

## **Angry Ratepayers across Victoria unite.**

### **MEDIA RELEASE.**

**"Too many activities, too much administration, too much borrowing - Local Government must be reined in " say ratepayers.**

A crowd of more than 80 angry ratepayers representatives last Saturday came from far and wide to a meeting of Ratepayers Victoria hosted by the Monash Ratepayers Association. Held at South Oakleigh, representatives attended from 16 shires/Council's.

With the continuing escalation of rates, serious concerns are being raised as to the direction of local government.

Those attending included young couples who had hoped to purchase their own homes, farmers rated on their means of income, as well as people on fixed incomes. "The Green Belt" and Werribee areas have created inequities to groups of ratepayers who are now "locked in".

Former Mayor of Monash, Peter Vlahos said "It is disturbing that people on very low or fixed incomes, in the sensitive years of their life are being penalised for staying in their own neighborhoods."

"With high interest on unpaid rates people are hurting" he said "and it will get worse." Mr. Vlahos predicts a horror scenario within 8 years time.

President of Ratepayers Victoria, Jack Davis said, "Ratepayers across the State are concerned with the escalation of administration costs and proliferation of activities being shifted across from State Government. The area of Health is just one issue being pushed as a huge responsibility to local government. A whole level of our society is being burdened beyond its capability," she said.

"Borrowing for infrastructure including luxurious corporate centres and for swimming pools is creating a growing debt impacting on rate levels. The level of senior staff remuneration is an area causing anger particularly in light of growing ratepayer hardship. Other areas of concern relate to overseas junkets by Councillors under the guise of "Sister City" activities."

With a new revaluation next year and Councils now indexing charges there is already widespread anxiety in ratepayers. The \$114million "black hole" shortfall for superannuation created a deep anger - this given as the reason for massive rate hikes in many municipalities.

President of Monash Ratepayers Association, Mr. Jack Davis JP said " Ratepayers are exploring the possibility of a large scale protest whereby they will request from their Council's information as to the proportion of their rates going to the superannuation of employees - which they might then claim against their personal taxation. Over the whole State with potentially millions of ratepayers this could have considerable system impact."

Following a deputation to the Minister of local Government, Ratepayers Victoria has prepared a submission to the Update of the Local Government Act.

Of concern to Ratepayers is that many councils conduct discussions in closed sessions with the result that few if any contentious issues are debated in open sessions. The open sessions are little more than a rubber stamp exercise

A major concern is that under the proposed changes to the Act, the Chief Executive Officer will be able to declare any information confidential.

A further concern is that even if after an inquiry a council is proven to have acted unlawfully, no provision exists to suspend or defer a resolution by that council or to compensate the parties affected.

Ratepayers want independent mechanisms to be directly available when serious disagreements occur between ratepayers and council. Ratepayers believe that "self-regulation" is insufficient and would like the power of plebiscite returned.

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