

Councillors views on Rolf Harris mural



The debate is yet to really begin about the future of the Rolf Harris mural in Warrnambool.

This is the full text of responses from elected councillors on the future of the Rolf Harris mural in Warrnambool. See [the related Opinion piece here](#).

Cr Michael Neoh: "Council will discuss the matter as a group. I would respectfully say that it is appropriate to address issues in a considered manner and not to not act in haste to meet external deadlines.

"As you would be aware the painting has been fully covered and we were awaiting for any indication of an appeal processes which seems unlikely now. The acting CE and I recently discussed raising it in a future briefing and I assume it will be an item, like many others, on a briefing agenda in the near future."

Cr Kylie Gaston: "I think we do something like put a white ribbon over the perspex. I don't like destroying art and, if we remove it completely, the opportunity to convey a message

about violence toward women has been lost.”

Cr Peter Hulin: “Quite clearly it should be painted over unless Harris is successful in any appeal to his conviction. If there is no appeal. Remove it. (If it remains) it could send a message that we condone this child predator’s behaviour. This is a very serious matter and council as leaders of the community need to show the leadership this issue demands.”

Cr Jacinta Ermacora: “My personal view is that, in the first instance we should show respect to victims of violence who live in our community. We should no longer celebrate his art work as he used his notoriety to abuse children and women. This dynamic is not uncommon in our community and represents the ‘abuse dynamic’ which as a community we sign on to if we take no action.

“I believe that as the piece belongs to the Warrnambool City Council and thus belongs to the Warrnambool community, there should be a discussion with relevant stakeholders and community as to what to do with it. I believe that the voices of victims ought be given significant weight in this matter. I also believe that there is no ‘right’ answer in this, except to show recognition to the feelings of people in our community that have also experienced sexual abuse as a child or adult.”

Cr Peter Sycopoulis: “Considering that the artwork is painted directly on to the wall of the Lighthouse Theatre, I believe at this point in time, my preferred option would be to completely cover and fasten the artwork in question with some form of solid panelling.

I believe that a plaque could be mounted beside it to serve as a reminder that underneath lies a painting by Rolf Harris who was convicted of (sexual assault charges) and that our society has chosen to show our disapproval of this type of predatory behaviour by not publicly displaying his works.”

No reply from Cr Brian Kelson or Cr Rob Askew.

Grappling with the work of a predator



The impromptu mural by Rolf Harris in the loading dock at Lighthouse Theatre – it has since been covered by perspex.
Image: ABC Radio South-west Victoria – Jeremy Lee.

OPINION – Carol Altmann

[box] A warning: this piece contains details of Rolf Harris's crimes which some readers may find distressing.[/box]

[dropcap style="color: #a02f2f;"] I **[/dropcap]**t is more than two months since the Warrnambool City Council promised [a discussion about the future](#) of the Rolf Harris mural in light

of his convictions for molesting children but, until now, we have not heard a word.

As readers will recall, an impromptu mural by Harris in the loading dock of the Lighthouse Theatre was covered by painted perspex after he was convicted on 12 counts of sexually abusing four girls aged between eight and 19, with the community split over whether the work should be retained or painted over.

Mayor Michael Neoh, at that time, said there was no room for a “knee jerk reaction” and the future of the work needed a considered response – perhaps it would be reinterpreted by adding a white ribbon over the perspex or some other symbol of denouncing violence against women. (Except Harris’s crimes were not about women, they were about sexually abusing children.)

Then the discussion fell quiet as if, by keeping the mural out of sight and out of mind, we might all just forget about it.

But survivors of child sexual abuse never forget, and neither do we.



Mayor Michael Neoh. Image: ABC.

[dropcap style="color: #a02f2f;"]When *Bluestone* emailed each councillor for an update on their personal view about the mural, Mayor Neoh initially sounded annoyed that he was being pressed to “act in haste”.

“Council will discuss the matter as a group. I would respectfully say that it is appropriate to address issues in a considered manner and not to not act in haste to meet external deadlines,” he wrote.

When asked what deadlines he was talking about, Mayor Neoh replied:

“As you would be aware the painting has been fully covered and we were awaiting for any indication of an appeal processes which seems unlikely now. The acting (Chief Executive) and I recently discussed raising it in a future briefing and I assume it will be an item, like many others, on a briefing agenda in the near future.”

So does Mayor Neoh still want the mural retained or not? We don't know.

[dropcap style="color: #a02f2f;"] 0 [/dropcap]ur view on the mural is unequivocal – it should already be gone and you can read our reasoning in [our earlier opinion piece](#) – but the councillors are divided.

The [full responses from councillors can be found here](#), but, in summary: **Cr Kylie Gaston** and **Cr Peter Sycopoulis** said they wanted the work retained – but covered – and with some form of educational message added, such as the white ribbon symbol or an explanatory plaque.

Cr Peter Hulin said that unless Harris successfully appealed his conviction (which appears unlikely), the mural should be painted over. While **Cr Jacinta Ermacora** said there was no right answer, she believed the fate of the mural should be decided by the community and “relevant stakeholders”. “I believe that the voices of victims ought be given significant weight in this matter,” she said.*

We did not receive a response from **Cr Brian Kelson** or **Cr Rob Askew**.



Rolf Harris was earlier this year convicted on 12 counts of sexual offences against children. Image: The Guardian

[dropcap style="color: #a02f2f;"] W [/dropcap]hat I wonder is this:

Would the council still be tip-toeing around this issue if the mural had been painted by a Warrnambool man who had since been found guilty of the same crimes as Rolf Harris?

[learn_more caption="You can read details here: contains explicit content"]Harris's crimes include touching an eight year old girl's vagina, digitally penetrating a 15 year old girl on multiple occasions, and licking the vagina of a 15 year old girl while she was asleep and her parents, whom Harris had been visiting, were downstairs.[/learn_more]

These are among the crimes which the judge outlined in his sentencing of Harris and they need to be named up. ([You can read the full remarks here](#)).

The celebrity status that Harris used to cover up his crimes (including in 1986, when he painted the Warrnambool mural), is the very same status that is protecting him now.

We don't need white ribbons and plaques and educational reinterpretations to remind us that this man is a predator and, to this day, has shown no remorse: he typifies so many sexual abusers, including those who still walk free in our community.

"But it is *art*", is the most common response from those who find it impossible to accept that this mural must go.

It is a *painting*, to be sure, but in my mind not all art is created equal.



Melbourne paint shop owner Frank Penhalluriack took one of the “most important stands” of his life in rolling over a Rolf Harris mural after the artist’s conviction. Image: Herald-Sun

[dropcap style="color: #a02f2f;"]P[/dropcap>ublic murals, by their sheer nature, are transitory: they fade, they are painted over, they are removed.

We know this because about 12 years after Harris spontaneously created his mural from an errant paint splodge, another commissioned mural less than 400m away was bulldozed to make way for a string of soul-less apartments in the Ozone carpark without so much as a whimper.

This was a work by local indigenous artist **Fiona Clarke**.

Harris’s work will remain in dozens, if not hundreds, of private art collections around the world – he was nothing if not prolific – and had this mural been treated the same way as Fiona Clarke’s when the Lighthouse Theatre was upgraded, it would already be gone. (Apparently the plans were modified to accommodate the mural, such is the power of celebrity.)

If only we, as a city, had the courage and fortitude of **Frank Penhalluriack**, the Melbourne [paint shop owner](#) who, the moment Harris was found guilty, rolled a bright-red roller over an impromptu Harris mural painted in his shop in 1990.

“It is one of the most important stands I have ever taken,” he told the Herald Sun.

I wonder how many of us – and our city councillors – could say the same thing?

* Since being contacted by *Bluestone*, Cr Ermacora raised the issue at last week’s council briefing, which is the first in a series of steps toward opening a wider community discussion.

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Tracing the trajectory of artistic talent



Portland artist Carmel Wallace with her three-dimensional work, *Bloom*, which is part of the *Trajectories* exhibition.

[dropcap style="color: #a02f2f;"] S [/dropcap]ix sensational visual artists who share much in common have combined for a new exhibition at Warrnambool' SCOPE Galleries that opened today (Sept 7).

The *Trajectories* exhibition features the work of artists **Victoria Dunn, Annette Iggulden, Marion Manifold, Liza McCosh, Noela Stratford** and **Carmel Wallace** who, between them, cover almost the full trajectory of art mediums, from painting to printmaking, drawing, photography and installations.

All six women have deep connections to regional Australia, with most living in south-west Victoria, and were among the first to complete a doctorate in visual arts at Deakin University in Warrnambool through what was then considered a bold experiment to combine artistic output (producing a gallery standard exhibition), with research and theory (a 20-000-30,000 word exegesis explaining their work).

The exhibition not only captures how far the artists have come (their “trajectory”) since their pioneering days as PhD students, but also reflects the immense value of having the opportunity to study for such a high-level qualification at a regional campus. That opportunity has since been removed, following the closure of the Visual Arts school at the Warrnambool campus.



SCOPE director and artist Dr Liza McCosh with Professor Emeritus Barbara van Ernst AM at the exhibition opening. The work of Annette Iggulden features in the background.

[dropcap style="color: #a02f2f;"] I[/dropcap]t was a point not

lost on Melbourne philanthropist and **Professor Emeritus Barbara van Ernst AM**, who was a former head of school for visual, performing and media arts at Deakin University and who opened the exhibition.

“Their (the artists’) location within regional Victoria is important,” Professor van Ernst said.

“It is work that could stand up anywhere – there is no sense of isolation or disadvantage because of their regional location.”

Professor van Ernst also highlighted the importance of women supporting women in the arts. The exhibition not only features all women artists, but was curated by a woman (Dr Liza McCosh) in a female-owned gallery (SCOPE) and was opened by a woman. Professor van Ernst said such support was reminiscent of the Heidelberg School, and others, where male artists worked collectively to produce, exhibit and promote their work.



Artist Noela Stratford (left), Jenny Altmann and Marion Manifold. Both Noela and Marion are among the six artists

included in the exhibition. Noela's charcoal work features in the background.



David Straford, Grant Wallace and James Wallace (in front of intricate works by Marion Manifold).



Retired Deakin lecturer and artist Dr Bruce Vinall, with Victoria Dunn and Annette Iggulden who's work features in the exhibition. (The artwork is a charcoal by Noela Stratford.)

[box] Trajectories, a travelling exhibition, will be at SCOPE Galleries until October 12. SCOPE, 38 Kelp St, Warrnambool, is open noon-5pm Thurs-Sunday.[/box]

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Warrnambool City Council spent \$17,000 on a corporate hospitality tent at the May Races earlier this year.
Image source: Source: Vince Caligiuri/Getty Images AsiaPac

OPINION

[dropcap style="color: #a5cecd;"] R [/dropcap]eaders will recall that [earlier this year](#) we revealed exclusively that the Warrnambool City Council spent \$17,000 on hosting a corporate hospitality tent at the May Racing Carnival.

Today we can tell you who actually attended.

While the WCC has not revealed the names of those who accepted an invitation, they have released to *Bluestone* the positions of the 97 people who attended, which make for interesting reading.

I say interesting because, as we noted in our first story, the hospitality event is intended to do a number of things including: show support for the May Racing Carnival; promote it to senior politicians, bureaucrats and regional leaders; to discuss “strategic projects” and, lastly, develop “organisation to organisation” relationships.

Yet the guest list reveals that, of the 97 attendees, almost half (45) were connected to council either as employees, councillors (and their partners), or as members of the council’s various advisory committees.



Of the guests who accepted invitations to the marquee, half were connected to council either as staff, elected members of through advisory committees. Image: REUTERS/Victor Fraile

[dropcap style="color: #a5cecd;"] W [/dropcap]annon MP Dan

Tehan came along, as did all five **State Members for Victoria**, but of the nine senior government bureaucrats invited, only one – the regional manager for **VicRoads** – was able to make it.

Regional leaders made a better showing, with 10 representatives (including, I assume, some partners) of the **Great South Coast Board** attending, no doubt catching up with fellow board members **Mayor Michael Neoh** and Council chief executive **Bruce Anson**.

Opportunities to discuss “strategic projects” also looked very promising with the inclusion of 9 members of a **Changchun** delegation – Changchun being the Chinese sister-city to Warrnambool – but lost a little of its lustre when it was clarified that the delegation was one that would be travelling *from* Warrnambool to China, not the other way round.

So did we, as ratepayers, receive \$17,036 worth of networking and promotional opportunities from this event, or should it be more correctly framed as an opportunity for the invitees to just relax and let their hair down? You can decide.

The list of acceptances is below, while [the full invitation list can be accessed here.](#)

[box]

WARRNAMBOOL CITY COUNCIL MAY RACES HOSPITALITY MARQUEE 2014-ATTENDEES

1. WARRNAMBOOL CITY COUNCIL :

Warrnambool City Council Mayor & Councillors & Partners **16**

Warrnambool City Council Chief Executive, Directors & Partners **5**

2. STATE & FEDERAL GOVERNMENT POLITICIANS

Federal Member for Wannon **1**

State Members for Western Victoria (there are five in total) 6

3. SENIOR STATE GOVERNMENT STAFF

VicRoads, Regional Manager 1

4. REGIONAL LEADERS

Great South Coast Board Members:

Corangamite Shire 2

Glenelg Shire 2

Moyne Shire 4

Three independent board members 2

Wannon Water:

Managing director 1

Chairman 2

Education:

Deakin University, Head of Warrnambool Campus 2

Regional Tourism Board Members:

Five independent board members 3

Regional Tourism Board 1

Barwon South-West RDA Committee:

Eleven board members 4

Police:

Inspector Local Area Commander Warrnambool, Moyne, Corangamite
Police Service Area 2

Health:

CEO South-West Healthcare 2

CEO Lyndoch 2

CEO and President Western District Employment Access 1

Warrnambool Cheese and Butter:

Chief Executive Officer 1

5. GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS WORKING CLOSELY WITH COUNCIL:

Maddocks Lawyers 1

Members of WCC Advisory Committees:

Audit Committee 6

City Landscape Committee 2

Livestock Exchange Advisory Committee 7

International Relations Advisory Committee 6

Flagstaff Hill Advisory Committee 2

City Health and Wellbeing Advisory Committee 1

Changchun delegation group (from Warrnambool to China):

10 members of delegation and partners: 9

Commerce Warrnambool:

President 1

6. OTHERS

Cr Kelson's business associates 2

[/box]

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Why I am running: Dr Denis Naphine



Premier Dr Denis Napthine, who is also the current member for Great South Coast, hopes voters will judge him on his track record. Image: Supplied.

Dr Denis Napthine has been an MP since 1988, representing first the seat of Portland and then, under new electoral boundaries, the seat of South West Coast. He became Premier of Victoria in 2013. Having made it to the top – and after more than 25 years in office – why does he wish to run again? He writes for us to explain all:

[dropcap style="color: #a5cecd;"] F [/dropcap]irstly, I would like to congratulate *Bluestone* on its first birthday.

I believe that a vote for me and my government on 29 November is a vote for a better Victoria, one that is more prosperous, smarter and more secure.

I am proud to call south-west Victoria home.

I have a proven track record of delivering for South West Coast and its communities and, if re-elected by my

constituents on 29 November, will continue to do so.

Over the past three-and-a-half years I have been delivering on my 2010 election promises. These include a new school for Woolsthorpe, a pedestrian overpass over the Portland Ring Road, seven new passing lanes on the Princes Highway, a passing loop on the Melbourne to Warrnambool rail line, a new police residence at Heywood, Avgas facilities at the Portland airport, and returning local rangers to Tower Hill and Mount Eccles, among many others.

And soon a cancer centre will be a reality for the south-west. I am pleased to have helped secure funding of \$15 million for this life-saving centre – a project I have been particularly passionate about.



Traffic chaos on the West Gate Bridge makes the proposed East-West link roadway essential, according to Dr Napthine. Image: [ABC Online](#).

[dropcap style="color: #a5cecd;"] I [/dropcap]n May's State Budget I was able to deliver funding for a new school at Narrawong, a vital upgrade of the Woolsthorpe-Heywood road and other local roads, additional mental health beds for South

West Healthcare at Warrnambool and a new community health facility at Port Fairy.

I have also announced a \$4.9 million upgrade of Warrnambool airport; a \$7.7 million boost for South West TAFE to allow the institute to offer affordable, accessible and high quality training programs anytime, anywhere on any device; a Master Plan for the Lady Bay area and new emergency vehicles for our hard working volunteers.

As part of the Coalition's *Fairer Water Bills Initiative*, residential customers of Wannon Water will receive a \$70 rebate on their water bills each financial year for the next four years.

I am also extremely proud of the work my government is doing for all Victorians.

East West Link is a vital project for all Victorians. I know that the many south-west Victorians who drive to Melbourne will benefit from this infrastructure project. How many people have been stuck in traffic waiting to get over the West Gate Bridge? Melbourne desperately needs a second river crossing and anybody who lives west of Melbourne and regularly drives to Melbourne knows that.

In terms of public transport, there are now 10,000 more public transport services per week than when we came to office; from January 1, there will be free tram travel in the CBD and Zone 1 and 2 travel for the price of a Zone 1 fare; we will build the Melbourne Rail Link and a Melbourne airport rail link as well as the \$2 billion Cranbourne-Pakenham line upgrade.

Our Government is also completing the \$4.1 billion regional rail link which will benefit v/line passengers from Western Victoria as well as metropolitan commuters from the western and north western Suburbs.



Dr Napthine says education has been a priority for the Coalition Government, with a record spend of \$9.2 billion this year . Image: Peaceinmyhome.com

[dropcap style="color: #a5cecd;"] A[/dropcap]s a result of the Coalition Government's sound economic management, Victoria is the only Australian state or territory with the coveted AAA credit rating and with budget surpluses forecast across the next four years.

This careful stewardship of the state's finances ensures there is more money available to fund the services families need now, and the important infrastructure our children and grandchildren will need in the future.

My Coalition Government is proud to be spending a record \$15 billion this year on our vital health services and a record \$9.2 billion on school education.

We have also increased police numbers by 1700 and put 940 PSOs on our railway stations. Our tough approach to law and order is delivering a safer community.

I am particularly proud of our proven commitment to vulnerable Victorians. Since coming to government, the Coalition has increased spending on vulnerable children and families by \$900 million. This includes \$100 million per annum on family violence, a 40 per cent increase since coming to government.

I am also passionate about delivering better services for people with a disability. That is why the Coalition is committed to the full rollout of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) which is now located in Geelong.

Be it here in the south-west, or more broadly across Victoria, my government is delivering the projects and programs that we need now and our children will need in the future.

That is why I urge you to support me and my government as we seek a second term on 29 November.

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