



Mr Vincent De Luca, OAM, and Friends of Warringah Public Forum

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The Hon. MARIE FICARRA [10.19 p.m.]: I recently attended the Friends of Warringah Public Forum concerning the need for reform in local government. Ms Sylvia Hale from the Greens also attended the forum, which was chaired by the association's president and Warringah community leader, Mr Vincent De Luca, OAM. Mr De Luca has worked for many years for transparency and corruption prevention measures in local government.

Having observed the operation of both the Local Government Act 1993 and the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 over a long period in local government as a councillor and mayor I must state that it is now time for a major overhaul of the legislation. Warringah Council was dismissed in 2003 following a section 740 inquiry conducted by Professor Maurice Daley. Recently I asked questions on notice directed to the Minister for Local Government regarding the outcome of the inquiry's recommendations. It is with disappointment I note that the Government has not properly addressed the recommendations of the inquiry. This shows how disingenuous the Government is about fixing the problems identified in local government and its failure to put in place mechanisms to prevent further problems occurring in the future like those revealed in Warringah.

The forum was well attended and I was interested to listen to the well-informed opinions of the residents. I noted an analysis that Mr De Luca had undertaken of legislation across Australia governing local government pecuniary interest and conflict of interest disclosure provisions. In New South Wales, should a councillor not disclose a pecuniary interest and vote on a matter in which he or she received a benefit, the penalty, if imposed, is a mere suspension or expulsion from office for five years. Should a councillor in Western Australia abuse his or her position of power and vote on a matter in which he or she has an interest, the maximum penalty, if convicted, is a jail term. The Western Australian provisions are certainly a greater deterrent for the few rogue self-interested councillors who seek to benefit financially from their office.

Residents also made it clear that they did not want private certifiers employed directly by developers because of the inherent conflict of interest, that they want more independent hearings and assessment panels introduced, that there needs to be stricter policing of non-compliance with conditions of consent, and that the power of the Minister for Planning to call in a development for determination should be limited.

The issue of political donations to candidates and true business interests of candidates for local government also was raised by Mr De Luca and other residents. It was proposed that candidates for office should have to disclose their pecuniary interests and sources of campaign funding prior to an election and that such disclosures should be published in voting booths on the day of an election in the interests of transparency and to provide the community with information about those who aspire to public office.

Although a number of councils have been dismissed by the Labor Government, it has not acted on the many recommendations of various public inquiries nor has it put in place legislative reforms to prevent a recurrence of the problems that have arisen. The Government must address these serious matters. I thank Vincent De Luca, OAM, and his fellow committee members, Annette Sammut, Tom Peel and Ian Hehir for their organisation of the forum. I call upon the Government to act on this very important issue.