



MAYORAL MEMO - 20 JULY 2022

Last week the Minister for Local Government officially announced the dismissal of the Wingecarribee Shire councillors with an administrator to remain in place until September 2024.

It pains me when I read about a dysfunctional Council and a toxic culture with Councillors regarding themselves as above the law. It reflects poorly on all elected representatives when cases such as this emerge and I do wonder how individual representatives get to the stage where they believe this behaviour is acceptable.

I remember a training session very early in my Council career. It was the 101 of corruption in public office. The trainer started the session asking who in the room was corrupt. Not surprisingly, no hands went up. The trainer joked that the session was now completed! As we went through that training session with various case studies, it was possible to see how some people may have started off with the very best of intentions but ended up engaging in corrupt behaviour.

On the positive side, I believe we have a good media presence and a strong democracy so that if you are in public office and engage in sub-standard behaviour, you will be exposed.

Many examples readily spring to mind. Daryl Maguire and Gladys Berejiklian with their cringeworthy ICAC appearances. Ian Macdonald and Eddie Obeid doing jail time with Obeid just being hit with more criminal charges along with several colleagues. Craig Thomson; Andrew Theophanous; Richard Face; Barry Morris; Bob Woods; Michael Cobb and many more leave a trail of legal battles behind them.

Then there are further travel rorts where different rules seem to apply to elected officials. Bronwyn Bishop chartered a helicopter to fly 80km to a Liberal Party fundraiser and taxpayers paid the \$5,227 bill. Sussan Ley charged taxpayers more than \$13,000 to charter planes to purchase an apartment. Adam Marshall spent \$1,459 on a charter flight to his grandfather's birthday. In each of these cases, once the politician was caught red-handed, the penalty was to simply repay the money. Imagine the public outcry if a bank robber was caught and his only penalty was to repay the amount stolen!

We have 227 politicians at the Federal level; 611 State based politicians (135 in NSW) and almost 5,000 Councillors in 537 Councils (128 of those Councils in NSW). Whilst it is easy to remember the examples of poor behaviour, the vast majority of those 6,000 elected representatives are doing their best in an altruistic manner to improve society.

The best antidote to poor behaviour is open communication. While I don't expect every resident of Dubbo Regional Council to agree with every decision made by Councillors, it is important to me that residents see and understand the rationale behind the decisions that are being made. If you don't understand, question, question and question until you are satisfied.

Councillor Mathew Dickerson
Mayor of Dubbo Regional Council

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