

Vincent De Luca OAM

Media Release

De Luca Slams increases to Childcare fees in Warringah

Warringah community worker and President of the Curl Curl Youth & Community Centre, Vincent De Luca OAM has slammed Warringah Council's decision to increase childcare fees by a massive 13 percent and is calling on the Council to review its decision in the wake of Federal MP, Tony Abbott calling on the Deputy Prime Minister to penalise the Council for its decision.

“At Curl Curl Youth & Community Centre we have one of the largest Playgroups on the northern beaches with over 100 families using the centre each week. It was seeing the amount of kids in our area and families in need of childcare services that prompted me at the time to call on Warringah Council for section 94 developer contributions from the 2001 Plan to be allocated to create additional childcare places”.

In 2003, a *Daily Telegraph* expose revealed that there were 1,045 Warringah families on the childcare waiting list, desperate for childcare services” Mr De Luca said.

“While 77 places were created under the 2001 Plan, in December 2006 following my lobbying Warringah Council it finally acceded to my requests and it was announced a further 49 places would be provided in the next two to three years under section funds collected from developments. Although these extra placement would not in any way address the massive waiting list it was some progress”.

“This progress now seems to be a hundred steps back with Council increasing childcare fees by 13% and making childcare unattainable for many families. This is an outrageous increase and will adversely affect many families in Warringah who are already struggling with today's financial pressures” Mr De Luca said.

Yesterday in the Federal Parliament, Warringah MP and Shadow Minister for Family and Community Services asked a Question Without Notice to the Deputy Prime Minister calling for Warringah Council to be penalised due to the massive increase.

“I applaud Tony Abbott in his efforts to ensure that childcare fees are maintained at rates affordable for families. Childcare is so important in today's society and it is not appropriate for Warringah Council to be exploiting the plight of families in need of such services”.

“In the last couple of years, Warringah Council has added senior staff to its top heavy bureaucratic management team. Some of these staff receive salaries near \$200,000 a year. At the same time Warringah Council has cut much needed funding to many community services and wasted money on unachievable projects. They have targeted Surf Life Saving Clubs and volunteer sporting groups and this has been very unfair. If Warringah Council really wants to save some money they should cut their bloated bureaucracy” Mr De Luca concluded.

For more information, please call Vincent De Luca on 0414 990 551

**Extract from the House of Representatives Hansard
Tuesday 18 June 2008**

Mr ABBOTT (2.31 pm)—My question is to the Deputy Prime Minister. Which of the government's powers is she proposing to use to penalise childcare price rises such as 10 per cent by ABC Learning Centres and 13 per cent by Warringah Council? Does she think that these price rises are fair and can she explain how publishing childcare prices on a government website is going to keep them down?

Ms GILLARD—I thank the member for Warringah for his question. Obviously the government are a substantial player in the childcare market, and we have a range of policy levers at our disposal because we are a substantial player in the childcare market. On the supply side, the levers at the government's disposal include our election commitment to introduce up to 260 new childcare centres. That is a significant contribution to the childcare industry and the childcare market as we know it. In terms of the locations of those centres, we are looking at establishing new centres in areas where the market is not working. One of the reasons that the market may be perceived to be not working in an area is that there are higher fees than in other locations. When we are working out who should be the providers for those new centres we are obviously going to be assessing diversity of provision and equity of access, including through new private and/or community partners. Significantly, when we are selecting the providers for these new centres, a track record of affordability will be taken into account. So it is a significant policy stream, a significant policy measure, which will make a difference for childcare centres.

On the demand side of course we have introduced, through the recent budget, an increase in the childcare tax rebate, which—as I presume the member opposite appreciates—is not income tested. So that is a significant measure on the demand side to assist working families. We are of course reviewing the regulation in the sector to ensure national consistency in quality standards and licensing. Finally, as part of this suite of policy measures, we are looking at the transparency and indeed acting on the transparency of the sector. This is actually implementing a pre-election commitment. I know that it is not fashionable amongst the Liberal Party members to implement pre-election commitments; it is fashionable to make them, to de-

scribe them as rock solid, rolled gold and all that sort of thing and then to back down on them later. The member for Warringah would probably remember all about that from the last parliament. I know it is not fashionable with the member for Warringah to make an election commitment and then actually implement it, but the government committed before the election to a major transparency measure to make sure that parents had access to information about fees, availability of places and quality standards.

I think the thing that members opposite should be reflecting on, as they show throughout this question time just how out of touch they are, is what a track record of failure it is that, after 12 years in government, they left a situation where parents looking for child care could not get ready information on fees, availability or quality. That is the situation they left after 12 years of inaction; and, as part of a suite of measures dealing with affordability, accessibility and quality, we are acting on it.

Public Forum Question – Response

Subject: Child Care Services

Question From: Vincent De Luca

Meeting Date: 28 October 2003

Question: Is the *Daily Telegraph* true with its article some months ago that there are over 1000 local children on Warringah Council's child care waiting list?

How many are on the waiting list? While Council spent funds on relocating the Kia Child care Centre, can Council please advise how much money has been collected through Section 94 for child care, how much will be spent on providing additional child care centres and places to address the waiting list and in what year can the community expect to see more child care centres and placements?

Response:

This is correct, at present there are 1,045 different families on the waitlist for Council's Long Day Care and Family Day Care Services. Some families are on the waitlist for both services. The figures are: Long Day Care 841 Family Day Care 616 The age breakup of this list indicates that approximately 91% are for children under 3 years of age. There are 108 unborn children at present on this list. This waitlist has been over 1,000 for the past 10 years. Council is developing a Child Care Strategy that will in part attempt to address this need. Council currently provides 204 Long Day Care places per day, spread across 4 Centres with a 99% utilisation rate. Council also provides approximately 210 effective fulltime Family Day Care child places which provides private employment for 52 carers. Approximately 20 places per day are provided by Council's Mobile Occasional Care Service. Council has facilitated the provision of approximately 180 child care places by a private provider through the lease of the former Mackellar Womens Bowling Club.

Public Forum Question and Response

Subject: Childcare

Question From: Vincent De Luca

Meeting Date: 24 February 2004

Question: I refer to my questions of 28 October 2003 and the subsequent answer that Warringah has 850 kids on its long day care waiting list and 600 on the family day care list.

a) Could Council please advise how many kids are waiting on the list presently?

Answer: The Acting Director Services advised there was 1,028 names on the waiting list (628 long day care/400 family day care) as at 30 January 2004.

b) When was Council's Child Care strategy written?

Answer: The Acting Director Services advised the Strategy was currently being written.

c) When will the review of Council's childcare strategy be finished?

Answer: The Acting Director Services advised there would be a workshop held in April with a target of June 2004 for completion.

d) Should the review reveal that there are increasing needs for child care in correlation with developments built recently, is it possible to amend the Council's Section 94 to pay for additional child care spaces and/or child care facilities?

Answer: The Manager Strategic Land Use Planning advised Council could amend the Section 94 plan provided it was adequately demonstrated a demand for child care spaces was created by the new population. Section 94 is not able to be applied retrospectively to developments already granted consent. While the next census in 2006 could provide information on demographic trends, the Administrator advised Council would take on the challenge to collect information rather than wait until the Census information was available.

Public Forum Question and Response

Subject: Review of S94 Funds

Question From: Vincent De Luca

Meeting Date: 24 February 2004

Question: a) I refer to my statement and questions at the first meeting of Council under

the Administrator (19/8/03) and in particular my statement regarding the need for greater flexibility in the application of section 94 funds.

Particularly, whether a submission could be made by Council to the State Government's review of section 94 funds that the policy should be broadened to facilitate spending on community services such as child care, youth suicide prevention, drug and alcohol counselling, aged services and the purchasing of land considered to be of environmental significance.

Answer: The Manager Strategic Land Use Planning advised the terms of reference of the taskforce were narrow and put Councils in a position of having to defend Section 94 in terms of the need to retain it as a funding source. Council raised the issue of greater flexibility in terms of internal borrowings within the fund, maintenance of assets, problems with indexation in regards to property values and rate pegging. The submission concentrated on the

provision of infrastructure and on-going maintenance rather than service provision. The purchasing of land considered to be of environmental significance may occur if already identified as a project to be funded and backed by a solid planning argument in terms of need and nexus. The task force report was not yet available.

b) Could Council please update our community on its submission to the review and explain the State Government's proposal to allow 'developer agreements' and what these funds in such agreements can be spent on?

Answer: The Manager Strategic Land Use Planning advised the amending legislation to incorporate Section 93 Developer Agreements into the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act has been withdrawn from the present session of Parliament. DIPNR officers advised that the Section 94 Task Force report due in late February was the reason for the withdrawal and that it is highly likely both the draft Section 93 (Developer Agreements) and revised Section 94 provisions will be read in Parliament later in 2004.

Public Forum Question and Response

Subject: Childcare Placements in Warringah

Question From: Vincent De Luca

Meeting Date: 27 July 2004

Question: I refer to my question of 24 February 2004 about Council's Childcare Strategy and whether the Council's Section 94 plan could be amended to provide for more childcare placements. I recall Council's advice that as at 30 January 2004 there were 1028 children on the childcare waiting list, the Council's Childcare strategy was being written and that the Section 94 plan could be amended if there was a demonstrated need and this would be reviewed. Has Council's Childcare Strategy been completed and has the investigations promised at the meeting taken place to address the need for possible amendments to the S94 plan?

Response: The Acting Manager Strategy and Policy advised that a draft version of the

Childcare Strategy has been completed, however its adoption for exhibition has been delayed due to the need for further consultation with staff and changes in the childcare market since the Strategy was commenced.

Those changes in the market include an influx of new childcare providers to the area; the initiation of a parallel planning process under SHOROC, and the availability of new statistical information including Census data. A revised strategy, however, is scheduled for completion and exhibition in late 2004.

A review of Council's Section 94 plan is presently underway, with the provision of additional childcare places as one of its objectives.

It is anticipated that the draft Section 94 plan will be completed and available for public exhibition in late 2004.

Public Forum Question and Response

Subject: Childcare services and placements in Warringah

Question from: Mr Vincent De Luca OAM

Meeting Date: 12 December 2006

Question: Asked the following questions to the meeting and made a statement of Seasonal Felicitations:

1a) What funding has been allocated under the new Section 94 plan to create additional childcare places and how many new childcare places have been created?

Response:

The Director Customer and Community Services advised that since the 2001 Section 94 Plan commenced, 77 places have been provided with a further 49 places to be provided in the next 2-3years. Council has recently adopted its Children and Family Services Strategy whose recommendations and findings state Council's strategic priority is to focus resources on actively working with not-for-profit and private providers to expand supply, with a particular focus on services gaps (such as the 0-2 years bracket and special needs areas). Therefore, in line with this strategic priority, the Section 94A Plan does not propose to use development contributions to fund any further public care places.

Question: b) Is the Administrator aware of the Committee report authored by the Hon Brownyn Bishop MP regarding the cost of childcare, that some organisations offer salary sacrificing to employees for childcare costs and the recommendation that childcare be tax deductible? Does Warringah Council offer salary sacrificing to its staff for childcare and will it review the report and make appropriate submissions based on Warringah's childcare placement list?

Response: The Director Customer and Community Services advised that Council does offer salary sacrificing to its staff. Council is seeking advice on whether childcare must be offered on site to be eligible for salary sacrifice.