

GOOMUNGIE GOT US

Gair's gang allege political stitch up



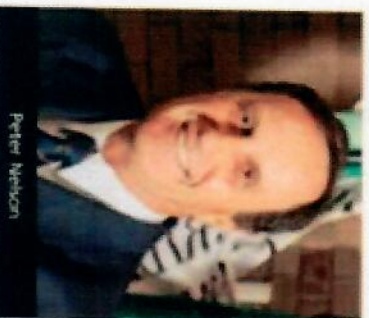
Duncan Gair



Graham McLaughlin



Gerienne Andrews



Peter Nelson



Gordon Marlowat with Ian Henke during a break in the inquiry hearing on Monday

The suspension of Wing-exco's Shire Councilors was a political response by the shire's two local state MPs Wendy Tuckerman and Nathaniel Smith, to their resistance to the Goomungie/Ashbourne development according to the suspended Mayor Duncan Gair and four other members of the suspended council.

In a bombshell statement issued on the first morning of the hearings by Commissioner Ross Glover's Public Inquiry into the suspended council, Cns Duncan Gair, Graham McLaughlin, Peter Nelson, Gerienne Andrews and Gordon Marlowat (who resigned due to ill-health long before the council was suspended), accused the two state Liberal MPs of applying pressure to approve the development "by a Chinese company without the necessary infrastructure like sewerage in place".

"Councilors and senior staff were guilty of resisting political pressure... so we were suspended," Cr Gair said.

"The state government had forced through the rezoning but refused any funding for basic infrastructure."

The joint statement said both local MPs had called for the councilors to be sacked.

"Having lobbied against the council as a backbencher, the new minister should recuse herself from any decisions flowing from the inquiry," Mr Gair said.

"And Mr Smith is the bloke who said to me in front of senior staff, 'just cut down the trees' in Station Street, Borealis."

Problems on Council, the statement said, were caused by "two or three councilors who, variously, deliberately disrupted council meetings, wrongly interfered in operational matters, publicly trashed their own council and bullied and tried to remove key staff right up to the general manager".

"The then minister [Shelley Hancock] could have removed the problem councilors without sacking the whole council but there were other political forces at play," the councilors said.

"The Minister rejected her own department's advice to maintain the elected council after it had met her performance improvement conditions and she ordered a costly public inquiry as the only legal way of keeping us out of office."

Whatever problems the former council had, it had done a far better job than the current administration.

"Council has suffered its first loss in at least 25 years of over \$200,000, entirely due to the costs of sacking or forcing the resignation of virtually all the senior staff, and the administrator has flagged another deficit of \$800,000 for 2022/23 and an extraordinary rate increase."

"And he must be the first council boss ever to give grant money (\$4.1 million) back to the state government."

"Council is now struggling to deliver services with the loss of hundreds of years of expertise and local knowledge and scores of staff vacancies it can't fill. The time to process development applications has blown out from weeks to many months with ex-

pensive external consultants now hired to try to stem the bleeding."

The statement accused interim administrator Viv May of unleashing "a torrent of criticism against the former councilors and staff on false or meagre grounds contrary to the code of conduct and unfortunately, this had been accepted as gospel by much of the community."

"Mr May has acted like a populist politician and not a paid professional public servant. There have been threats of physical violence against councilors on social media."

"The plethora of external reports the commissioner found relatively insubstantial issues and no smoking gun to justify the suspension of the councilors."

"The inquiry needs to examine whether the administrator has breached the code of conduct on numerous occasions, particularly regarding his involvement in staff operational matters, and the major decisions made behind closed doors without accountability or transparency."

The councilors said the previous council had an "enviable record in financial performance and statutory reporting and had been described by the Auditor General's Office as a 'pearl among the councils it dealt with'."

It had embarked on "the biggest capital works and asset renewal program in the council's history", won multiple tourism, risk management and environmental awards and had greatly improved workplace safety.

"Hardly the smoking ruin alleged by the administrator," the statement said.

NSW Member for Wollondilly Nathaniel Smith said he had no comment to make on the statement.

"Let the inquiry proceed," he said. Interim Administrator Viv May was unavailable for comment. NSW Member for Goomungie Wendy Tuckerman said she would not be commenting on "baseless allegations".

"I look forward to the independent commissioner's report," she said.

By Mark Wallace