

Residents defiant on council rates

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Show me why: Port Douglas woman Jennifer Hill is upset at Cairns Regional Council's rates increase and is paying only half the bill as a protest.

PORT Douglas pensioner Jennifer Hill has launched a campaign of civil disobedience in protest at council rate rises.

Rates last year on the 55-year-old's Four Mile Beach home were about \$1800 under the former Douglas Shire Council.

This year, with water charges, her bill totals almost \$2800 under the newly-formed Cairns Regional Council.

And until the new council explains why the rise is so high she's refusing to pay half the bill.

"I'm putting the rest of it in trust for council," she said.

"If they want it they can put me in jail or take me to court."

While not taking such a strong stance as Ms Hill, it is understood hundreds of Douglas residents have signed a petition committing to pay rates, but only the amount on their last bill issued by the former Douglas Shire Council.

Cairns Regional Council general manager of corporate services Brett Grosser said he had sent a detailed letter to Ms Hill outlining why her rates had risen.

But an explanation of a rise in land value cut no ice with the former teacher.

"They say the valuation went up on my land. Perhaps it did," Ms Hill said.

"But I can't justify the exorbitant rise."

Ms Hill said she has been forced to take on a cleaning job to offset the rates battering.

"Going up the way they are I will have used up all my left over funds from super," she said.

"I'll be forced to sell my house."

Mr Grosser said ratepayer failure to pay the full amount was a futile gesture.

"Not paying your rates is not a protest against amalgamation, it is penalising other ratepayers who have paid their share," he said.

"And once rates are overdue you start paying 11 per cent interest."

Mr Grosser said in a worst-case-scenario if people continued to default they may end up on the street.

"If people continue over a period to fail to pay rates and not come to any payment agreement with council they can lose their home," he said.

As of yesterday, 20 ratepayers failed to meet a council deadline to come up with a plan to pay long overdue rates and now risk having their homes auctioned.

Mr Grosser, Cr Alan Blake and other council officers will be at the former Douglas Shire offices in Mossman on Wednesday to explain rate notices to concerned individuals. Call 4044 3044 for an appointment.

The deadline to pay Cairns Regional Council rates is Monday.