

Residents snub rate hike forums

Apathy blamed for poor turn-out at Ballina council's community consultation sessions

By GRAHAM BROADHEAD
news@northernstar.com.au

DO BALLINA ratepayers really care they could be slugged with a \$50 to \$60 increase on the average home rate for the next five years?

Of a shire population of 42,000 people, a total of only 40 attended two community consultation meetings arranged by Ballina Shire Council to explain the council's application for a Special Rate Variation of 7.4 per cent for the coming financial year.

However, it was a totally different story in Lismore earlier in the year when the community consultation meetings were chockers, and the city's council ended up not going ahead with a proposed special

rate variation.

East Ballina resident and council watcher, Vince Kelly, attended both meetings in Ballina Shire on the proposed special rate rise.

He wasn't surprised with the turn-out, saying there was apathy in the community in regards to council consultation.

"You never get a strong turn-out," he said.

"Council can interpret that as 'no opposition' or 'everyone must be in favour'.

"But the general public gets frustrated and thinks 'as an individual, I'm not going to make a difference'.

"Across the community, there is a large apathetic view of local government."

Mr Kelly said council had a

'responsibility to engage the community', and praised the amount of material council placed on its website and the online surveys, particularly the one currently being conducted for the special rate variation.

But he said the big difference between Ballina and Lismore was that Lismore City Council sent a letter to ratepayers more than a month before the rates consultation process began, whereas letters to Ballina ratepayers were sent out the week before the workshops.

Ballina Shire Council general manager Paul Hickey said the council had found from other issues where public meetings and online surveys had been conducted that there

was a greater response to the online surveys.

"It's a more efficient way for people to provide council with a response," he said.

Mr Hickey said the letter and brochure sent to ratepayers was scheduled to be mailed earlier than it was, but there had been a delay in the issuing of material from the printer, and he apologised on council's behalf.

Meanwhile, Mr Hickey said the \$3.2 million that would be earned from the special rate variation was necessary to keep on top of council's current and future capital works program.

He said less than half of council's \$8 million operating surplus - which excludes depreciation - could be spent on

infrastructure like roads, drainage, footpaths, parks and new or replacement community facilities. The balance of the surplus was generated from water, sewerage and waste operations, and was directed back to those areas.

The funds available for roads was a problem, with Mr Hickey saying council's engineers had reported annual spending on roads was already \$2.5 million behind what they would like to ensure the road network was at an acceptable level.

He said 62 per cent of the extra rate income, if approved by council and then the Minister for Local Government, would be spent on roads around the shire, both new roads and reconstruction of

the existing network.

A \$530,000 roundabout at the Tamar and Cherry street intersection and a \$1.4 million roundabout at the entrance to the Boulder Beach car park from The Coast Road are some of the major new projects that have been earmarked for construction in the next five years.

Mr Hickey said that if the rate rise wasn't approved, council may have to defer major works, which could possibly affect big projects already earmarked for late in the 20-year road plan, like the Western Arterial Road linking West Ballina to the Southern Cross industrial area, and the extension of North Creek Road from Lennox Head to the same industrial area.

Mums come first on their special day at the Friendly Inn

By DOMINIC FEAIN
dominic.feain@northernstar.com.au

MOTHER'S Day started early at Eltham this year as the Friendly Inn helped local clans spoil their mums by serving breakfast at the historic pub for the first time.

While dozens of families

took advantage of the not-so-traditional early opener, local matriarch Val Johnston gave the breakfast the thumbs up as she savoured the special treatment from her children and in-laws.

"I wouldn't get that kind of service if I were at home," she said.

"It was just beautiful, ten out of ten.

"We told (pub manager) Toby that we want the same thing for Father's Day in September and he said he'd work on it."

Managers Toby and Lucie Black were on deck early after working late shifts on Saturday and declared the breakfast a success, with patrons asking for more.

"It's our first breakfast and customers reckon we should do it every weekend," he said "That could get tricky with our late hours," he laughed.

His wife and co-manager Lucie, while happy with the turn-out, had to put her own Mother's Day needs on hold as she kept the pub's wheels turning.

"I definitely drew the short straw this year," she laughed.

With the restaurant also booked out for lunch, and dinner filling fast, Mr Black promised to make it up to his spouse next week.

Meanwhile, mums made up nearly half of the extend-



MOTHER'S DAY breakfast at the Friendly Inn, Eltham: (Clockwise, from left) Chris and Gladys Cotter, of Lismore, holding grandson Alex Robinson; Jason Cotter, of Brisbane; Glenn Robinson, of Goonellabah; Dave and Maurine Robinson, of Toowoomba, holding grandson Blake Robinson; Sharyn Robinson, of Goonellabah; Debbie Cotter, of Brisbane, holding son Sam, and Jan Purcell, of Brisbane, holding grand-daughter Olivia Cotter. Picture: DOMINIC FEAIN



ENJOYING mum's special day are (from left) Trish and Garry Johnston, of Clunes, Val Johnston, of Clunes, and Jim and Robyn Hayward, of Nashua. Picture: DOMINIC FEAIN

ed Cotter/Robinson clan's gathering which also took advantage of the 'early opener' - travelling from as far as Brisbane and Toowoomba to celebrate Mother's Day.

"We organised it this way because we're all up early anyway so breakfast feels like lunch," Debbie Cotter

said. "The boys are paying, so we're pretty happy about that."

New chef Rupert Stevens, who took over the pub's restaurant about three months ago, is now serving lunch and dinner seven days a week and said breakfast was a natural

progression.

"Some people associate pubs with drinking and dinner, but nowadays a pub can be anything," he said.

"We're starting Sunday roasts next week and we're about to introduce take-aways - so maybe we'll keep the breakfasts going too."



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