

13 October 2024

Indigo Community Voice Inc – Supplementary Submission No. 1

Indigo Community Voice appreciates the opportunity to further contribute following our appearance at the Inquiry into Local Government Funding and Services on 19 September 2024 in Broadmeadows. In response to the Committee's request for a supplementary submission, we are pleased to provide this supplementary submission which outlines significant challenges faced by a broad cross-section of the community when engaging with the Indigo Shire Council, particularly over the last five years. Our Association has endeavored to address the challenges the community has faced dealing with Council through various means, including raising questions at Council meetings, conducting research, investigations, analytical studies and extensive correspondence.

We have communicated with relevant agencies within Victorian government departments and ministers to address a wide range of community concerns. Regrettably, the outcomes have been less than satisfactory, leading to a community that has lost trust in governmental institutions, particularly at the local Council level.

Indigo Community Voice Inc. has engaged in widespread media coverage on these matters. Predominant feedback indicates that while the Council asserts it is "listening", it is not acting accordingly. Council appears to be pursuing its own agenda rather than serving the best interests of the community.

We are concerned that essential public needs are not receiving the attention they deserve, while there is an undue focus on non-essential expenditure.

Despite oversight by various State Government departments, there is much room for improvement in operational accountability and a need for more effective management of ratepayers' and taxpayers' funds. We believe that maintaining the rate cap is important and that Councils should strive for prudent financial decision-making.

We look forward to the Committee making recommendations in its report to address the shortcomings in financial management and service delivery by the Council.

Yours sincerely,

Herb Ellerbock

President, Indigo Community Voice Inc.

0418 549 749

The following is an overview of just some of a raft of concerning matters:

1. The Victorian Government Rate Cap and Differential Rating

The video presentation technology available at our appearance before the Committee was not ideal and may have detracted from our explanation of the effects of Differential Rating. This attachment provides a better record of our concerns.

2. Mayday Hills Early Years Learning Centre

This attachment details the Indigo Council's failure to consult properly with stakeholders involved with the Beechworth Kindergarten and Child Care Centre. The Council plans to implement a single-occupancy lease and split these two services apart from 2026. Further details are provided in the attached letter.

3. Indigo Caravan Park Masterplan Study

Indigo Council leases four caravan parks. At the Council's General Meeting in May 2024, councillors voted 4–3 to approve—despite four conflicts of interest involving a law firm—the awarding of a 21-year lease for the Rutherglen Caravan Park to one of the companies involved in the caravan park study.

This decision has had substantial impacts on the previous successful leaseholders, including personal hardship, marriage break-up and the need for counselling and medication to prevent suicide. The remaining three leaseholders are now very concerned about their future as their leases near expiration. Media Extracts 1 and 1a provide more details.

4. Rutherglen Roadhouse

A petition with 1,600 signatures opposing a proposed roadhouse. There was no prior consultation, and the planning notification was discovered accidentally on a fence. Community backlash against the Council has been substantial, prompting the petition. Media Extract 2 provides more details.

5 Rutherglen Main Street Safety

Rutherglen's main street is very narrow—originally built for horse and carriages—and is part of the busy Murray Valley Highway. The volume of large trucks is a significant issue; this year alone, there have been three accidents, including the tragic death of a well-loved resident.

Initially, there was a \$4 million budget, with \$690,000 allocated to a VicRoads study titled "Rutherglen Origin and Destination 2018." However, neither the Council nor the community has been able to obtain a copy.

A lack of Council advocacy has resulted in \$2 million being returned to the Federal Government, with the remaining funds still unspent. The community has had to advocate for themselves, with only one Shire Councillor championing the cause since 2016. Media Extract 3 provides more details.

6. Rutherglen Loops Cycle Trail

This 48 km cycle trail, formerly known as the Rutherglen Wine, Walk, Cycle Trail, received federal funding of \$5.13 million. There have been numerous objections to this trail and its flawed business case, including illusory "shadow benefits".

A 12 km section of the trail is on the Murray River floodplain, leading to high maintenance and repair costs. This year, Victorian Government flood recovery funds were used for repairs, diverting resources from essential infrastructure in flood-damaged towns.

An objector to this cycle trail was threatened with legal action by the Indigo Shire Council CEO. Media Extract 4 provides more details.

7. Tangambalanga-Kiewa Men's Shed

The lease for the men's shed was not renewed, and the Council has failed to find a suitable premises or secure funding to build a new shed, despite government funding being available. The Council has handled the situation poorly and is going to lease two shipping containers as the new men's shed. Media Extract 5 provides more details.

8. Indigo Heated Indoor Pool Facility

One of the most requested budget items from the Beechworth community is the establishment of an indoor pool. A comprehensive 94-page, \$60,000 Beechworth Swimming Pool Feasibility Study was completed in 2021. Numerous times this has been raised in Council meetings to no avail. The Council has cited various excuses for not proceeding, yet substantial funding is available through federal programs like the Growing Regions Fund. Time will tell what is really behind this negative response from Council.

According to the 2021 ABS census, Indigo has 8,152 residents aged over 50, representing 47% of its population, well above the state average of 35%. This demographic is growing. Currently, seniors throughout the Shire are bused weekly to Wangaratta for therapy exercises and fitness activities. Additionally, the increasing number of young families would greatly benefit from swimming lessons and aquatic programs.

It is worth noting that the existing outdoor pool was closed from 7.30am until 3.00pm last season making it unavailable to many who like to swim during the middle of the day.

Beechworth is one of the most popular tourism destinations in north-east Victoria; a year-round aquatic facility would be well-utilized by both residents and visitors. Media Extract 6 provides more details.

9. Tourism North East

Tourism North East (TNE) is one of twelve Visitor Economy Partnerships, established at the directive of the Victorian State Government. TNE is a not-for-profit association funded by local councils and taxpayers which operates under the umbrella of Victoria's High Country's economic development. Despite its significant role in regional tourism and economic activities, TNE has denied public access to its grant application and financial reports, contrary to public expectations for transparency, especially for projects.

Indigo Shire Council's CEO sits on the TNE board, but Council also refuses to release the grant application details, citing that relevant documents and accounts etc. are the property of TNE.

We consider that this lack of transparency, public scrutiny and engagement in grant and project applications is unacceptable when funded by taxpayers and ratepayers in the order of tens of millions of dollars.

Indigo Shire Council has ignored its own community survey priorities with TNE and Council delivering unwanted low priority non-essential infrastructure, creating an unsustainable future position as it pulls critical funds from maintaining essential infrastructure and inducing future rate rises.

The lack of focus by the Council and TNE and lack of project justification was evident in business case documents to the Rutherglen Wine, Walk, Cycle trail, but timely access to business cases is now unobtainable. TNE's office is not open to the public and it no longer has a public phone number.

Approaches to relevant government departments seeking to acquire information under FOI has been to no avail. The Victorian Auditor General Office should undertake an investigation as to how the TNE entity is able to circumvent accountability to the public.

Media Extract 7 provides more details.

Letters of Support

Elizabeth Mason and Lorraine Lucas, successful Indigo Shire businesspersons and community leaders, have provided letters of support, which are attached.

The Victorian Government Rate Cap and Differential Rating

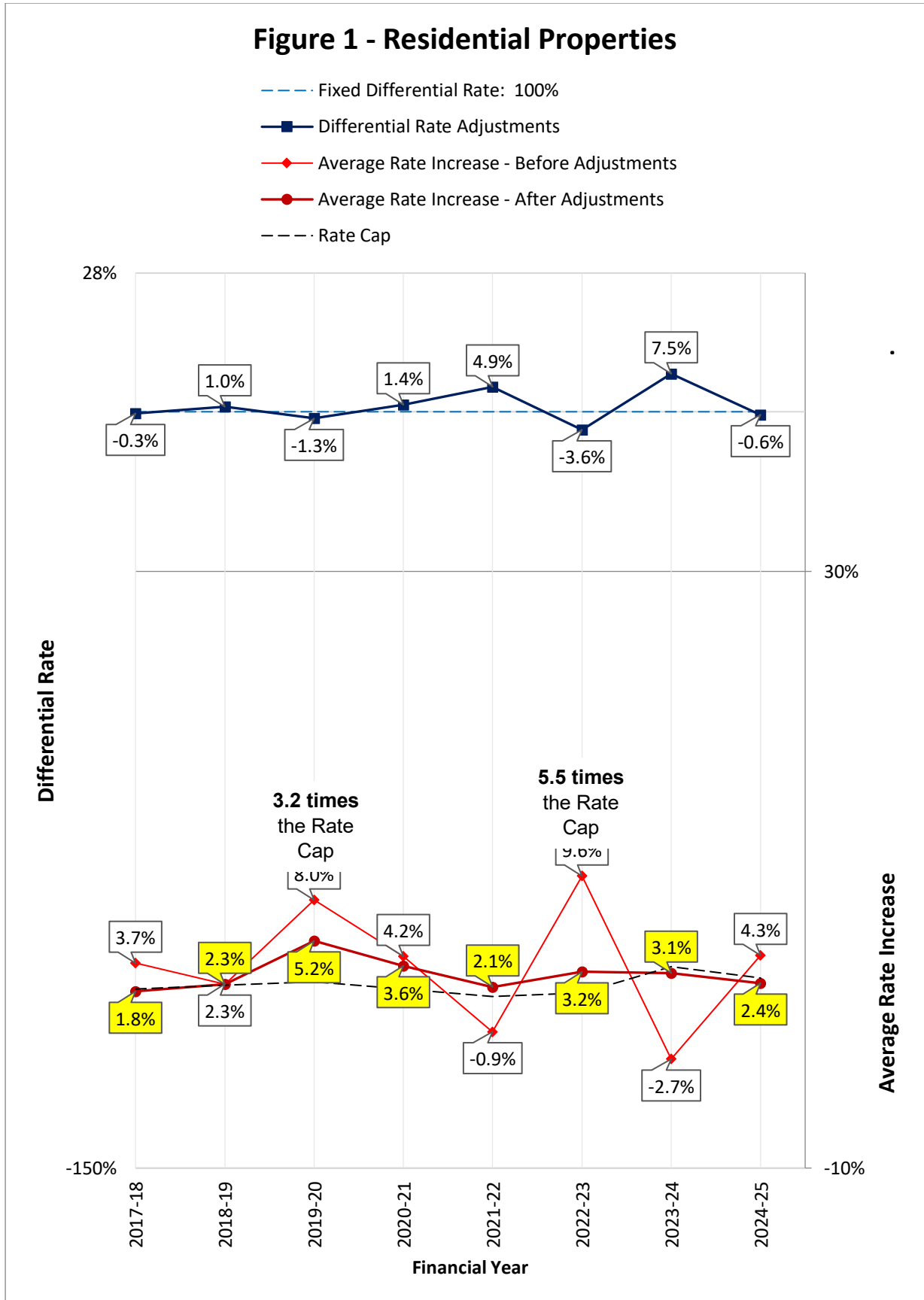
The video presentation technology available at our appearance before the Committee on 19 September 2024 was not ideal and may have detracted from our explanation of the effects of *Differential Rating*. These are the key points:

1. When disproportionate property value movements occur where a rating strategy uses fixed *Differential Rates*, unpredictable and excessive rate increases in one or more property categories are a common outcome.
2. The Victorian Government *Rate Cap* fails to protect ratepayers from those excessive rate increases.
3. Councils that use fixed *Differential Rates* are failing to follow a key principle under *section 101(c) of Local Government Act 2020 (the Act)*, which states that:

“Revenue and rating plans must seek to provide stability and predictability in the financial impact on the municipal community.”
4. The *Differential Rates* can and should be adjusted so that the average rate increase for every property category is, as near as possible, the same. That provides the stability and predictability required by *the Act*.
5. There is a need for:
 - a. *Differential Rates* to be reviewed and adjusted, as necessary, each time properties are revalued;
 - b. *Section 161 of Local Government Act 1989* and the *Ministerial Guidelines for Differential Rating* to be amended to make such adjustments mandatory; and
 - c. The *Essential Services Commission* to monitor compliance with the *Rate Cap* at the ratepayer, that is, at the average rate increase rather than at Council level.
6. *Differential Rates* used by Indigo Shire Council are:
 - a. *Residential*, levied at 100% of the General Rate;
 - b. *Residential Vacant*, at 200%;
 - c. *Commercial-Industrial*, at 135%;
 - d. *Rural 2* (rural lifestyle properties of 8 to 40 hectares), at 90%; and
 - e. *Rural 1* (predominantly farming properties larger than 40 hectares), at 75%.
7. Figures 1 to 7 in Annex A show the effect of fixed *Differential Rates* in Indigo Shire over the past 8 years and the outcomes that would have been possible if those *Differential Rates* had been adjusted each year.

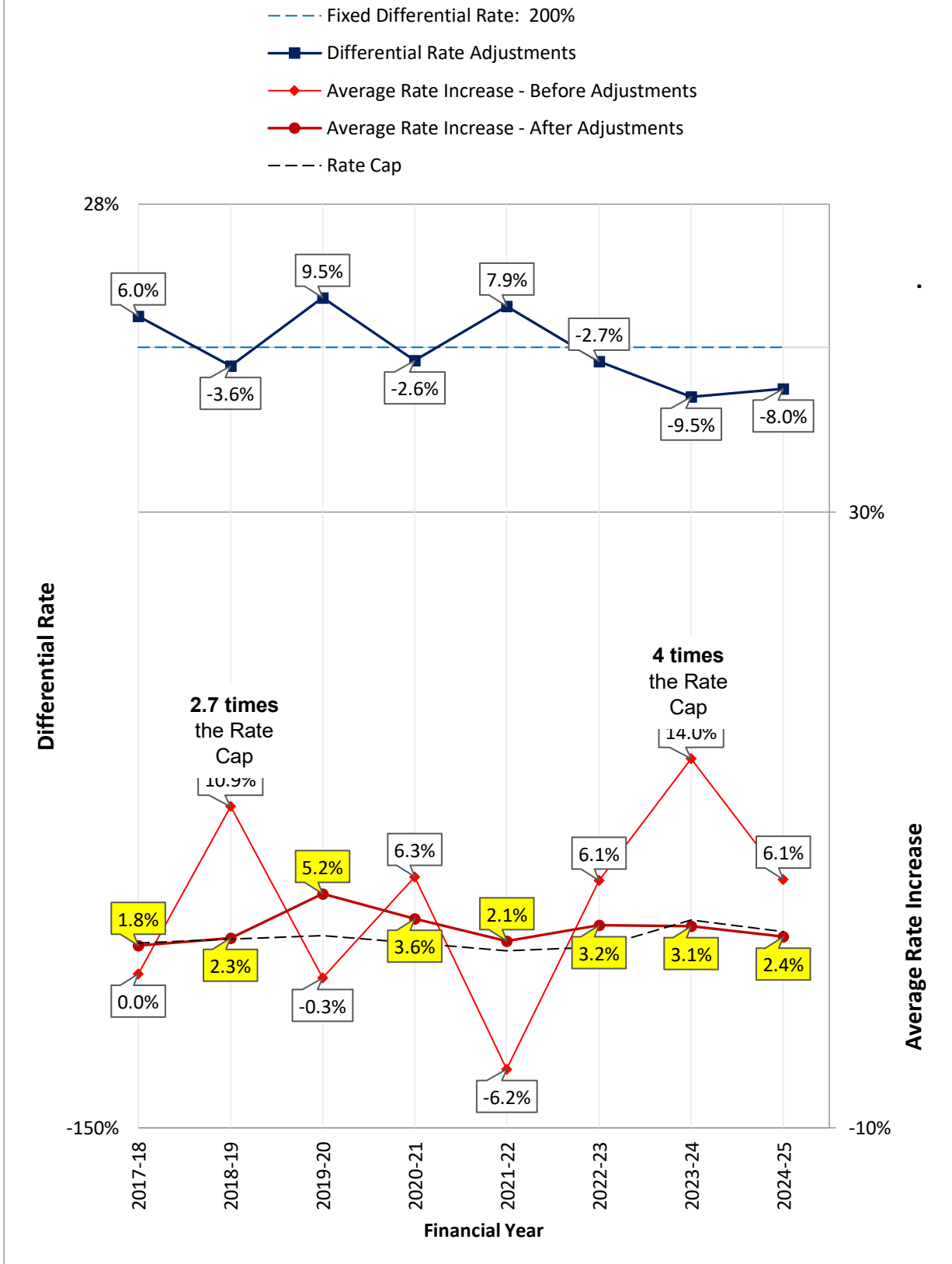
ANNEX A - Effect of Differential Rate Adjustment

Figure 1 - Residential Properties



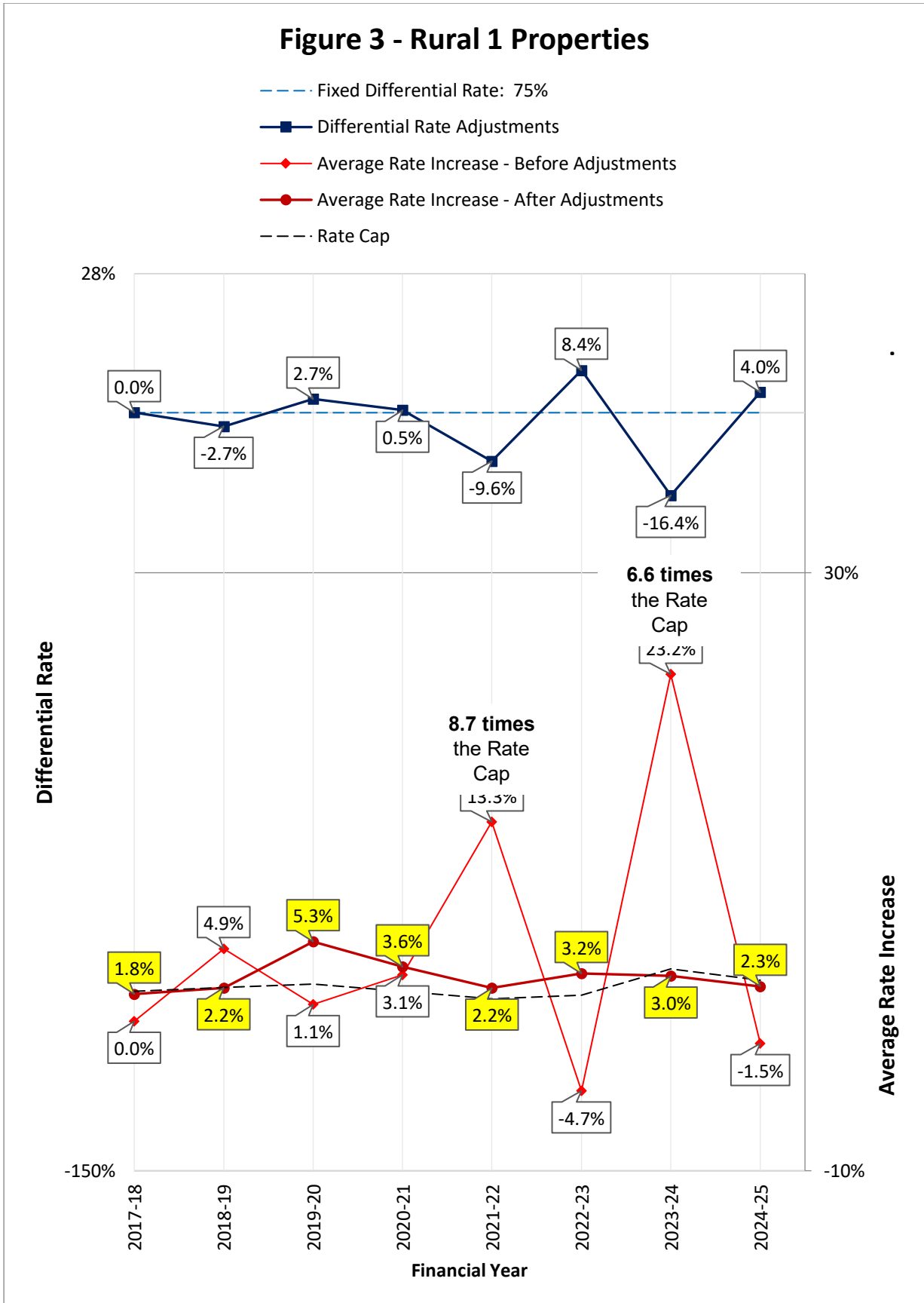
ANNEX A - Effect of Differential Rate Adjustment

Figure 2 - Residential-Vacant Properties



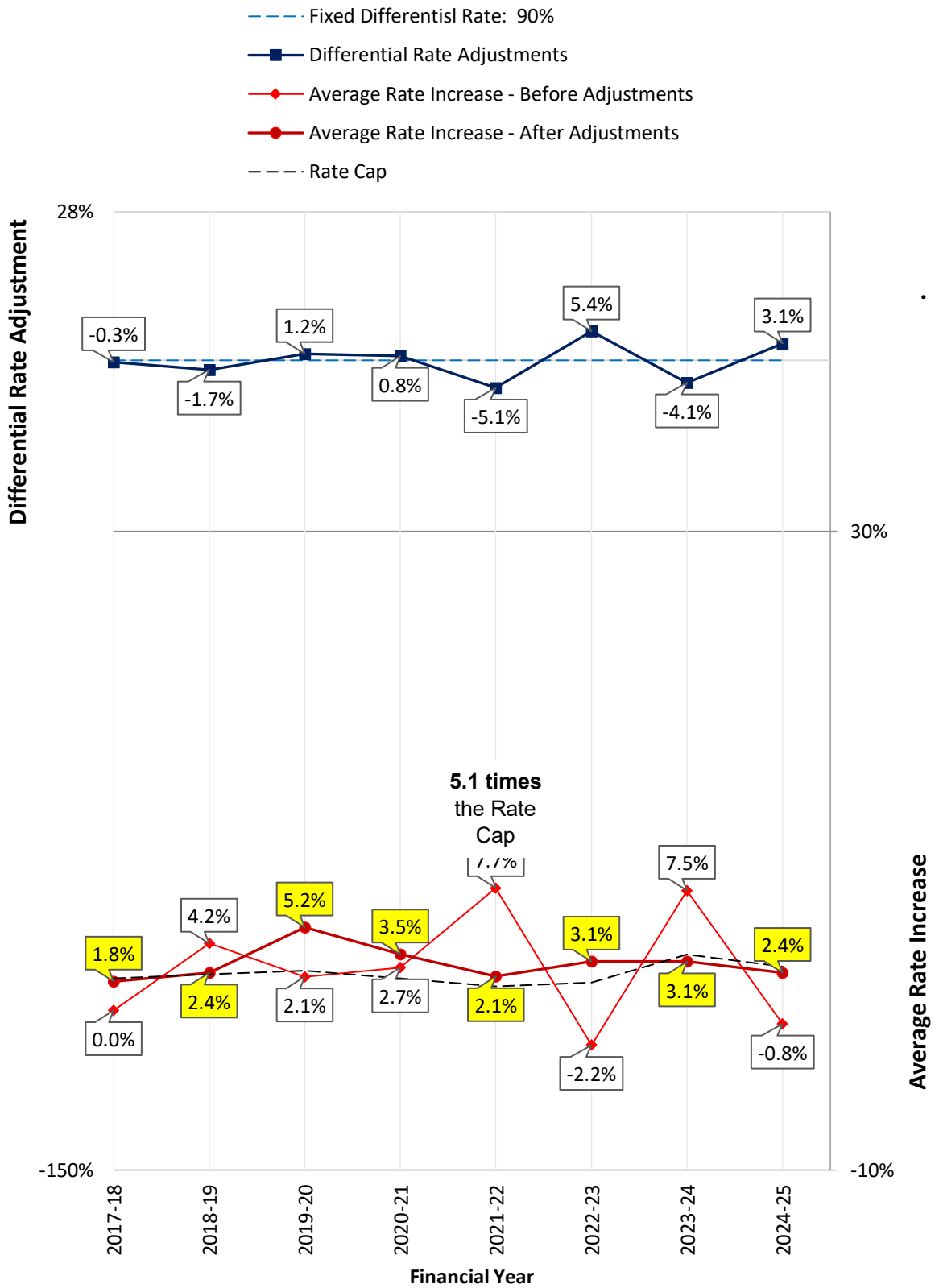
ANNEX A - Effect of Differential Rate Adjustment

Figure 3 - Rural 1 Properties



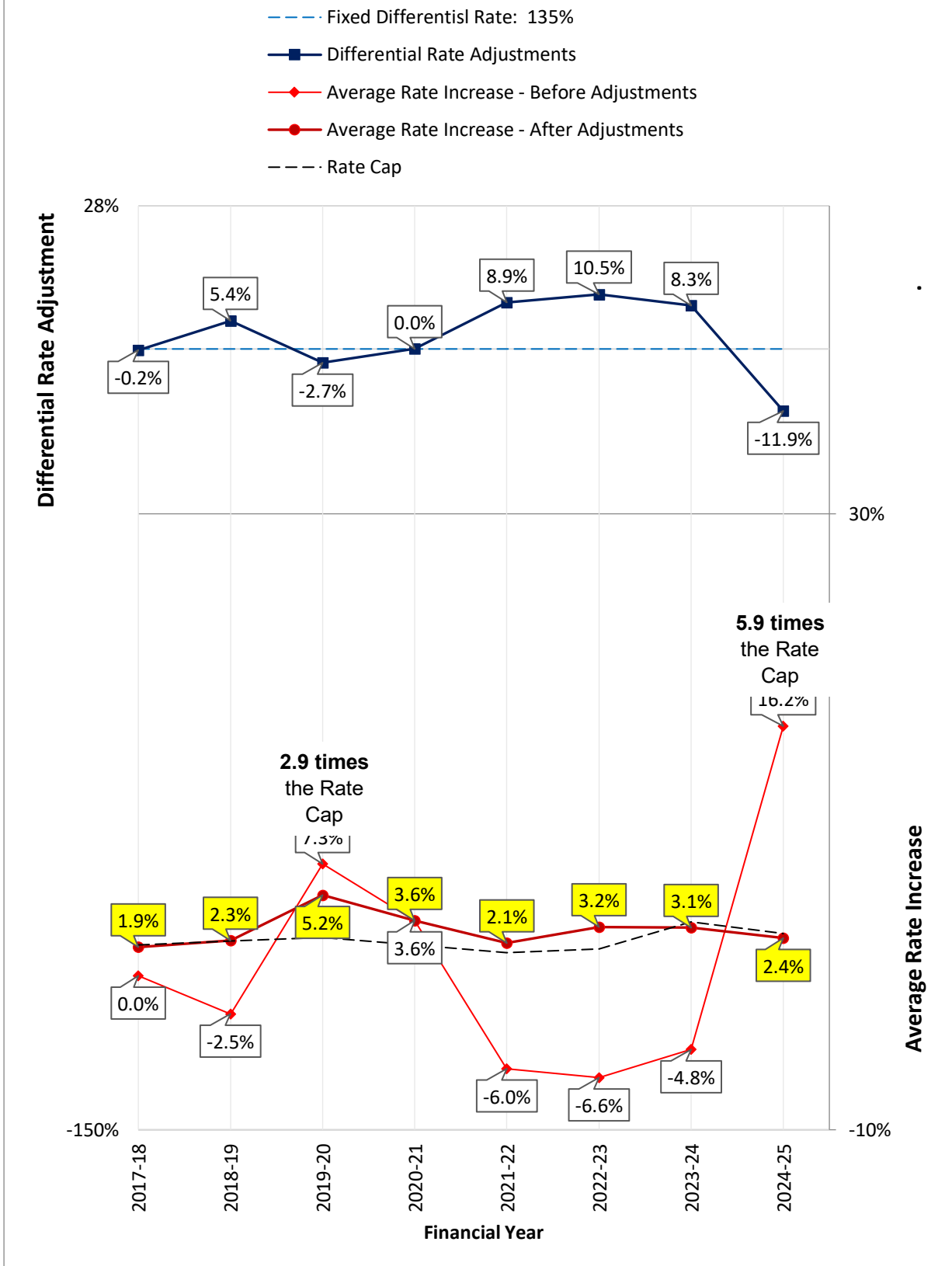
ANNEX A - Effect of Differential Rate Adjustment

Figure 4 - Rural 2 Properties

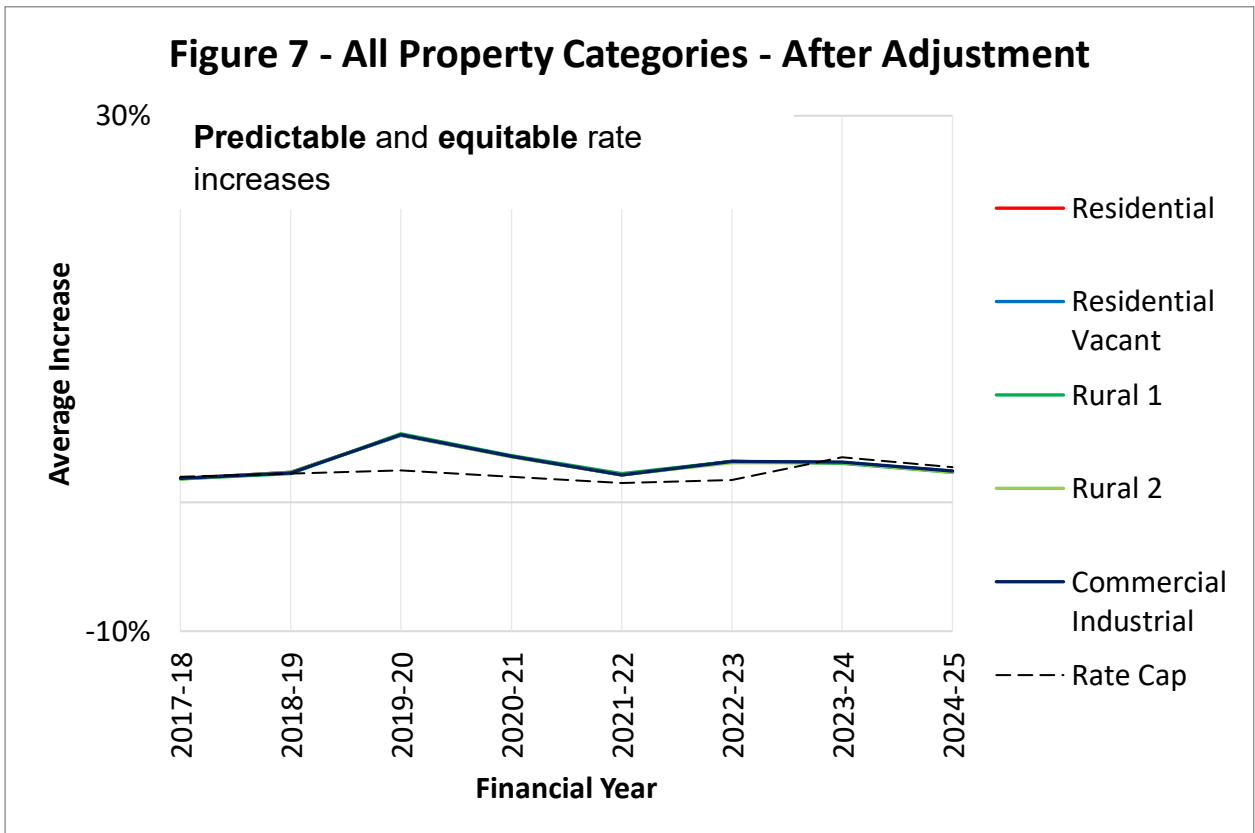
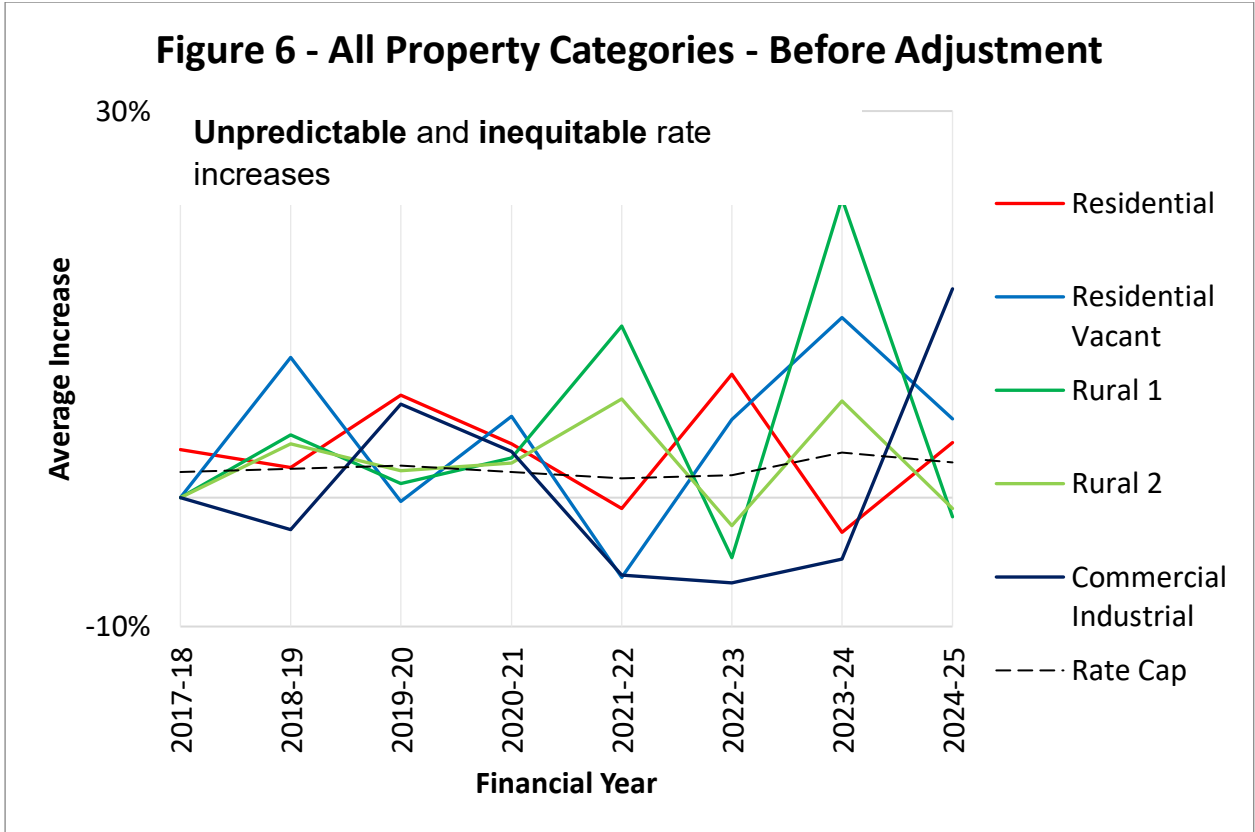


ANNEX A - Effect of Differential Rate Adjustment

Figure 5 - Commercial-Industrial Properties



ANNEX A - Effect of Differential Rate Adjustment





25th September, 2024

Dear Indigo Voices,

Re: Indigo Shire Council's EOI for Single Occupancy at the Mayday Hills Early Years Learning Centre

Thank you for reaching out to us regarding our recent engagement with Indigo Shire Council relating to their proposal for, and approval of, an EOI for a single occupancy lease at the Mayday Hills early years service in Beechworth from 2026. We welcome the opportunity to share our experience with you to include in your supplementary submission to the Inquiry into Local Government Funding & Services being conducted by the Victorian Government.

As President of Beechworth Kindergarten's 2024 Committee of Management, I have been intimately involved with all areas of this matter and can attest to the information below being an accurate reflection of our service's experience to date with Indigo Shire Council.

To provide some context to this subject, please allow me to share an overview of Beechworth Kindergarten and the proposal by Indigo Shire Council to conduct an EOI tender for a single occupancy lease at the Mayday Hills early years service in Beechworth from 2026.

Overview of Beechworth Kindergarten

Established in 1964, Beechworth Kindergarten is the oldest early years educational service within the community and the only dedicated sessional kinder provider.

It is also the largest kinder service in town, with 35 families enrolled in 2024 - clearly demonstrating the long standing value our service holds within the community. Indeed our service has a number of legacy families, some with their third generation of children attending the service.

Beechworth Kindergarten is highly regarded for the warmth and inclusivity of its culture, welcoming and supporting a number of vulnerable/at risk children and children with special needs. We are also recognised for our strong educational outcomes and unparalleled school readiness preparation.



Furthermore, our service is a key employer of educational professionals within the broader shire, whilst our governance team is rooted in community, being led 100% by a team of dedicated parent volunteers.

Since 1998, Beechworth Kindergarten has operated out of the Mayday Hills early years site under a rolling lease with Indigo Shire. Our service is located at one end of the facility, whilst another service (Beechworth Community Early Years Learning Centre, commonly known as Beechworth Childcare) operates out of a separate space within the same building, also under lease from Indigo Shire Council. Indeed, the site has been managed on a dual occupancy basis since 1998.

Indigo Shire Council's EOI Proposal for a Single Occupancy Lease from 2026

In April 2024, our service was advised of Indigo Shire Council's intention to take the Mayday Hills early years site to tender for EOI for a single occupancy lease from 2026 by the Manager of Community Development Justin Forrester.

A requirement of the EOI is that the provider offer both a kinder and childcare program.

At the August 2024 council meeting, this proposal was approved.

Formal Complaint to Indigo Shire

We have submitted a formal complaint to Indigo Shire Council regarding the following concerns relating to the EOI proposal and approval:

1. Lack of engagement and transparency with key stakeholders
2. Design of the EOI preclusive/not open to all service providers
3. Management of the EOI proposal within council
4. Conduct of Directors and Councillors at the August 2024 council meeting

1. Lack of Engagement & Transparency with Stakeholders

Our first complaint relates to a serious and ongoing lack of engagement by Indigo Shire Council with key stakeholders impacted by the EOI proposal, including the services directly impacted, the Department of Education, families affected and the broader community.

At no time prior to April 2024, when the Manager of Community Development advised us of the intention to move to a single occupancy lease, was there any



engagement with the stakeholders noted above. Indeed it was our service, Beechworth Kindergarten, who alerted the Department of Education to Indigo Shire Council's intention.

Engagement with stakeholders would have identified:

- that time frames proposed within the EOI - whilst perhaps appropriate for commercial sites - are not viable educational services, particularly those operating in the early years space (the Department of Education has advised that certification and approvals to establish a new early years site require a minimum of three years)
- that this process does not identify or distinguish between different kinder models and the value that these varying service offerings hold for the community
- that this proposal could create cost barriers for families to send their children to early years learning programs (Beechworth Kindergarten's sessional program is fully funded under the Victorian Government's 'Free Kinder' initiative whilst childcare services inherently have an additional out-of-pocket cost to attend their program)
- that this process would, perhaps unintentionally, see two essential and well established service providers having to compete to stay in operation

These are just some examples of key information that could have been shared with council if sufficient engagement was undertaken to ensure that all services, even if unsuccessful in the EOI process, could still relocate and continue to operate in the community without disruption or the risk of potential closure.

Additionally, in the time post the initial communication from the Manager of Community Development, it has been almost impossible to engage with the council on this matter as this person went on extended leave (until August 2024) not long after our initial engagement/advice from him.

In phone discussions whilst on leave, he indicated that Beechworth Kindergarten should discuss the matter further with Mark de Campo who in turn advised when contacted that he was not close enough to the project to be able to discuss/influence it.



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Beechworth Kindergarten had been awaiting Justin Forrester's return to work in August and contacted him early in the month with the aim of expediting discussions. We received no response.

At no point in his absence did anyone from council attempt to engage with our service on the topic of the lease or the EOI proposal.

Indirectly, not from council, we were alerted two days prior that this matter was not yet approved by Indigo Shire Council and was being taken to the August council meeting accordingly. We would have expected that as a service directly affected by this proposal that council would have contacted us regarding the proposal being formally presented.

Regardless, members of our committee, teaching team, families and other supportive local enterprises (such as Beechworth Inc.) attended the meeting and raised a number of questions/concerns which were not able to be answered at that time.

In the aftermath, it took over a week to secure a meeting with the Director for Community & Economic Development Sally Rice and Mark de Campo on this matter, and still longer to get a written response from Sally Rice regarding our unanswered questions from the council meeting.

At that point in time, the Department of Education indicated that they too had been seeking a meeting with council on this matter which they were only recently able to secure.

Disappointingly, it was in fact the Department of Education at this time which advised us that Justin Forrester had in fact resigned on his return from extended leave. Indigo Shire Council did not communicate this.

To date, Beechworth Kindergarten is still waiting to secure a meeting with Mayor Sophie Price, although she has been able to make herself available regularly to local media and influential members of the community who have also raised concerns.

How, with such minimal engagement with key stakeholders, can a proposal with such significant impacts be put forward and approved with any degree of integrity by



council? It is the council's responsibility to represent its community, not to dictate to it.

2) Preclusive EOI Design

To be eligible to participate in the EOI process, the applicant needs to provide both a kinder and childcare service. As Beechworth Kindergarten is a dedicated sessional kinder service and does not offer childcare, any submission made would be deemed “non-conforming”.

Indigo Shire has indicated that they will accept non-confirming submissions in order to pursue a fair and transparent process, however in effect our service is still being excluded from the EOI process or any real/valid consideration from council.

3) Management of the EOI Proposal for the Early Years Site

Beechworth Kindergarten has serious concerns about the management of the EOI proposal by Indigo Shire.

Based on communication from various members of the council, it would appear that this project has been inherited by Sally Rice and Mark de Campo upon the resignation of Justin Forrester and put forward by these directors without proper stakeholder engagement or a real understanding of the implications of this proposal.

In Justin Forrester’s extended absence, Mark de Campo indicated he was not close enough to the proposal to be able to provide detailed information or assistance.

Equally, at August’s council meeting, Sally Rice was unable to answer the numerous and detailed questions put to her, and the advice she gave to councilors at that time was largely erroneous (e.g. that one year would be sufficient for the existing services to relocate if necessary, which does not align with the Department of Education who advise that a minimum of three years would be required).

In addition to this, it was recorded in the council’s August meeting agenda that the risk/community backlash around this proposal would be low - this assumption shows a gross misunderstanding by council as to the importance of early years services within our community and how invested stakeholders are.



It is clear that the management of this proposal has been disjointed and fast-tracked without appropriate due diligence being undertaken. This matter certainly calls the integrity with which council operates into question.

4) Concerns Relating to the Conduct of Directors and Councillors During the August 2024 Council Meeting

During Indigo Shire's August 2024 council meeting, a number of deviations from formal procedure occurred which is deeply concerning.

Firstly, during the open forum section of the meeting, it is protocol for questions from the community to be read and answered. In the August meeting, a number of questions - approx. fifteen - relating to the EOI proposal for the Early Years site were read collectively with only a high level response provided by Sally Rice. It was indicated that she would revert at a later time as she was unable to answer all questions.

In spite of this, the councillors still elected to vote on and approve this proposal which we are confident would not pass the reasonable person test. Instead, one would presume that in the event of insufficient or incorrect information, the appropriate approach would be to withhold voting on such a proposal until such a time as all information is available and accurate. Or, in realising in the aftermath a decision was not fully informed, sufficient corrective action be undertaken to remedy it.

Finally, the meeting minutes from the August council meeting were inaccurate. In the meeting minutes it was noted that all stakeholders had been sufficiently engaged with (which as aforementioned is not correct) and equally Sally Rice's commitment of support to helping impacted stakeholders relocate (in the substantially reduced timeframe) if necessary has been omitted.

It is important to note also that similarly at the September 2024 council meeting, our numerous questions during the open forum section for the meeting were also read collectively and only answered by council in writing at a later date.

Given the council is now in caretaker mode as they navigate local elections, it appears unlikely that the decision to proceed with the EOI, and the time parameters associated with it, will be adjusted in any way by Indigo Shire Council.



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Thank you for your interest in our experience with Indigo Shire on this matter. I hope the information contained in this letter is useful in your supplementary submission to parliament.

Kind Regards,

Averil Halleur

(on behalf of the 2024 Committee of Management - Beechworth Kindergarten)

The Border Mail

Dismay as caravan park control given over to company

By [Anthony Bunn](#)
19 2024 - 6:30pm



/ The Border Mail **Updated** May 20 2024 - 5:19pm, first published May



The entrance to Rutherglen's caravan park, which is located near Lake King, in the town. A council decision means it will be under a new lessee from July 1. Picture by Mark Jesser

Caravan Park operators are furious at Indigo Shire after councillors approved a new lease for a Rutherglen site despite a number of conflicts of interest.

Councillors voted 4-3 at their meeting on Tuesday, May 14, to approve a 21-year lease for Holiday Park Management (HPM) Australia to operate the Rutherglen Caravan and Tourist Park from July 1, 2024.

The decision followed HPM Australia declaring a potential conflict of interest because of work it had done on a master plan for the Rutherglen park prepared for the council by consultants ODIN360.

HPM Australia on its website states it is "proud to be part of the ODIN360 consulting network".

Media Extract 1

That situation and other conflicts flagged in the meeting agenda had councillor Bernard Gaffney join Roberta Horne and Emmerick Teissl against the lease.

"I think it's a very, very serious matter," Cr Gaffney said.

"There's a lot of confidential documents that can't be brought out to the community to see, which is unfortunate.

"To get four declarations of conflict of interest over one contract ... is something I've never seen before."

The other conflicts related to the council's buildings and property officer having ties to a company that expressed interest, ODIN360 declaring a general conflict because of its council work and its lead consultant also flagging a difficulty.

Mayor Sophie Price told the meeting the council took guidance from its law firm Maddocks as part of due diligence.

"The advice from Maddocks recognised that while HPMA were involved in the development of the master plan and proposed lease, the processes conducted by council in developing the master plans and EOI documentation were appropriate as they accurately reflected council's intentions with respect to the park, and that HPMA were not materially advantaged," Cr Price said.

"Consequently they found no reason to not support council granting the lease to HPMA."

That has not satisfied the operators of the Rutherglen Park and their counterparts at Chiltern and Yackandandah who fear a similar process will befall their sites.

Rutherglen caravan park lessee Dennis Exton said his lawyers told him the lease appeared designed to keep others away and he had decided not to bid because of that and too much uncertainty and viability questions.

"We felt tired of it and dealing with council; not once were we asked what was needed, they made this master plan off their own bat and half the things they don't need," Mr. Exton said.

"I don't want to brag but I could have put \$2 million into this place if they let me and now someone else is going to come in and put managers in and they haven't got the personal touch that we have."

Media Extract 1



Lake Anderson Caravan Park operator Ty Bates says he was left devastated after watching Indigo councillors debate the future lease for Rutherglen caravan park. Picture by James Wiltshire

Councillor Diane Shephard, who joined Cr Price, Sue Gold and Peter Croucher in voting for HPM, thanked "the previous Rutherglen caravan park lessees for the work that they've done over the years in establishing that caravan park and giving great service".

"They didn't put in an application and so they'll be moving on, but really appreciate the time and work they've put into that space and look forward to HPMA's opportunity to move that caravan park to another level," Cr Shephard said.

Mr. Exton, who took over the lease after potato farming, felt slighted by Cr Shephard's remarks.

"We've been here 14 years and they couldn't even say our name, say 'Dennis and Lisa have done a magnificent job' and there was a little dig that we hadn't gone for the tender," Mr. Exton said.

"Well that was because something was not right."

The operator of Chiltern's Lake Anderson Caravan Park, Ty Bates, said he had raised the issue with Victoria's corruption watchdog IBAC and Benambra MP Bill Tilley.

Mr. Bates said his lawyer raised concerns after he presented them with the proposed Rutherglen lease.

Media Extract 1

"There were half a dozen clauses deemed unusual and he wouldn't recommend anyone sign that lease," he said.



Flooding at Yackandandah's caravan park. Its operator Gavan Doyle says a master plan fails to adequately take into account the impacts of regular inundations when it comes to designs for new buildings.

Mr. Bates and his Yackandandah Holiday Park counterpart Gavan Doyle are fearful they will be subject to similar dealings when their leases are up for renewal, and they won't be able to continue.

"I'm walking around now and feel as though I've got no purpose," Mr. Bates said.

Mr. Doyle said: "You feel like you're beating your head against a bloody brick wall and it's not achieving anything and it's making us a little bit more mentally fragile and angry."

Mr. Bates said in his nine years at Chiltern adult visitor numbers had gone from 6000 to 20,000, while Mr. Doyle estimated his had risen from 4500 to 15,000 since 2015 when he took on the lease.

All three park operators questioned the secrecy of the new lease with the only significant detail beyond the 21 years, "a minimum rent guarantee set at 70 per cent of the predicted gross annual income".

That 70 per cent is dependent on a forecast and in reality will be a percentage of annual income rather than ending with such a high figure after final calculations.

Mr. Exton says what he pays to council tallies about 7 per cent of annual turnover.

Media Extract 1

With the new Rutherglen lessee required to invest in line with the master plan, Mr. Doyle said the blueprint for his park flagged investment of \$3.5 million.



An official website image of the accommodation provided at the Koondrook Retreat which is managed by the same company which has now won the rights to oversee Rutherglen's caravan park.

"We've been here for a bit over eight-and-a-half years and in that period we haven't grossed \$3.5 million, let alone made \$3.5 million, so it's completely unviable to apply for another lease when that's the figure being spoken," Mr. Doyle said.

Mr. Bates hopes the Rutherglen decision can be rescinded before July 1 and has made a plea to Cr Croucher to support such a move.

Cr Croucher did not reply to The Border Mail, while HPM Australia director Peter Woolman said he would need to speak to the council before answering questions.

HPM manages holiday parks at Long Jetty and Wilsons Promontory in Gippsland as well as the Koondrook Retreat near the Murray River which provides glamping.

'I don't understand the secrecy': Caravan park manager questions council



By [Anthony Bunn](#)

May 26 2024 - 8:00am

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Lake Anderson Caravan Park lessee Ty Bates is irked at delays to his freedom of information request for information about the valuation of the accommodation hub. A Chiltern caravan park manager has complained to a Victorian watchdog after being frustrated with delays to a freedom of information request lodged with Indigo Council. Ty Bates, who operates the Lake Anderson Caravan Park, applied last September to the council for documents related to an assessment of his property and is still awaiting a response. He said his action was prompted by the council, as his landlord, increasing his rent from \$5000 per year to \$18,000. Mr Bates said the removal of 14 new powered sites, considered to be an improvement, from the final lease update, had resulted in a reduction to \$13,000 but he still wanted detail as to how the council arrived at the first figure. "We want to keep the bastards honest," Mr Bates said.

WATCH: 17 stylish dogs have hit the red carpet in miniature recreations of the outfits worn by Hollywood A-Listers at the Met Gala. The outfits were sold to raise money for the Museum of the Dog in New York City.

"I don't understand the secrecy.

"I want to know how they arrived at that figure and make sure they're doing the right thing in accordance with the criteria in the lease."

Mr Bates said in 2023 he had received an assessment document from the council which blacked out details related to Indigo Council caravan parks, but displayed financial details for those in Alpine Shire.

The Border Mail asked Indigo Council why the Alpine Shire data was provided but material related to its own parks was censored.

An answer was not provided.

Indigo Shire chief executive Trevor Ierino cited intricacies for the delay on the material sought by freedom of information.

"The request is particularly complex and some documents contain sensitive third party information," Mr Ierino said.

"Under FOI legislation, we must consult with these third parties to consider their view on the potential release of the information.

"Given this necessity and the complexity of the request, the process takes some time.

"We are unable to comment on how long this process will take, but we appreciate the applicant's patience while we work to finalise it as quickly as possible."

Mr Bates said he spoke to a council representative on April 9 and this month took his concerns about the hold-up to the Office of the Victorian Information Commissioner. A case manager emailed him on May 21 stating his complaint about Indigo Shire had been accepted.



Indigo Community Voice president Herb Ellerbock is not happy with the process that resulted in a 21-year lease being awarded for Rutherglen's caravan park.

The to-do about the information request follows a controversial council decision to grant a [21-year lease](#) to manage Rutherglen's caravan park to a company which was linked to a master plan process.

Conflicts of interest sparked concerns from councillors and a [suggestion from Benambra MP Bill Tilley](#) that "alarm bells" should have been ringing in relation to the process.

Now council watchdog [Indigo Community Voice](#) has expressed dismay at what has unfolded and suggested councillors should have followed councillor Roberta Horne's move to delay the decision.

"The deferment of the motion would have provided a deeper understanding for councillors and gained more community trust," ICV president Herb Ellerbock said.

"An improvement in council's process and transparency is needed, particularly when three other shire caravan park leaseholders are anxious about their future as their leases near expiration.

"ICV will be contacting the Victorian Ombudsman early next week and seeking their consideration of the matter."

The Corowa Free Press

1600 signature petition against roadhouse will be considered

By [Robert Muir](#)

Sep 24, 2024



Among local residents raising strong objections to the proposed roadhouse/service centre are Robin Pfeiffer and Michael Chambers, pictured at Pfeiffers Winery with Sunday Creek in the background.

A petition containing 1600 signatures against a proposed 24/7 roadhouse/service centre at the intersection of Federation Way and the Murray Valley Highway, Rutherglen will be considered by Indigo Shire Council before any decision is made.

The matter was discussed at council's latest monthly meeting on Monday, September 16.

Council received the document 'Save Lake Moodemere – Say No to 24/7 Roadhouse/Service Ctr Next to Conservation Reserve' with a council recommendation the document does not comply with the petition requirements under clause 39(b) of Indigo Shire Council's Governance Rules.

At council's September meeting, Cr Emmerick Teissl said the sentiment is felt by council by those who took the time to fill out the petition. "It's great to see so many

Media Extract 2

people care about our environment and the significance of Lake Moodemere,” he said. Cr Sue Gold said it was “a really important opportunity to reflect on both council’s interest in hearing from the community and acceptance of the petition even though it does not meet all our requirements”.

Cr Gold said it was important names, addresses and email details were included by those signing petitions to verify the applicants. She said it’s appreciated it would not be feasible to follow up everyone on the petition being from all walks of the country but encourages people in future to look at the standards for petitions.

Cr Roberta Horne said there is “great passion” in the community and elsewhere against the proposed development and confusion exists regarding petitions, especially being confined to Indigo Shire residents in the case of border communities – a la the decades old Main Street Rutherglen situation – and online considerations. Despite not meeting all petition requirements, Cr Diane Shephard said the petition will be noted in council deliberations.

The document of September 9 from the Friends of Lake Moodemere group submitted to council included: “As concerned residents, landholders, farmers, environmentalists, indigenous peoples of the land and recreational users we strongly object to a proposed development of a 24/7 Roadhouse/Service Centre to be built on the edge of the Lake Moodemere Conservation Reserve.

“We all have a deep personal connection to this unique location in Rutherglen. This pristine and precious area is more than just a waterway, it is a sanctuary teeming with endangered species and rich native habitat. Among its residents are the Sunday Creek Platypus colony, the elusive and endangered Rakali, fresh water crays, an intriguing variety of fish species and enchanting birdlife. In these waterways, too, you can find the delicate croak of our local froglets and the silent scamper of countless small critters unseen to the naked eye but so essential to our native biodiversity.

“We were therefore devastated and alarmed to learn of this proposed development located adjacent to this haven. Night and day, the operations of a commercial establishment of this nature will undoubtedly produce pollutants and noise that will disrupt the natural habitats of our native wildlife, risking both immediate harm and long-term environmental degradation.”

The document included data from NECMA, Parks Victoria and the DEECA pointing out that many of these species within the conservation reserve are vulnerable and/or seriously endangered, hence it being a conservation reserve!

“Therefore, any actions disrupting their habitat, such as this proposed development, pose a grave threat to their existence,” the document states. “Our opposition to this development is more than just a fight for the serene beauty of our environment; it’s an imperative action to save the wildlife that rely on this habitat.

Media Extract 2

“We are calling on the Indigo Shire Council, the Indigo Shire Planning Department and the relevant statutory authorities NECMA, VIC Roads, Dept of Transport, GM Water to consider their decision wisely.

“We implore them to prioritise the conservation and protection of this irreplaceable ecosystem over short-term commercial gain.

“Please, stand with us in preserving the pristine and vital waterways of Lake Moodemere by signing this petition and show that you care about these natural habitats and the wildlife.”

Lake Moodemere’s document calls on the Indigo Shire Council, the Indigo Shire planning department and the relevant statutory authorities NECMA VIC Roads, Dept of Transport, GM Water to consider their decision wisely: “We implore them to prioritise the conservation and protection of the irreplaceable ecosystem over short-term commercial gain.”

At this stage, council is in the process of assessing the application. This includes referral to the relevant authorities such as the Department of Transport and Planning and North East Catchment Management Authority.

Once the process is complete, the final decision will be tabled at a future council meeting, supported by a planning report that will provide an assessment against the relevant planning scheme requirements.

At this stage, it is not known if the planning assessment will result in a recommendation for approval or a recommendation for refusal.

The process to date has included a public exhibition period that resulted in several submissions.

Council’s director of planning and corporate services Greg Pinkerton said Lake Moodemere’s document, and all other submissions received from the public will be assessed by the planning team for relevant planning considerations.

“The application for a service station on the corner of Federation Way and the Murray Valley Highway, Rutherglen is progressing through the planning process, and this includes referrals to statutory bodies which will advise council on their relevant areas of expertise,” Mr. Pinkerton said.

“When the assessment against the Indigo Shire Planning Scheme is complete, a report, with recommendation will be provided to a future council meeting for decision.”

By [Robert Muir](#)
Journalist

The Border Mail

'Someone is going to die'

MONDAY MARCH 18, 2024



Businesses were forced to close after a truck collided with a parked car in Rutherglen's Main Street. Picture by Mark Jesser

Large smash reignites calls to divert trucks

Ted Howes, Mark Jesser

RUTHERGLEN was left reeling after a truck smashed into a car, shopfront and power pole leaving hundreds without power.

Businesses and residents were without electricity until after closing time on Saturday following the incident on Friday, with Main Street closed.

No one was injured in the crash on what is part of the Murray Valley Highway, a thoroughfare for B-doubles and stock trucks.

At 5pm on Friday a truck smashed into a Kia Stinger GT before knocking over the power pole outside The Other Place cafe.

Police, who said investigations were continuing into the incident, were awaiting blood tests from the driver of the truck.

The owner of the black car, Herb Ellerbock, was at James and Co wine bar when the smash happened.

"Five minutes earlier I was getting out of that car - if the crash happened then, I wouldn't be talking to you now, I'm OK but I reckon the car is a write-off," Mr Ellerbock said.

"I feel sorry for the businesses here - the bakery, all the shops along here, the residents have no power and the road is still closed off, it's a mess."

The Other Place owner, Cyril Cox, said the incident had left the town shattered.

Mr Cox said the crash wiped out the verandah of his building and he had lost thousands of dollars in stock with his fridges and freezers out of action.

"There's probably 20 or 25 businesses that have had their doors closed today," Mr Cox said.

"They are all losing if they're in hospitality, they're losing food, they're losing beverages, they're losing everything."

Continued: P5

Monday July 29, 2024 THE BORDER MAIL 5

CRASH CONCERNS Petition tabled in Parliament calls for traffic calming measures

Pledge to make town's main road safer

Ted Howes

A COMMITMENT from the Victorian government to work towards traffic safety improvements in Rutherglen has been welcomed by Indigo Shire Council but met with scepticism by community advocates and an opposition politician.

This week, Roads and Road Safety Minister Melissa Horne responded to a petition with 876 signatures calling for the balance of \$2 million put aside in 2016 to investigate heavy vehicles passing through Rutherglen be spent on traffic calming measures.

"The Roads Minister has committed to working with Indigo Shire to implement safety improvements, but we need more than talk and planning, we need action," Member for Northern Victoria Wendy Lovell, who lodged the petition on behalf of a councillor, said.

"The minister blames the Commonwealth for withdrawing funding from the Rutherglen traffic study, but the state promised \$2 million of its own for this project, and now refuses to answer questions about how that money will be used."

The move follows incidents including two this year, one fatal when a pedestrian hit by a car in Main Street in Rutherglen just before Easter died from her injuries when she was struck a car. In

another incident earlier in March, a truck smashed into a car outside a Main Street shopfront and power pole, leaving hundreds without power. No one was injured.

Indigo Shire mayor Sophie Price welcomed the government's commitment to work with the council to implement traffic safety improvements in Main Street.

"We have also been advocating to the Victorian government for a commitment

that the remaining funds, put aside to address heavy vehicles using Main Street, be used to implement safety improvements," Ms Price said.

"We are yet to receive any formal correspondence from the Department of Transport on when works will start or exactly what the safety measures will entail, however, we look forward to working together to maximise safety outcomes for the Rutherglen community."

Indigo Community Voice president Herb Ellerbock, who lives in Rutherglen, said since 2016 Councillor Roberta Horne [no relation to the minister] had worked tirelessly advocating for Main Street to be made safer.

"Cr Horne's most recent efforts include sending her 876 signed petition calling on the Victorian Minister for Roads and Road Safety to act on delivering road safety works," Mr Ellerbock said.

"Since 2009 several studies have been done. The most recent 2018 study being the Rutherglen Origin and Destination report costing almost \$700,000. The study still hasn't been released to the public.

"It is only a matter of time before more deaths occur."

Mr Ellerbock said it was time to act and spend the remaining \$1.3 million on essential safety-traffic calming measures.

"One measure is to extend the Main Street 40kmh speed limit to slow traffic," he said. "Now is the time for the Victorian Minister for Roads and Road Safety to act.

"The minister must instruct VicRoads and Indigo Council to urgently address this situation as it becomes more dire each day."

The Border Mail has contacted the office of Roads and Road Safety Minister Melissa Horne.



On March 15, a truck smashed into a shop front and power pole on Rutherglen's Main Street. Picture by Mark Jesser

Town robbed of 'quiet achiever', true giver

Ted Howes

RUTHERGLEN lost a gracious quiet achiever last week in Dianne Boyd, a lady her devastated husband Alan described as one of the community's greatest supporters - but few knew.

Mrs Boyd, 76, was hit by a car in Main Street on Thursday, March 28, and died in hospital the next day.

Retiree Mr Boyd, 79, said his wife of 50 years worked calmly but diligently behind the scenes for decades helping sick babies, handicapped children, the elderly and people seeking to trace their family heritage.

"Dianne was a quiet achiever, was always a giver more than a taker," Mr Boyd said. "If anyone was in trouble, or needed help, Dianne was always there to help.

"She would be pretty well known in Rutherglen because we used to run the servo, but I'm not sure that a lot of people would know how active she was, how helpful she was because she was never in the limelight, she didn't want that at all. Everything she did was al-



Dianne Boyd worked tirelessly to help others before she died aged 76 last week. Picture supplied

ways done quietly, in an unassuming way."

The couple had two children: Lyle a truck driver who now lives in Melbourne, and Hayden who is based with

the navy in Sydney. Mr Boyd said he and his wife were fiercely proud of their children, but Mrs Boyd's efforts went far beyond caring for her own young.

"At one stage, Dianne went to Melbourne and trained and worked as a mothercraft nurse at the Royal Women's Hospital," Mr Boyd said.

"Later, when she was settled here, if people had illnesses, or were handicapped she'd be there to help, to go out of her way to help get them to doctors.

"She worked at the mother's club and even though we were running the service station, she'd take time off and go up to the school and work in the canteen - she loved kids.

"She did little bits of knitting to help people out, she spent a lot of her time after we retired doing knitting for the Royal Women's Hospital for handicapped babies. She used to knit all day.

"If we were at home having a quiet night watching television, she would be there busily knitting away."

The couple were married in Melbourne in 1974 and lived in Yarrawonga, where Mrs Boyd's parents lived, until 1984 when they moved to Mrs Boyd's hometown of Rutherglen. The couple bought the service station

on the town's Main Street, which was a BP until they sold it in 2002.

"Even when we had the busy servo, she was busy helping people out, especially with her knitting - but I guess no one really knew about this," Mr Boyd said.

Mrs Boyd's expertise in genealogy research is reflected in the study in their Rutherglen home where folders containing decades of research sit on the bookshelves.

She started this passion long before the internet made lighter work of it.

"Dianne would put in a huge effort to help people trace their family past, writing letters, making phone calls, she'd have her head in old newspapers at the library," Mr Boyd said.

Mrs Boyd's passion for tracing family roots uncovered strong connections with her and her husband's own ancestors in the UK.

The couple had planned a trip there next week.

"We were supposed to be leaving next Wednesday to go to England," Mr Boyd said. "She was just so adven-

Dianne was a quiet achiever, was always a giver more than a taker.

Husband, Alan Boyd

turous, she did some travel when she was much younger and that stayed with her.

"Dianne had that amazing spirit of adventure, she just loved meeting new people, she would talk to anyone, she was genuinely interested in people."

Mr Boyd said his wife had requested there be no public funeral.

"Dianne's mother died last year and she had requested no funeral and Dianne told me she thought this was very fitting for her mum and said she would prefer the same thing when she goes," Mr Boyd said.

"We're just having a quiet family arrangement, nothing public, she didn't want a fuss - that sort of shows how she was."

The Border Mail

Trail 'fail' claim

4 THE BORDER MAIL Friday September 16, 2022

BY TED HOWES

A BORDER region whistleblower has written to the federal government alleging an application for a multi-million dollar grant to fund the Rutherglen Wine Walk Cycle Trail overstated the benefits to the community.

Albury engineer Charles Mitchell yesterday wrote to Regional Development and Local Government Minister Catherine King to raise

"serious questions" over a Building Better Regions Fund application for the Rutherglen Wine, Walk, Cycle Trail project.

Mr Mitchell was approached by Rutherglen resident Peter Twigg to provide economic and engineering advice for the project's business plan, which Mr Mitchell alleged effectively "misled" the federal government.

"The false economic justification used to justify the

project is ... extremely misleading," Mr Mitchell has alleged.

"It's basically misleading the government to invest in a project with negligible community benefit and is essentially defrauding the federal government and taxpayers."

Indigo Shire CEO Trevor Ierino said council strongly refuted the allegations contained in Mr Mitchell's letter to the minister.

In 2018, Mr Mitchell

helped spark a Victorian Ombudsman investigation into the Wodonga Council allegedly overcharging rate-payers more than \$18 million over 10 years for waste.

Mr Mitchell's letter to Ms King over the Rutherglen trail states: "The current funding for the trail will not provide the anticipated economic stimulus for the community and will, in fact, become an ongoing debt and liability legacy for the community."

The business case for the federal grant application prepared by consultant TRC Tourism for Indigo Shire Council stated: "For the Rutherglen Wine, Walk, Cycle Trail, we have assumed it to be \$25 per ride. For all users, this benefit measure totals \$9.733 million over 10 years for all trail users."

Mr Mitchell called the \$9 million figure "illusionary", saying: "TRC Tourism consultants identified 'shadow

benefit' where a user pays cost of \$25 per ride is ludicrous. It's like asking people to pay a toll to use a path or a council road."

An Indigo Shire Council spokeswoman said: "The business case covers the economic contribution to the visitor economy from both day and overnight visitors based on a minimum additional spend per visitor using the trail."

|| Continued: P4

Media Extract 4

■ From: P1

Mr Ierino said the allegations in Mr Mitchell's letter were serious and unsubstantiated, and that "council will be seeking legal advice as soon as possible".

Rutherglen resident Peter Twigg said the "inevitable ongoing maintenance costs of the trail" had not been addressed in the business plan presented to the federal government.

He said he had raised his concerns with council.

"They're saying that it's only a concept - and what am I worrying about," Mr Twigg said.

"I've asked them but they haven't done a cursory examination of the route.

"I've done a full analysis of every section of the track including photos and sent this on to the council.

"I've done this because I've been advised that before they look into it I need to provide full documentation but they don't want to hear about it."

The Indigo Shire Council spokeswoman said the project funding was for two phases: design and construction.

"It is important to note that the final funding amount from the federal government is \$5.1 million," the spokeswoman said.

"This is substantially higher than the costings in the original business case, reflecting the importance of the design phase work and increasing costs of construction.

"The design phase includes comprehensive consultation with all land owners and managers including



Indigo Shire Council said the design phase of the Rutherglen Wine, Walk, Cycle trail project would include assessment of cultural heritage, vegetation and other physical aspects including flooding. Picture by Peter Twigg

further consultation with Parks Victoria."

The spokeswoman said the construction phase could not commence until the design phase had been completed which would "address a number of key challenges".

"This includes comprehensive assessment of cultural heritage, vegetation

and other physical aspects including flooding," she said.

Mr Mitchell, who previously worked in the Wodonga Council's finance department, said the benefit-to-cost ratio (BCR) identified in the Indigo Shire Council's business case for the trail was intangible.

"The business case identi-

fies a benefit to cost ratio of 3.2," he said.

"My preliminary calculation shows that with ongoing maintenance and renewal the BCR is closer to 1.0, which means negligible economic benefits for the community, but an ongoing debt for the ratepayer for annual maintenance and renewal of

the future asset.

"According to the business case, 'estimated construction cost of the trails project is \$4.414 million, and the 10-year maintenance costs are \$1.324 million for a total 10-year cost of \$5.738 million.

"Indigo ratepayers could be up for over \$200,000 per year in costs."

The Border Mail

THE BORDER MAIL Friday January 19, 2024



Tangam-Kiewa Men's Shed president Jack Britton and treasurer Gary Hale say the organisation works hard for its community. Picture by James Wiltshire

No shed to call home

Ted Howes

A BITTER dispute has erupted between a North East men's support group and Indigo Shire Council over a building on a pocket of land next to the Kiewa River.

Members of the Tangam-Kiewa Men's Shed

fear their group will be left in limbo with nowhere to meet when they are "evicted" on April 1.

The group's managers joked they might "chain themselves" to their shed if the bulldozers moved in at the Kiewa Valley site on Kiewa East Road.

The council, however, insists the "loan" to the men's shed of the building, once owned by North East Catchment Management Authority, was always temporary. The council, which now owns the land, said community consultation had indicated most locals want the land on

the banks of the Kiewa River to be used as a family space.

But men's shed president Jack Britton said the plans for the river access park "had always included the men's shed", dismissing the idea of relocating to Coulston Park.

"Work on all those things in the Coulston Park master

plan will probably be around 20 years away," he said. "We approached council about putting a fence around our men's shed and had a meeting with all the councillors about it and it just completely turned around, they had a different agenda."

■ Continued Page 12

Men's shed members have nowhere to go

Ted Howes

From Page 1

"They decided that they didn't want us here and said that we shouldn't have been there in the first place," Mr Britton said.

"Nearly three months ago they gave us a \$2000 grant to upgrade our power, then on the 15th of December I got a letter to say they weren't renewing our licence and that they would put our stuff in storage.

"So our stuff will be in a shipping container until a site becomes available - but what do we do while those tools are being stored - we have nowhere to go."

Mr Britton said the existing building was perfect.

"We're prepared to move but we want to stay where we are until we have a place to move to," he said. "What if it takes five years? We're all getting old.

"The men's shed is a real need for the community here, and we have the support of the community."

The Kiewa River Community Park project has a budget of \$180,000 (partially

government grant funded) and a completion date of May 1, 2024.

The council said the plan was to revitalise the former NECMA depot site into a hub for "building social con-

nections, passive recreation and community access to the Kiewa River".

"Council staff have been working with the men's shed to find an alternative location and are currently

exploring several options for a long-term permanent home," it said.

Council chief executive Trevor Ierino said the agreement to use the shed was only ever a temporary one.



Gary Hale and Jack Britton at the men's shed. Picture by James Wiltshire

They decided that they they didn't want us here and said that we shouldn't have been there in the first place

Tangam-Kiewa Men's Shed president Jack Britton

"We are very supportive of the work of the men's shed," Mr Ierino said.

"Council understands the health and wellbeing benefits for the community of connecting through the men's shed activities. We are committed to working collaboratively with members to find a permanent home and to seek grant funding opportunities to build a purpose-built facility."

Tangam-Kiewa Men's Shed secretary Ian Kerr said there were concerns about the condition of the river front which was fenced off.

"It's got to be fenced off - the whole project is to be a safe place for families, kids," he said.

Life Saving Victoria, which conducts studies on waterways deemed to be danger-

ous, said it had been working with Indigo Shire Council in an advisory role.

A spokesman said they had no findings that the area was dangerous and that LSV would be prepared to provide a risk assessment.

Community ambulance officer Aaron Wallace, who lives in Tangambalanga, posted his support for a community park on social media.

"Community ask yourself - do you want an area for community to have markets and a space by the river?" he posted.

"The area was always to be community space. Maybe a place in the industrial area as it's developed for a men's shed. I support a men's shed ... but I want to see this area developed for all community and visitors to enjoy."

'Light at the end of the tunnel': Men's group gets new home

12 THE BORDER MAIL Friday July 05, 2024

Ted Howes

A NORTH East men's support group that feared it would be evicted from its headquarters says there is now "light at the end of the tunnel".

The Tangam-Kiewa Men's Shed understood there is now an informal extension of the April 1 deadline to vacate the Kiewa East Road premises to September.

In January, the group feared it would be booted off the site after receiving a notice from Indigo Shire Council to move on and a bitter dispute erupted.

The council maintained the group's tenure at the site "was always intended to be temporary" while the community space development there went ahead.

Since then, the issue has been discussed at meetings between the council and the group, and at February's Indigo Council meeting.

Tangam-Kiewa Men's Shed president Jack Britton said while he was initially opposed to Indigo Shire Council's plan for the group to move to nearby Coulston Park, he was now confident the shift would benefit the

group and the community. He said the group had remained at the original site holding regular sessions and was waiting for two shipping containers to arrive to transport tools and equipment to the Coulston Park site.

"There's light at the end of the tunnel, although there is nothing official about the extension for where we are now," Mr Britton said. "For the men's shed recently it's been business as usual.

"Once we get confirmation from Coulston Park that we can build a new shed there, I'll start chasing grants and things to build a new shed up there.

"Things have been going OK, the council has been co-operative and I think everyone, including the community which gives us heaps of support, would like to see this resolved."

When asked if the council had extended the arrangement with the group to occupy the Kiewa Road East site, Indigo Shire Council chief executive Trevor Ierino said: "Not formally".

"Council is waiting on planning advice before the relocation can progress ... (and) has an open line of

communication with the men's shed group which is aware of the delay. There has been no extension to the licence," he said.

"The Coulston Park committee of management resolved at its May 2024 meeting to site the men's shed on a temporary and permanent basis at Coulston Park."

Mr Ierino said the proposed men's shed move to Coulston Park would take into account feedback from nearby residents.

"Council estimates it will take three to four months to obtain planning and building permit approval, and a further two months to order, deliver and set up containers on the Coulston Park site," he said. "This is assuming there are no objections from nearby residents, who will be notified through the planning permit process. If objections are encountered, then the process could be prolonged."

The Coulston Park Master Plan, adopted on February 27, has a spot earmarked for a men's shed compound on the eastern side of the property.

"The project is subject to current site location considerations," the plan states.

The Border Mail

Monday June 24, 2024 THE BORDER MAIL 7

Push for indoor pool gets support

Ted Howes

WITH temperatures rising from minus 3 at dawn to 7 degrees by 11 o'clock on Wednesday morning, Beechworth retiree Jim Murphy was quick to sign a petition for a heated swimming pool in the historic town.

At the moment, heeding his doctor's advice to partake in aquatic therapy means finding a lift to Wangaratta every week; the only other public heated pool nearby is Wodonga.

By late morning on June 19, Mr Murphy was one of 475 people behind a push to establish an indoor community pool in Beechworth.

But the driving force behind the campaign, Stanley businesswoman Maggie Mackenzie, is aiming for 1000 signatures.

Mr Murphy, a longtime Beechworth resident who used to work at the Mayday Hills asylum with mate Ross Gladstone, who also signed the petition, said "it made perfect sense" for a heated pool in the town.

"I usually head out to Wang every Wednesday,

I couldn't go today, but it would be great to have a heated pool here, one you could use all year round," Mr Murphy said.

"You can only use the one here in summer, but my

doctor says it's something I should do all the time - I fully support this. "If you had one in Beechworth, I wouldn't have to drive to Wang, and neither would anyone else who needs it."



Jim Murphy, 80, Remy, 2, and Ross Gladstone, 80, outside Ritchies IGA at Beechworth on Wednesday, June 19. Mr Murphy and Mr Gladstone both signed Maggie Mackenzie's petition (below) to support the establishment of an indoor community pool for Beechworth. Picture by Mark Jesser



Mrs Mackenzie said rather than groan about what was not happening, she was taking the approach of convincing people of the benefits of a heated community pool, and not just for elderly residents.

"Kids need to learn how to swim, especially kids from overseas, and at the moment there's just nowhere for them to go to learn when it gets cooler," she said.

"This could actually save lives by teaching young kids to swim properly.

Mrs Mackenzie said she wanted to alert Indigo Shire Council and the community to statistics from the Royal

Life Saving Society and the Australian Water Safety Council which painted a grim picture.

She said she had written to federal Infrastructure Minister Catherine King, member for Indi Helen Haines and Benambra MP Bill Tilley about the need for federal and state funding to support the project.

Mr Gladstone said he was concerned about children missing out on the life skill of swimming.

"All my children have grown up now but I've got grandchildren here, six of them, it would be a good thing for them," Mr

Gladstone said. "Learning to swim properly is a very important skill for kids."

Indigo Shire has five outdoor pools, in Beechworth, Rutherglen, Yackandandah, Chiltern and Tangambalanga. Council has allocated \$160,000 in the 2023-24 budget to reline the existing Beechworth pool. The council said there were no funds in the 2024-2025 budget for an indoor pool project.

"The Beechworth Pool Feasibility Study conducted in 2021 showed the indicative capital investment required for an indoor pool would be \$14.5 million," a spokesperson said.

Media Extract 7

EXTRACTS – Council Forum



COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES - 14 MAY 2024

Question 2:

Tourism North East has allocated responsibility to Indigo Shire Council to formulate a Master Plan for the Beechworth Goods Shed Precinct including art, landscaping and detailed designs of the Rail Shed and connection to the existing heritage railway station.

Will TNE and Indigo shire council provide ratepayers with details of their intentions for this project and any grant applications, or will it be kept secret as have previous TNE projects.

Response provided by Director Community and Economic Development, Sally Rice
Information to the community about this project will start in the next few weeks. This will include:

- Tourism North East have secured \$8.5M of Murray to Mountains Rail Trail Enhancement grant funding. This funding is delivering enhancement projects across the 3 LGAs through which the Rail Trail runs.
- Council has put forward the Beechworth Railway Precinct as an enhancement project recognising community interest in appropriate activation of the site and Goods Shed. Enhancement grant funding will enable the development of a Masterplan for the precinct, deliver landscaping of the Public Park and Recreation area, including integrated artwork. In addition it will fund detailed architectural design work for bringing the Goods Shed up to code.

Question 3:

Tourism North East is seeking approval for an \$11.5 million grant application for the Rutherglen Silo Art Project. The Business Case for the project identifies repairs and maintenance costs of \$2.4 million over the life of the project. Repeated requests for access to the grant application details to ascertain responsibility for these costs have been denied by TNE and Indigo Shire Council

Will the Indigo Shire ratepayers be required to provide the \$2.4 million for the repairs and maintenance for this project?

Response provided by Trevor Ierino, Chief Executive Officer
Council is always required to maintain and repair its assets, noting that any grant application always applies to the capital costs of the project, and not ongoing maintenance.

28 September 2024

To Whom it may concern

I write in full support of the Indigo Community Voice Inc.

This organization has brought together the representatives from Indigo Shire who have completed an exhaustive process of identifying the vast areas of mismanagement by our current custodians, Indigo Shire.

As a Beechworth retail operator for almost 35 years I have been fundamentally entrenched in the management of our Shire and I firmly believe the management has been derelict in almost all areas of service to the community.

I personally have expended many hours of volunteer time as a business operator, meeting with the CEOs of Indigo Shire and the CEOs of TNE, with a plea for governance that protects, preserves and promotes our extraordinary history in Indigo Shire.

The current management have completely neglected the heritage assets that transformed Beechworth from a government institution-based economy to a vibrant dynamic tourist destination. The singular focus of cycling and adventure tourism has had a dramatic negative impact on many aspects of Beechworth.

Regards,

Elizabeth Mason

President, Beechworth History and Heritage Society- 2018-2023

President, Beechworth Chamber of Commerce and Industry- 2015-2018

President, Business and Professional Women's Club - 2010-2012

The Finer Things of Life (est. 1990)

16 Camp Street

Beechworth Victoria 3747

0428573519

03 57282248

1a Camp Street
Beechworth Victoria 3747

28th September 2024

To Whom it may concern

RE: Concerns regarding Lack of Transparency, Governance, Integrity and community engagement relating to the operation of the Indigo Shire Council.

Introduction

Beechworth is a unique town which successfully transitioned from gold to government employment and now to tourism for its economic well being. It is different from other rural towns as its beginnings were in gold not in agriculture.

It has cultural aspects and some of the finest architecture in Australia which forms its identity and for which it is famous.

I have been a resident of Beechworth since 1961. My grandchildren represent the sixth generation of their father's family to reside in the town. Throughout the generations, our family have played a significant role in community life.

I have worked in many areas of healthcare, both clinical and community as well as the Team Leader of the Home and Community Care Services for the Indigo Shire Council.

For the past 23 years, my husband and I have owned and operated a hospitality business in Beechworth which offers employment to 19 local people, two of whom have been sponsored from overseas. We are soon to sponsor more staff.

We are actively involved in several community groups, festivals and other activities which support the economic well being of our community.

I believe I am well placed to offer insight into the disharmony in my community which emanates from the total lack of ability of the Indigo Shire Council to engage with the ratepayers of its community.

I feel compelled to write this letter, as I have never witnessed such a decline in regard for our local government decision makers. The gulf between the Indigo Shire decision makers and their community is enormous. Almost all efforts of appeal to reason and logic relating directly to community issues are ignored or given 'lip service'.

Beechworth is the 'jewel in the crown' of the Indigo Shire because of its unique history and the part played in Australia's early and social history. Beechworth can offer everything to the visitor, however. In recent years those responsible in the Indigo Shire Council have sought to disregard the historic essence of the area in favor of adventure tourism, a move which has not brought the promised economic benefits to business and in turn the local community.

The CEO of the Indigo Shire Council is board member of Tourism North East. A significant amount of money from the ratepayers of Indigo Shire is committed to enhance tourism visitation which at this point is difficult to quantify particularly when there does not appear to be any tangible outcomes. No evidence is forthcoming or feedback from workshops received.

Recently, the Beechworth Historic Precinct was listed on the Australian National Heritage Register, which cemented its importance for all time in the history of Australia. The work which enabled this outcome was not initiated or carried out by the Indigo Shire Council or Tourism North East. It was completed by an individual who worked in their own time without any recompense.

The following examples are a few of the many issues we ratepayers face when it comes to overall management of our community by the Indigo Shire Council.

1. Lack of transparency and poor financial governance - Home and Community Care Services.

The Indigo Shire Council Home and Community Care Service took pride in offering a care service which met the needs of the individual and was not a 'one model fits all'.

All staff employed resided in the Indigo Shire and provided services for the residents of the Indigo Shire. It was A LOCAL SERVICE providing CARE FOR LOCAL PEOPLE BY LOCAL PEOPLE.

Even though it could be shown that with the advent of Home Care Packages, a profit could be made which would directly offset funds provided by the Indigo Shire Council and support service provision, the Service was handed over to Alpine Health in the Alpine Shire.

The process showed a lack of good financial governance and transparency as the aged community of the Indigo Shire was not adequately informed or consulted regarding their requirements relating to their support and therefore as ratepayers were not given a choice.

The Indigo Shire now has a "ONE MODEL FITS ALL" service delivered from Bright, in the Alpine Shire, which is reaping the benefits derived from the management of Aged Care Packages and the delivery of associated services.

To further complicate service delivery issues, the aged community of the Indigo Shire now must liaise with the service provider, which is 58 kilometers away.

There are examples of other rural councils who have maintained the Home and Community Care services because of the money to be made through the management of Home Care Packages and the delivery of associated services.

2. Lack of Community engagement and integrity - Community Meetings

The recent four 'Community Visioning' forums organized by the Indigo Shire Council were poorly attended. I understand that only six community members attended the Beechworth meeting – two were from other communities. The other forums had very low numbers as well.

The following is my personal experience of attending what was advertised by the Indigo Shire Council as a 'community meeting', which might partly explain why community members have 'given up' attending meeting organized by the Indigo Shire Council.

On the 2nd of August 2022, I attended a community meeting organized by the Indigo Shire Council which I found did not serve the purpose of the council or the community!

On arrival I found that we were all to be seated at individual tables with a particular Councilor. This did not afford the possibility of good discussion or interaction.

The CEO, Senior Council management staff and the mayor, were at the front of the hall with a projector and a screen. When a member of the community attempted to politely raise the issue that he thought the purpose of the meeting was to engage with the community to hear issues of concern to the ratepayers, the representatives at the front of the room turned their back and would not engage with him. At no stage did they show any integrity and attempt to alleviate the situation. It was a shameful way to treat any individual.

The community members left the hall, and the meeting continued with the mayor and the senior staff presenting their pre-prepared presentation. The councilor at my table stated that he didn't know what the meeting was about!

It appears there was nothing recorded, and no feedback has ever been provided. The Council has no appetite for holding any community meetings.

3. Lack of Community engagement, integrity and transparency – Police Paddock

Beechworth is reliant on tourism for its economic well being. Integral to this is the festivals and events organized by community volunteers. Since 2015 Beechworth has lost six major events.

Last year I was the Chair of the inaugural Beechworth Heritage festival. This was a celebration of Beechworth's Indigenous, Chinese and Celtic past and featured music, dancing, cultural presentations and Heritage Trades, which spanned three days.

The center of the activities was in the Police Paddock at the rear for the historic precinct, which has been used for generations and respected by the community as it is reflective of a 'village green' in the center of the town.

This was a true community event as many community groups participated and raised funds for their individual organizations.

The festival was very successful and attracted many visitors. Planning for this years' event, which was attracting more participants, had already commenced however, when the application was sought for the use of the Police Paddock, it was discovered that without any consultation, the Indigo Shire Council had amended the size of the usable area. This effectively meant that the festival could not be planned, as there is not enough space.

There is a long 'email trail' between the decision makers of the Indigo Shire Council and me as Chair of the Committee, querying why this decision was made without any consultation with the community members who use the space for events. The CEO, Senior Indigo Shire Council staff and all councilors were included in these emails to which there has been no acknowledgment.

There is no transparency regarding why this decision has been made and by whom except to say that that the Indigo Shire Council have stated that they must protect the historic buildings. There has been no explanation regarding whether there is reason to suddenly change the usable area.

As member of Beechworth Inc (the chamber of commerce), I have also participated in a meeting with the CEO of Indigo Shire and the Director of Community and Economic Development where the request for transparency in decision making was discussed.

At this meeting it was obvious that despite the two senior managers being informed via email on two separate occasions, regarding a thoughtful proposal relating to the use of the area by the community, which will not jeopardize the integrity of the historic space, they were not aware of the proposal. Had they not read their emails?

It was also stated at this meeting, as it was in previous emails, that the Police Paddock, as a community space, is vitally important as an area for events which enhance the economic well being of Beechworth and the surrounding area.

The latest response from the Indigo Shire Council following the recent meeting is that their decision will not change despite the appeals from the Heritage Festival committee and Beechworth Inc. Nor is there a reason given regarding how the proposal, for the use of the area can possibly damage the historic buildings.

In a previous email, the Director of Community and Economic Development stated that the staff of the Indigo Shire Council have determined the space required to organize the Heritage festival.

The is also quoted as stating that “there will be no town hall meeting” regarding the issue of the Police Paddock.

This is disrespectful and impudent, as no one from the Indigo Shire Council has been involved on the committee and subsequently are not aware of plans relating to participant involvement. Platitudes were also given relating to how the council can help organizers manage the events. This amounts to the exercise of ‘ticking boxes’, as suggestions made, were totally inappropriate and showed a lack of insight into the requirements of staging a major community festival.

4. Lack of transparency and poor governance – Floating sauna.

There were over 10 objections from the Beechworth community to the proposal from a private business to erect a floating sauna on historic Lake Sambell.

The Planning Manager of the Indigo Shire Council provided a 13-page document citing why the planning application **should not be granted** for the following reasons:

- Environmental issues.
- Historic overlay of the area.
- Not included in the Lake Sambell Master Plan.
- Private enterprise using a community park.

However, four councilors overruled the Planning Manager’s advice.

This is another example of poor governance. Why would the expert advice of the Indigo Shire representative, who is not only responsible to the Indigo Shire Council but to the ratepayers for sound decision making, be ignored? Why employ someone for their skill if it is to be disregarded. Not to mention the effect that such a decision has on the morale of the staff members.

As one who objected to this proposal, I have not received any feedback regarding the Council ruling.

I am passionate about our community of the Indigo Shire and sadly could outline many more examples to support my introduction. I trust this correspondence will assist in some way to enhance the voice of frustrated Indigo Shire ratepayers.

Your sincerely,

Lorraine Lucas