



## **MINISTER REJECTS PORT STEPHENS COUNCIL RATE RISE**

The Tomaree Ratepayers and Residents Association today thanked the Minister for Local Government, Ms Perry, for considering and supporting its submission regarding Council's application for a substantial rate rise of 8.6% this year and a total of 22.85% over a four year period. Action by TRRA to oppose the rate increase had been initiated by unanimous membership votes at two recent public meetings

TRRA Acting Chairman, Dick Appleby, said today that 'the less well off, and pensioners in particular, in Port Stephens are protected for the time being from excessive rate increases. All of us must continue to seek further investigation into Council's dodgy finances and lack of interest in providing basic services.'

'TRRA made a strong submission to the Minister that the Council did not present a sound business case in support of their application for this rate rise, nor did the council explore or exhaust the alternative revenue sources, change their expenditure priorities, look at alternative modes of service delivery or properly consult the community's views and priorities, as required by the minister for such an application.'

TRRA believes that the basic and real services that ratepayers are concerned about need NOT suffer through this rejection of the rate increase. Instead the council needs to put its house in order and concentrate on its core business as priorities, NOT be involved in dubious business activities and property investments which have left the budget in disarray.

Rather than threatening to refuse to buy library books, stop road resurfacing, funding for sporting facilities and upgrading public amenities, (identified in its own community survey as a priority), Council should provide these basic services without need for a huge rate hike. This would be possible if it just managed its finances and investments properly.

The Council was also double dipping by applying a 5% increase for all services, fees and charges across the board, which is double the inflation rate, as well as trying for an "above the peg" rate hike.

TRRA understands there has been a total absence of regular financial briefings between Council and elected Councillors to discuss the true financial position and implications for future operations. Instead we get day to day management by crisis instead of professional long term financial planning; this situation gets worse because the Council is run by the "Mayors Team" as he calls it, not the whole Council acting together.

To solve its problems the council needs to undergo a major clean out of its financial and administrative operations to get rid of unnecessary costs and return to its core business.

'Is the current proposal by Council staff for the Mayor and his team to fly to Queensland for a day to check out shopping centre developments at ratepayer expense really necessary, or another example of a total loss of financial reality?' Dick Appleby questioned.

'TRRA intends to continue it requests to the Minister for Local Government to conduct an independent investigation into the Council's financial management practices, regardless of this small win in helping stop an unnecessary rate rise'. Dick concluded.

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