

Response to supplementary questions

29 September 2025

Question 119

(119) Does IPART have a lobbying policy?

IPART Response

The Tribunal has robust governance policies and processes to manage lobbying and conflicts of interest. These include:

- Code of Ethics and Conduct for Tribunal Members
- Code of Ethics and Conduct for Committee Members
- IPART Code of Ethics and Conduct
- Conflict of Interest Policy
- Gifts and Benefits Policy
- Fraud and Corruption Control Charter.

You can find these documents on [IPART's website](#)^a.

In relation to lobbying, the Code of Ethics and Conduct for Tribunal Members prevents Tribunal members from meeting or discussing the work of the Tribunal with a person listed on the NSW Register of Third Party Lobbyists without approval from the Tribunal on the advice of the Secretariat. Any engagement by a Tribunal Member with a person listed on the NSW Register of Third Party Lobbyists must be recorded in the Tribunal's list of external meetings. In addition, the Tribunal proactively discloses a list of all meetings between Tribunal Members and external stakeholders on the [IPART website](#)^b.

Under the IPART Code of Ethics and Conduct, IPART staff must not meet or discuss their work with a person listed on the NSW Register of Third Party Lobbyists without written approval from their manager. The Code of Ethics and Conduct for NSW Government Sector Employees also applies to IPART staff and includes guidance on lobbying.

^a <https://www.ipart.nsw.gov.au/Home/About-IPART/Governance>.

^b <https://www.ipart.nsw.gov.au/tribunal-external-meetings>.

IPART acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands where we work and live. We pay respect to Elders both past and present. We recognise the unique cultural and spiritual relationship and celebrate the contributions of First Nations peoples.

Question 120

(120) Which members of IPART's staff were in attendance at the meeting with the Member for North Shore and the Chair of the Tribunal on 7 March 2025?

(a) Were they the same staff members who wrote the determination report?

IPART Response

One IPART staff member attended the meeting between the Member for North Shore and the Chair of IPART on 7 March 2025: Ms Sheridan Rapmund, a Director in IPART's Pricing & Policy Division.

The matters discussed in the meeting were limited to the conduct of the special variation assessment process. A file note of the meeting is at **Attachment B**.

(a)

Ms Rapmund, the member of the IPART Secretariat who attended the meeting between the Member for North Shore and the Chair of the Tribunal on 7 March 2025, was not the primary author of the North Sydney special variation report. Ms Rapmund is responsible for supervising the members of the IPART Secretariat who assessed and drafted the special variation advice to the Tribunal.

The Tribunal consists of four independent statutory officers, who are responsible for determining applications for a special variation and/or a minimum rate increase under delegation from the Minister for Local Government and consistent with Guidelines set by the Office of Local Government.

Question 121

(121) Does IPART have a policy regarding the use of artificial intelligence products in its work?

(a) what is that policy and how is it regulated?

IPART response

The use of AI at IPART must be compliant with the [NSW Artificial Intelligence Framework^c](https://www.digital.nsw.gov.au/policy/artificial-intelligence).

IPART does not allow information it holds that is not already in the public domain to be entered into any public artificial intelligence model (including ChatGPT) for any reason.

^c <https://www.digital.nsw.gov.au/policy/artificial-intelligence>.

IPART, along with all NSW Government agencies, is in the process of rolling out Microsoft Copilot, which operates in a secure environment and in a way which ensures access and use in accordance with all government requirements. Copilot helps in improved productivity and can be used to assist with processing information.

IPART staff must also consider other relevant IPART policies, including:

- Cloud Security Policy
- Data Protection and Privacy Policy
- Information Security Policy
- IT Security Policy
- IT Security Standards.

Question 122

(122) Does IPART use any artificial intelligence products at any stage of its workflow when assessing special rate variations?

IPART response

Artificial intelligence is used on a limited basis by some staff, such as for summarising publicly available information.

Artificial intelligence was not used in the provision of advice, decision-making or the writing of reports in relation the last round of special variation applications, or for any other IPART review processes to date.

The IPART Secretariat assess council applications and supporting materials against the 6 criteria set by the Office of Local Government in its [Guidelines for the preparation of an application for a special variation to general income](#)^d. The IPART Secretariat draft all the materials presented to the Tribunal for its decision making and draft the special variation final reports. All council special variation applications and reports are reviewed by IPART staff for quality assurance.

^d https://www.ipart.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/olg-guidelines-special-variation-2021-22_0.pdf

Question 123

(123) In IPART's evidence, it was claimed that the amendments that were made to the determinations were merely "typographical" in nature. A typographical error is a mistake (such as a misspelled word) in typed or printed text. Please provide justification for each of the below points as to how they should be considered typographical rather than factual and/or substantive errors:

(a) For Northern Beaches:

i. Corrections have been made to the description of the council's voluntary pensioner concession policy. References to volunteer work being necessary for pensioners to qualify for an additional concession have been removed from pages 8 and 45 of the report.

(b) For North Sydney

i. Corrections have been made to Table 10.3 on page 75 of this report. The data in the table has been updated to correctly show the 'average of rates not on the minimum', and the differences in dollars and percentage terms recalculated (columns through 5). The sources for the data in the table have been included.

ii. The percentage in the sentence "current minimum rate of \$715 is 31% lower than the average residential rate of those ratepayers who are paying above the minimum rate" (on page 74) has been changed to 55%.

iii. 2 Clarifications have been made to pages 2, 12, 71 and 73 to include footnotes and notes to tables to explain that the impact of the proposed minimum rate increases are partly offset by the council's proposal to remove the additional levies that apply to minimum rates assessments. For minimum residential ratepayers, they previously paid on average around \$97 in levies per year (Minimum Rate Application Form Part B, p 13) that are now included in the proposed minimum rate for 2025-26.

iv. Clarifications have been made to pages 5 and 21 to include additional footnotes to explain that the cash expense cover ratio, as defined by the Office of Local Government (OLG) includes restricted funds, and therefore may overstate the liquidity levels the council has available to meet short term liabilities. We also explain that the cash expense cover ratio was one of several indicators used to assess financial need.

v. Clarifications have been made to page 43 to change the number of verbal speakers from 25 to 28. An additional footnote was inserted to explain the council is not required to adjourn a meeting to consider the content of public presentations at a council meeting.

vi. Amendments have been made to page 51 to change a statement related to the comparison of North Sydney Council's average business rates with the average of councils with a Central Business District (CBD) as follows: • "North Sydney's average business rate in 2024-25 is **similar** to the average of councils with a CBD", has been changed to "North Sydney's average business rate in 2024-25 is **significantly below** the average for councils with a CBD"

vii. • "But with the proposed SV, the average business rate in 2026-27 would be **higher**", has been changed to "But with the proposed SV, the average business rate in 2026-27 would be **slightly below** the average for councils with a CBD".

IPART Response

In response to question 123 (and all its sub-questions) I acknowledge that the response I gave at the Budget Estimates Hearing characterised the amendments made to the IPART reports as typographical errors. I bring your attention to page 47 of the transcript where I attempted to clarify this statement to say:

The reason I say they're typographical is that they weren't substantive changes that would have changed the decision of the Tribunal. (Transcript, p 47)

To expand on my response at the Budget Estimates Hearing, the amendments made to the Northern Beaches Council and North Sydney Council's Special Variation Final Reports can be classified into two categories:

- Minor factual corrections/non-substantive errors. These are classified as minor and non-substantive because they did not change the Tribunal's decision. The Tribunal, after its consideration of these errors, concluded the changes were minor errors that did not change its overall decision on the council's application.
- Additional supporting information. These amendments were made to include additional clarifying information in the report, and do not represent factual errors or substantive changes to the content on the report. The Tribunal notes each of the amendments were considered minor and non-substantive and did not change its overall decision on the council's application.

Question 124

(124) Following such a series of significant errors in these initial reports, what measures were undertaken to ensure significant errors aren't made by ipart employees in the future?

IPART Response

As noted in response to question 123, the Tribunal did not consider that these were significant errors.

IPART has a Quality Assurance process in place to check the accuracy and reliability of its published materials. I acknowledge the oversight in IPART's internal review procedures in the North Sydney Council and Northern Beaches Council's special variation final reports. As a result, IPART is strengthening its Quality Assurance processes before the publication of future reports to reduce the likelihood of similar oversights occurring again in the future.

In the event that an error occurs, as a transparent regulator, IPART will as a matter of course make corrections or clarifications in public documents as necessary to provide community confidence in IPART's reports. IPART has this year issued a policy document to all staff about how to handle a situation where an error is identified after the Tribunal has made a decision.

Question 125

(125) Does IPART consider its role as requiring high levels of public trust and confidence in its determinations?

(a) What impact do you think such serious errors will have, if not properly addressed, on public confidence in the ability of IPART to fulfill its functions?

IPART response

IPART was established to provide the people of NSW and government with confidence that important services, markets and systems are functioning efficiently and effectively in the public interest. This role requires that IPART maintain high levels of public trust and confidence in its decisions and reports.

IPART has robust analytical and decision-making processes to support its decisions. IPART also has a Quality Assurance process to check the accuracy and reliability of its published materials.

(a)

As noted in the response to question 123, the Tribunal was briefed on the errors and approved the amendments to the reports. The Tribunal considered whether the amendments would change its decisions and the Tribunal decided they did not. The Tribunal decided to maintain its overall decisions.

IPART will, as a matter of course, make corrections or clarifications in public documents as necessary to provide community confidence in IPART's reports.

If IPART makes any changes to its public documents, it will disclose those changes for example, by clearly outlining the changes in the preliminary section of a report and/or publishing an erratum on the IPART website.