is that what it means to be general manager and with the Mayor often attending, you both are a SAD sight.

I would have thought you should be to carefully control what money you have for the benefit of the Ratepayers, and not 'screw' us for more & more.

Considering what I see done with my taxes you both should be sacked.

2

10 Quote an example.

Over the last couple of years I've noticed the proliferation of WEED TREES - established weed trees being planted, mulched, staked, and continually watered - at my expense.

Whether it's the Crepe Myrtle on the Lismore Road near Eric Box, or Poplar trees, on the Brouwer Hwy - near Sextonville Rd, being watered week after week at 6^{ish} on Saturday morning, at my expense.

Is this just what you mean by 'doing' Mr. General Manager. To plant and maintain these weeds is costing hundreds of dollars a year - each tree, so while you are doing this, the Teak trees on the Lismore Rd, planted some 25-30 years ago are struggling to survive. They are not maintained, feed, pruned or, from what I see, never even watered, and to think if I had they were looked after, the timber from those Teak trees would one day be worth a decent sum of money.

Such is your foresight - or lack thereof.

On the subject of another - on going rate increase, all I have to say

3/ about that, is- live within your
means.

The only ethical way you
can slug the ratepayer with another
increase is to have referendum/vote
on the subject.

I am saying NO
to any rate/tax increase in the
foreseeable future.

Sincerely,
E. Menden.

From: Louise Bell
Sent: Mon, 14 Jan 2019 10:51:54 +1100
To: t1connect prod
Subject: Objection to additional special rate rise - Special rate variation - Craig Firth

#ECMBODY
#QAP RECORDS DEFAULT
#NOREG

Louise Bell

Administrative Assistant - Records
Richmond Valley Council | Locked Bag 10, CASINO NSW 2470
T: 02 6660 0322 | F: 02 6660 1300
E: louise.bell@richmondvalley.nsw.gov.au | www.richmondvalley.nsw.gov.au



From: Craig Firth [<mailto:craigsfreedom@hotmail.com>]
Sent: Thursday, 10 January 2019 7:46 AM
To: council
Subject: Objection to additional special rate rise - Special rate variation - Craig Firth

Morning,

As a rate payer, I am against any additiinal special rate rise as this is a compounding effect on previous special rate rises along with the increase in Valuer Geneneral Land Valuations of said 9% this year.

Wages / pensions & incomes have not increased yet the general cost of living has.
I beleive like any budget be it household or Council, you should be looking at ways to stay withing your budget or reducing costs.

A compounding Special rate rise would be unfair & cause hardship.

Regards
Craig Firth

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