

From: Barry Arthur [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, 7 March 2018 7:51 AM
To: Legislation
Subject: Submission re Review of Local Government Act

I would like to make the following submission in relation to the Local Government Review:

1. My wife and I have lived in the Swan Valley for more than 24 years. Our 6 acre property in the Swan Valley has been 'identified' by the City of Swan as no longer being used for 'rural purposes' and the rating basis will change from UV to GRV. During the time we have lived here we have kept horses and sheep, cropped our paddocks for hay, planted an orchard, and grown vegetables for our family. The property has never provided us with any significant source of income.

We are situated within Area C (Rural Living) of the Swan Valley Planning Act, the objectives for which include:

- a. Maintenance of the rural character of the area,
- b. The encouragement of viticulture and horticulture,
- c. The establishment of a wide range of rural activities compatible with the rural character of the area,
- d. No subdivision to less than 4 hectares.

Within the constraints of the Swan Valley Planning Act there is no possible way that we could change the usage of our property from being anything other than rural. Yet the City of Swan has somehow identified that our property is no longer being used for 'rural purposes' and should be rated on a GRV basis. The only thing that has changed is that the City of Swan has fabricated a new interpretation of 'rural purposes', which appears to be completely at odds with the Swan Valley Planning Act.

The City's argument is that, unless you earn your livelihood from your land and can prove this by having a Primary Producer's Registration and an ABN, then you are not using your land for predominantly rural purposes and that a hobby farm would not satisfy this criteria. Well, I don't agree. Whether owners choose to earn a living from their acreage is irrelevant. It does not alter the fact that the blocks are rural and if the owners want to run a few sheep and horses in their paddocks and not earn a living from their land that is entirely their business. Their blocks are still being used for rural purposes.

The City of Swan has taken it upon itself to define 'rural' as being the cultivation of land for husbandry or horticulture including raising livestock and growing crops. I have checked the dictionary definition of rural, which is

- 1) Relating to or characteristic of the country or country life;
- 2) The opposite of urban;
- 3) Relating to or associated with farming.

The City of Swan is focusing on the one definition that suits its purposes and ignoring the fact that to most people the meaning of rural is the countryside - acreages with paddocks and sheep and horses and trees and farmland and natural bush. To them rural is simply the opposite of urban and virtually the whole of the Swan Valley and Gidgegannup, together with large sections of the Pearce Ward, are rural. These rural areas do not have the same infrastructure and facilities as the urbanised parts of the City of Swan and cannot be rated on the same basis. We practise weed and vermin control, maintain fire breaks etc and do not have easy access to urban facilities, such as community centres, libraries etc. It is illogical to rate rural properties on the same basis as urban properties.

The way that the City of Swan has attempted to foist this on UV ratepayers, with no consultation or discussion, is disgraceful and an outcry from more than 1,200 UV ratepayers and intervention from Rita Safiotti resulted in a (temporary) retraction and apology from the City.

1. Community consultation from the City of Swan is farcical. It pays lip service to the concept of listening to the community's wishes and then completely ignores its views and proceeds with its own agenda, which is exactly what it intended doing in the first place.
2. The City has become entirely remote from the people who pay its wages and who the City should be serving. It is no longer serving the people; the position is now reversed – the people are serving it.
3. The City appears to have no accountability. When it makes a mistake (such as the calculation of the UV rates for 2016/17) it simply brazenly it out rather than admit the mistake and remedy it. The City appears to believe that it is bullet proof.
4. The current poisonous culture of the City seems to be so deeply ingrained that it will be almost impossible to change. A recently elected, high profile, City of Swan councillor has sent an open email (as an individual and not in his role as councillor) listing some of the major problems that he sees with the operation of the City of Swan. Coming from within, it shows just how bad things are.
5. I feel that local councils are too small and amateurish. They are often controlled by a small clique of power-hungry, self-serving individuals who are following a personal agenda, whether it is political ambition (just how many councillors stand for office in State elections?) financial gain or simply cronyism. I think councils should be amalgamated to become large, professional organisations that attract higher calibre senior bureaucrats, or alternatively dispensed with entirely and everything handled through State Government.

Thank you for the opportunity to express my views.

Barry Arthur

