

## Debunking the bunkum

South Gippsland Shire Council's CEO Tim Tamlin is disappointed by the 'bunkum' that was bandied about at the Council meeting on Wednesday.

"I'd like to address a couple of related issues that arose at Wednesday's meeting," said Mr Tamlin. "The claim that officers are trying to 'gag' Councillors is ridiculous. Council uses the confidentiality of briefings and some committees as a way to foster robust discussions and the frank exchange of ideas. Without the protection of confidentiality people would temper their contribution lest it be used against them in the public realm.

"As the Good Governance Guide states: 'Councillors need to have good information do their jobs properly. So it's important that councils have robust processes and systems in place for providing councillors with information – whether as formal advice, in briefings or through individual requests. This is particularly important when it comes to confidential information. Local government needs to be able to keep certain information confidential, especially when it relates to important commercial issues or the privacy of individuals.'

"Further to the issue of confidentiality, I would like to offer some context to the figures that Cr McEwan liberally tossed around during the debate. While it is true that South Gippsland Shire Council is 31 per cent higher than the state average for decisions made in closed sessions, Cr McEwan did not go on to say that South Gippsland made just 16 per cent of its decisions in camera while the state average is 12.2 per cent. This is a variation of just 3.8 per cent, which is effectively only one more confidential decision than the average Council. This is well within the State Government's acceptable range of up to 30 per cent.

"Furthermore, of the 19 confidential decisions made in 2014/15, nine were related to the awarding of contracts, five were to do with providing grants, two were regarding the audit committee, one was to approve the Australia Day Awards recipients and another was my performance review. That leaves just one other matter – in the whole financial year – which Council considered in confidence in case it prejudice anyone," concluded Mr Tamlin.

South Gippsland Shire Mayor, Cr Bob Newton, was also dismayed at the tone of some contributions to the meeting. "It seems that some of my colleagues don't understand that we are a democratic body and by its very nature that means that sometimes decisions will go against them. It's not a conspiracy; it doesn't mean there is a voting bloc: it simply means their opinion was not supported by the majority. To accept this requires a level of good grace and an understanding that this is democracy at work.

"The people voted for us as Councillors. They put their trust in us to represent, lobby for and make decisions in their best interests. Revisiting decisions previously made and casting aspersions about the motives of the other Councillors is a tactic some seem to be using to call attention to themselves instead of the issues at hand. Unfortunately this does nothing but negatively alter the perception of us as Councillors, of the organisation we oversee, of our services and our intentions."

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