

Hunters Hill welcomes levy deferral but warns of Berejiklian's slow strangulation

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HUNTERS Hill Council has welcomed Premier Gladys Berejiklian's decision to defer the controversial Fire and Emergency Services Levy but deferment has already come at a cost to ratepayers in a municipality being slowly strangled by her government, Mayor Richard Quinn said this week.



Premier Berejiklian announced the deferral last week on the grounds that businesses would be worse off under the current fee collection model, which local councils have been told to carry out.

She said her government would further consult with the community Hunters Hill Council is already counting the cost before a cent has been collected.

“To be able to collect the levy we’ve had to bring our whole IT system in line with the government’s and we’ve already had to introduce new software, which has been a major task for us” Mayor Quinn said.

“On top of that our staff have to administer the levy and if a household or business can’t pay or don’t pay we have to recover the cost from our own budget and it could be 20 years before we eventually recovered it from that household or business.

“Nonetheless, we welcome that deferral decision, absolutely, because we know that some ratepayers would be adversely affected by the current system because the system is based on land values.

“This means that if you have a beautiful building with a low land value than you would pay less than if you had no property at all on land valued more highly.”

Hunters Hill also has a significant number of self-funded retirees and the government has not made it clear if they are to receive the same compensation offered to pensioners.

Mayor Quinn said that as well as the I.T. costs ratepayers would have to pay the cost of Council staff assigned to collect the levy from them although he hopes Hunters Hill will be compensated for the staff time.

Notwithstanding any future compensation the Mayor believes that Hunters Hill is being “slowly strangled” by the Berejiklian Government which has already declared Hunters Hill to be Unfit For The Future and subject to a proposed forced merger with cashed up Ryde and Lane Cove.

“It is slow strangulation because we liable to pay all the government imposed expenses such as wage increases and all the other charges but the government will not let us cover these expenses through special rates variations,” Mayor Quinn said.

“Where we are in trouble is that when rate pegging was put in our rates were very cheap and we couldn’t bring it into parity with other councils.

“If we were allowed to charge the same rates as Willoughby, which is in the Premier’s electorate, we’d have enough money but as it is our cents in the dollar (recovery) is very low.”

Hunters Hill has fought hard to balance its budget despite the Berejiklian Government’s expenses rip off and is one of Sydney’s most efficiently run and well organised Councils.

The Mayor is also quick to warn that Hunters Hill may only have one elected representative on a forced merged mega council and that there is no guarantee that such a mega council will respect Hunters Hill’s Development Control Plan or its Local Environment Plan.

“We believe that local decisions that impact on our municipality should be made by local people,” he said.

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