

13<sup>th</sup> May, 2015

Dear Sonya

Our Council put us on rate relief, only to increase our rates an extra \$150.00 the following year. The message this sent to us was:- I know you are having trouble meeting your payments , now but we will still increase them anyway. What stupidity; you know I can't afford the rates now, so you increase them to make it harder still.

I believe the Federal Government reduced funds to the Local Councils, who in turn increased the rates for the public, expecting them to make up the difference. To put it in a clearer picture, the Federal Government past the buck onto the Local Councils, who in turn pasted it on to the public. The only problem with that, is who do the public pass it onto, no one, we can't so in a lot of cases, our credit cards take a hammering again. My advice to all Government Departments, the public pay your wages to Govern, so Govern, don't pass the buck onto the rate payers when things get tough, try using your brains for a change, instead of taking the easy way out, by attacking the rate payers.

In our local newspaper today, the council has announced rates will increase by 5% again this year. In my case that is another \$100.00 a year – at what point does it stop? Will it eventually be 50% of our pension? The way it is going, probably, yes.

A solution was suggested to me. Could the State Government increase the G.S.T. By say 2%, which they could allocate funds to town councils and eliminate rates. This would give families thousands (in many cases) of extra spending on essentials, thus stimulating the economy everyone wins, and the local councils have to operate within their budget JUST like the public have to.

I have spoken to many people about this idea and they have thought it was great.

Maybe a referendum would be the way to go.

Regards

18<sup>th</sup> January, 2015

Dear Mrs Linley - CEO

**RE: RATE COSTS**

Over the last few years, I have contacted your office concerning the ever increasing rate costs. I have pleaded with your office explaining the financial burden it is putting on me, all to no avail. My concerns apparently are falling on deaf ears, as you put my rates up the following year.

At present your office takes 10% of my Disability Pension, and gives me NOTHING in return. We no longer have garbage pick up (couldn't afford it), no town water, no sewerage, no kerb and channelling.

My question to you is simply this, why are you charging me these ridiculous rate costs, when I get NOTHING in return.

Seven years ago, my rates were \$954.00, and that included garbage pick up; this year my rates are around \$1800.00 and I have the added cost of tip fees to empty my bin. My rates have increased \$874.00 in 7years. An increase of about 15% a year. 500% more than the National C. P.I. How the hell do you expect me to keep paying these ridiculous increases. I would like to put a proposal to you. I am prepared to offer \$750.00 a year for my rates, and any increases to be in accordance with the C.P.I. Or alternatively 3%. This should include garbage pick up and fire levy. As I receive NOTHING from your office, I see no reason why I should pay any more.

Why am I expected pay \$400.00-\$500.00 a year more than the citizens of St. Arnaud, when I do not get garbage, town water, or sewerage, as they do?

My 45acre farm will never show a profit, it's too small; I would need hundreds, if not thousands of acres. That's common knowledge.

Are our excessive rates used to assist your own town of Stawell and if so, why?

Is it even legal for your office to force us to pay anything, without giving us something in return?

I do not want an explanation on where our rates are being used, because regardless of how much money your office receives, you will find a use for it; my complaint is, NOTHING is coming back to me.

Whenever I do improvements to my property, I pay for all costs including labour, yet your office thinks it's fair to increase my rates yet again. Could you please tell me how much your office contributed to these expenses? I'll tell you, NOTHING. So what gives you the right to take money from me?

Both my wife and I are solid respected citizens who contribute to the community in many ways, so could you please explain to me why your office goes out of your way to make life so BLOODY hard. My pension increases this last year, amounted to a whopping \$8.00, yes eight dollars, but your office put our rates up approximately \$150.00 this year alone. Could your accountants please tell me how I make up the short fall.

I request your response in writing as soon as is practical please, so that I may be able to sleep easier at night.

If any of my figures are incorrect, this can't be helped, as I unfortunately, do not have community paid accountants at my disposal.

Yours sincerely



27 January 2015

Enquiries : Mary Scully 5358 8761

Dear

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF RECEIPT OF INCOMING MAIL**

I confirm receipt of your recent correspondence received by Council on 27 January 2015 regarding rate costs.

Your correspondence has been forwarded to the relevant officer for attention.

Please contact Council's Customer Service staff at Stawell on 5358 8700 or St Arnaud on 5495 1500 if you require any further information; please quote Document ID number 15901.

Yours faithfully

MARY SCULLY  
MANAGER GOVERNANCE & CIVIC SUPPORT

6 March, 2015

Enquiries: John Traill (03) 5358 8743

Dear Sir,

**RE: RATE COSTS**

I do not propose to respond to all of the points you raise in your letter instead the following comments, explanations and/or advices are offered on the main points.

Firstly lets deal with the figures you have quoted, there are a number of inaccuracies included in the amounts that you have mentioned and in particular the incorrect inclusion of the Fire Services Levy which I will refer to separately later. As you have acknowledged in your letter that some of the figures you have used could be incorrect I do not propose to go through them in detail in this response, but would be happy to do so if you wish.

With respect to the Fire Services Levy it is important to note that this is not a Council Charge it is a State Government Levy that the Council is required to collect under the "Fire Services Property Levy Act 2012". The Act also requires Council to pass on this levy to the State Government in full. This levy was first collected with the 2013 -14 rates and should be excluded from any calculation of rate increases as it substantially distorts any real comparison. I have enclosed some information on the levy for your information.

The next item that I would like to clear up is the assumption that the provision of both Water and Wastewater (Sewerage) services are provided by Council, these services are provided by the local water authority and those who receive such services are billed directly by the water authority.

Moving to your question on the legality of rates raised by Council, the authority or legal basis if you like is the rating provisions contained within the Local Government Act 1989 and the Valuation of Land Act 1960. It is important to note that rates are in fact a property based tax and are not linked to the number or quantum of your use of Council Services. Council wherever possible will apply the principles of user pays, an example of this is the Garbage and Recycling service or the Home and Community Care service.

As indicated the application of rates is based on the valuation of a property. Your property is currently valued at \$206,000.

The *Valuation of Land Act 1960* does allow for a ratepayer to lodge a valuation objection in circumstances where it is considered that the valuation applied does not accurately reflect the market value. The Act states that an objection must be lodged with Council within two months of the date of issue of the first rate and valuation notice issued in each year and or within two months of any supplementary notice.

When the 2015/2016 notices are issued, if you consider that the property valuation does not accurately reflect the market value, please ensure that you lodge an objection with Council within 2 months of the issue date. Objection forms are available on Council's website or by contacting our office.

I have noted that in the past, Council officers have offered you assessment under Council's financial hardship policy but you have indicated that this is not required. This assessment is still available should you wish to participate.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'John Traill', written in dark ink.

JOHN TRAILL  
ACTING MANAGER FINANCIAL SERVICES