

Attention: General Manager and Mayor, Uralla Shire Council

Purpose: Notice of Agenda Item – Council Meeting

Submitted by:

[REDACTED]

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Submitted on: 28 June 2023

Submitted by: council@uralla.nsw.gov.au

Subject: Shire Council Rate Rise

On the basis of the following guiding principles for NSW councils, I am registering an objection regarding the decision-making processes for recent rate increases to Uralla Shire Residents, and the percentage of yield attributed to the range of rate payers.

8A Guiding Principles for Councils

f) Councils should act fairly, ethically and without bias in the interests of the local community

(2) Decision Making

(a) Councils should recognise diverse local community needs and interests

(e) Council decision-making should be transparent and decision-makers are to be accountable for decisions and omissions

As part of the consultation process for rate increases, various groups within the community were presented with Options 1 through to 5, compiled at the request of the General Manager, without bias and at a cost to rate payers. Option 6 was presented by Tom O'Connor, currently a Councillor, living in the township of Uralla, and a former General Manager from over a decade ago.

On listening to the audio recording of the Council Meeting - no discussion was recorded regarding any of the options, after which, following a recess of Councillors, Option 6 was then delivered by Cr Tom O'Connor as the option to adopt, and which was agreed to by the Meeting.

1. This process is a breach of the Guiding Principles for Councils 8A (e) Council decision-making should be transparent and decision-makers are to be accountable for decisions and omissions.
2. It is a conflict of interest that Cr O'Connor, an in-town resident, could submit a proposal and also then vote on its adoption, which recommended 61% of the yield of proposed rates increases be charged to rural farmland (areas greater than 40h), which in turn, would see a decrease in rates to in-town residents – of benefit to himself.

Comments in the audio recording indicate Cr. O'Connor adding weight to argument for adopting Option 6 and included comments such as "this is the way we have always done it" and "rural farmland holders don't have other service charges that can be increased".

With reference to Guiding Principles 8A (2) Decision Making (a) Councils should recognise diverse local community needs and interests and (f) Councils should act fairly, ethically and without bias in the interests of the local community

3. It is unfair and unethical to charge 61% of the yield of total rates to rural farmland ratepayers, rather than evenly distribute the yield amongst all rate payers.
4. It is biased thinking to state because Rural farmland owners do not pay for council services that they do not receive, the yield of rate should be the greatest.
5. The commentary by Cr O'Connor in saying that this is "is the way we always did it" (ie apply the rate yield increases) indicates no appreciation and understanding that it Rural Farmland owners must address their own needs at their own expense such as the supply of water and its infrastructure; the disposal of waste; and so on.
6. There was no recognition of diversity and need. It is well known that "if you always do what you've always done, you'll always get the same". By having no discussion about each and every option 1-6 means that the needs and interests of rate-payer constituents represented by their various Councillors were being presented, or at least there is no evidence of everyone's needs being presented.
7. What is apparent, and which was not brought to a discussion, is the recent NSW Land Valuation Rate increases of the unimproved capital value rate of between 60 -130% in particular affecting rural farmland holders. Thus this increase in land value will exponentially increase Shire Council rate yields. Therefore an arbitrary decision to impose 61% of the total yield of rates from rural farmland ratepayers does not consider the changes impacting on our whole Shire – thus the "this is the way we have always done it" attitude will suppress the viability of the majority of rate payers in the Uralla Shire, thus affecting everyone.
8. Farmland ratepayers are also Businesses which employ people and buy goods and services. The attitude to rural farmland rate payers needs reconsidering given that these rural businesses are still in recovery mode from the drought, fires and floods – but also contribute increasingly to closing the gap of the GDP between rural and urban areas.

When will Council recognise rural farmland ratepayers for their financial and employment contributions they offer – and who also have "diversity of needs to be understood.