

To: localgovernment@esc.vic.gov.au

Date: 12/05/2015

Subject: Council rate capping in Dandenong

Dear Essential Services Commission,

As a mother of a young child in Dandenong and a volunteer in a not-for-profit children's organisation in Dandenong, I am very concerned at the impact that a rate cap as drastic as that proposed in the April 2015 consultation paper would have on our services.

Despite being a town of socio-economic disadvantage, we have recently, with the help of State government initiatives but also through judicious use of our not unreasonable rates (averaging 5.6%, lower than many similar councils), been able to build ourselves a new theatre and new library in the heart of our city, and in Noble Park we have built a wonderfully modern and sanitary Maternal Child and Health Centre (The Paddy O'Donohue Centre), a far cry from the outdated and woefully undersized facilities they replaced. In a growing city, this is a must. However, it is not merely facilities funding that will suffer from the proposed drastic rate cuts.

I am also very worried that our community programs, which keep so many of our most disengaged members of our community in touch with the wider community, will also suffer. Dandenong Council provides funding both directly and indirectly to a vast array of programs that keep, for instance, young Sudanese youth, who are statistically at high risk of becoming involved in crime, meaningfully connected to services that help them find productive activities and chances to engage with the law in non-confrontational environments. Our council also works with the wider refugee community, having just developed an Asylum Seekers Refugee Action Plan that could plan no action without funding stemming from rates. Council is not wasting money on fountains and fancy furniture at ratepayers' expense; rather, they are doing their best to keep our community connected, safe and functioning.

As well as such direct programs, we must also consider the indirect programs that are so critical to quality of life in our town. I live down a street filled with families living hand to mouth, crammed into units and with both parents working long hours in local factories just to get by. These are the people who benefit most from our subsidies to local arts programs - without such funding, how could such people afford access to such programs?

Perhaps some Councils are gouging their ratepayers with unreasonable rates. Dandenong is not one of them. Please, if you must cap rates, do so without tying them to such a drastic drop as a CPI cap requires. The cost to council of capital investments does not drop commensurate with falls in CPI, which are calculated based on household costs, not infrastructure and service costs that Council faces. Cap rates at 5% if you must, but do not halve our income because of bad behaviour by a few councils. The people of this town cannot access services if they are not provided by council. Many do not even have cars. Strip away local, affordable services and their quality of life suffers. There are no two ways about it.

You are the Essential Services Commission. I tell you that essential services in Dandenong will suffer with the proposed rate cut, and I ask you to reconsider.

Kind regards,

Aloma Davis