A MILLERA farmer has claimed Mildura Rural City Council’s plans to review its rating strategy was “shutting the gate after the horse has bolted”. Yesterday, council announced it would commission independent consultants to personally meet with concerned ratepayers as part of a stage two revenue review.

Ross Hards said council’s failure to implement a differential rate in its 2013-14 budget had “significantly hurt” farmers, but he was keen to be part of the review.

“Council didn’t take any notice of our 144 submissions and I don’t know whether we’ll get anything out of this,” he said. “But current rates are an impost on individuals in the dry land area and can’t be tolerated.”

Councillor corporate manager Mandy Whelan said consultants would meet with individual ratepayers, residents and business owners from September 30 to October 4.

Councillor will take appointments at Mildura, Ouyen, Underbool, Murravida, Collulluana and Nagambie, with phone interviews also available.

Ms Whelan said ratepayers would be given “two bites of the cherry” with the opportunity to respond to a draft rating strategy in late October or early November.

“This is the second part of a revenue review which started in September 2012,” she said.

“The first step was the removal of the drainage differential and the core of the second phase is reviewing the rating strategy as a whole.”

Other farmers also expressed interest in getting involved in the process.

Murringo farmer Joe Fox said the review process was “news to him”.

He would like to meet with a consultant.

Mr Fox’s sister-in-law, Grenda Fox, farms 9000 acres at Murringo with her husband and son, and said she was also up for “a big, long talk” with consultants.

“Mullawa farmers and farmers in general pay far too much in council rates and, as a family unit, we bear too much of the burden,” Ms Fox said.

“My argument is that the rating system at the moment is inequitable”.

CR Greg Brown, an Underbool farmer, said the rate review was a “necessary step in the right direction” and it was a good opportunity for all ratepayers to have their say.

CR Mark Jellie said for community members and businesses to come forward with “substantiated input”.

There were some people who were unhappy about what happened to Mildura Tourism, Mildura Development Corporation and Mildura City Traders.

CR Jellie said: “This is an opportunity for those people to have their say.”

Residents can call 5018 8100 before September 23 to book an appointment with a consultant.

By Kaitlyn Opie

RATE CONCERNS

Chance to air frustrations