

Hepburn Shire Council higher cap application

Submission received via email

Date submitted: 13 March 2025

Submission written by: Alex Hancocks

I am writing in reference to the application made by Hepburn Shire Council for a Higher Rate Cap for the 25-26 period, submitted on 6th March 2025.

I write my submission as both a resident of Hepburnshire and a business owner, with a business located in Daylesford, Hepburnshire.

Having read some of the materials provided by Council and also having attended the Special Council Meeting on 10th September 2024, I would like to make the following points:

I cannot see any reference to the mis-handling of the purchase and subsequent sale of The Rex (A flawed Council project, creating a net loss of at least \$5.5m to ratepayers)

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-07-26/daylesford-rex-building-saga/104115044>

This project in itself created a financial black-hole that the Council is now expecting ratepayers to fill via this Higher Rate Cap application.

HepburnShire Council cannot manage projects to budget/timelines and previously they thought it necessary for each main Shire town to have a "Community hub"

The geography and low, dispersed population of Hepburnshire does not warrant such expenditure, a classic example being the Mechanics Institute in Trentham, serving a population of approx 2,200

\$1m is now being spent to make repairs to Daylesford Town Hall, with a proposal to create some sort of community space within.

Community consultation is always done as a box ticking exercise and it is rare to see any input from ratepayers actually acted upon in a meaningful way.

The shire has spent considerable amounts of \$s on consultants to compile reports, such as the recent town plan documents, which caused an outcry when first published, due to the high-level of errors and mis-information contained within, resulting in lots of meetings and amendments.

I had attempted to have 2 questions asked at the Special meeting on the 10th Sep 2024. These were not read out due to an administrative error on the part of Council at this meeting and the CEO vetoed one of the questions as he said I was "trying to embarrass Council staff members, and they may get upset". The question being "Why does Council need 4 Executive Assistants?". This information is available on the Council's own website. My question(s) not being read at the correct meeting did not make an entry into the minutes for this meeting.

I have worked in a "real Commercial" environment where individuals are held accountable for their actions. Before even making the application to the ESC, I would have thought it prudent for the Council to carry out a thorough root and branch review of all departments and headcounts to see where savings could potentially be made. Vendor/Supplier contracts could be reviewed etc. Although there is some mention of a reduction in FTE, I feel that there is a further opportunity to make savings.

My feeling is that this would not be the last application from Council for a higher rate cap and my confidence in their ability to manage budgets and services is at an all time low.

I would ask that the ESC, please carefully review all of the information provided by Council and submissions from ratepayers, as it is very easy to interpret graphs and excel sheets, according to set agendas.

I pay rates for both my business and my residential property and take a genuine interest in where and how funds are spent. Councils are under pressure with increased costs and reduced income, however, I do not feel that mis-management and poor decision making should be reason enough to approve this Higher rate cap application. Storm events and COVID are not the main causes for the current financial position of Hepburnshire.

I thank you for your time.

Yours faithfully,

