

FNQ power price petition sparks up



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CAIRNS small business owners are switching on to a petition calling on the State Government to lower electricity prices.

Since 2007, the Queensland Government has delegated responsibility to the Queensland Competition Authority to set electricity prices, but the QCA does not take into account affordability or cost-of-living pressures.

The QCA in March released its draft pricing schedule for electricity users for the next 12 months.

It recommended price rises between 9.3 per cent and 13.6 per cent for small businesses in regional areas in 2016-17.

If adopted, the increase will come into effect from July 1.

Led by the Far North Queensland Electricity Users Network, small businesses and community groups from across the region filed public submissions to the QCA's draft pricing, calling for it to consider the impact the price hike would have on the community.

The Jack Hotel has jumped on board a petition started by the FNQEUN, calling on the government to take back its authority to set electricity prices and impose an immediate 5 per cent reduction.

Hotel general manager John Lynch agreed to advertise the online petition – which has attracted more than 650 signatures in one week – on the pub's electronic billboard at the corner of Spence and Sheridan streets.

"Electricity is the second-largest expense for our business after labour costs," Mr Lynch said.

"We're in a very delicate economy at the moment and the increase they are looking at would really stick the boot into us."

Mr Lynch said the hotel's

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JACK HOTEL GM JOHN LYNCH

power bill was roughly \$20,000 each month, meaning he was facing an increase of about \$2000 per month if the QCA proceeded with its draft pricing.

Mayor Bob Manning also threw his support behind the petition yesterday.

"We have been absorbing these rapidly increasing electricity prices, which impact every part of our operations," he said.

"We know every business is facing the same challenge and the struggle is growing."

FNQEUN co-ordinator Jennifer Brownie said current electricity prices were "causing pain in virtually every business sector including retail, tourism, mining, manufacturing and construction".

"A further rise in electricity prices will result in the loss of jobs," she said.

"Regional Queensland can't afford to lose any more jobs."

"The cost of living will rise as nearly every product and service produced in regional Queensland involves electricity."

The QCA will release its final decision on pricing by May 31.

The petition can be found at fnqeun.com.au

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UNITED: Tourism Tropical North Queensland chief executive Alex de Waal, Jack Hotel general manager John Lynch, Deputy Mayor Terry James, Far North Queensland Electricity Users Network co-ordinator Jennifer Brownie and Cairns Chamber of Commerce chief executive Deb Hancock are calling for people to sign the online petition against increased electricity charges. Picture: ANNA ROGERS