

Transparency lacking over trader levy



OPINION

[dropcap style="color: #a02f2f;"] I [/dropcap]t is interesting to see **Mainstreet Australia** adding its voice to those urging Warrnambool traders to pay a special levy to fund a \$3 million marketing and promotion campaign by **Commerce Warrnambool** over the next five years.

Mainstreet Australia president **Steve Bentley** was recently the [focus of a local news article](#) in which he praised the trader levy, saying it was one way to counteract the impact of online shopping and that it had worked very successfully for Geelong, where he works as part of the City of Geelong Council.

As infamous model Mandy Rice-Davies once said, “he would say that, wouldn’t he” because what Mr Bentley failed to mention – or what the news article failed to report – is that the person who was paid by Commerce Warrnambool to develop the trader levy, **Peter McNabb** from Peter McNabb and Associates, is a key figure in Mainstreet Australia.

Indeed Mr McNabb’s [own website](#) explains that he “played a leading role in the establishment of the Victorian version of

Mainstreet in 1996, and was its inaugural President from 1996 to 2001”.

The Mainstreet Australia [website states](#) that Mr McNabb is a current committee member and a life member of the association.

As part of his duties with Mainstreet Australia, Mr McNabb was a judge for the annual Mainstreet Australia Awards in 2008, 2010 and 2012. The awards [include](#) a category for groups that have a “special rate and charge budget” of under \$100,000 (in 2014) and a category for those who have a special rate and charge budget over \$100,000 (in 2014).

In other words, Mainstreet Australia rewards those associations that oversee the sort of special rates and charges that Mr McNabb specialises in setting up.



Peter McNabb from Peter McNabb and Associates. Image: [Peter McNabb and Associates.](#)

[dropcap style="color: #a02f2f;"] S[/dropcap]pecial rates and

charges are part of what Mainstreet Australia is all about and it is not ashamed to say so. In fact it held a conference in 2009 in which [the use of special levies](#) – right down to [how to avoid and handle appeals](#) to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal – was a particular focus.

There is nothing wrong with any of this activity, after all, Mainstreet Australia is a business lobby group and Mr McNabb is paid to help business groups, but what is wrong is that none of this has been disclosed.

This means that you, me, and all the traders who are grappling with whether the controversial levy is a good idea or not, think that Mainstreet Australia is offering an independent assessment.

It is not.

I believe it is part of a strategy designed to make those traders who are uneasy about the levy feel as if there is something wrong with *them*, because they can't see its "obvious" benefits and may wish to vote "no" to its introduction.

We saw another example of this when those local traders who clearly object to the levy – which would add an impost to their overheads until 2019-20 – were [asked to come up with a better idea](#), as if this was somehow their responsibility. Why should they have to find a solution to a problem that they did not create?

It is muddle-headed thinking and, to my mind, a dangerous precedent for how objectors are treated.

Even [the intervention](#) of **Mayor Neoh** later this week to try and find a middle ground between Commerce Warrnambool and dissenting traders speaks volumes as to how the process has been rushed through.



High rents in Warrnambool's main street of Liebig St remain a burden to many traders...and will continue to do so.

[dropcap style="color: #a02f2f;"] A[/dropcap]nd while all of this pushing and pulling and lack of transparency is going on, another Warrnambool CBD trader [has announced](#) that they will close. Not simply because of online shopping. Not because of a lack of any "buy local" campaign, but largely because of high rents in the main street of Liebig St.

This, plus the lack of any free, timed parking in the CBD during the week, remains the single biggest issue facing many traders who can't afford to pay the rent and make a decent living.

A special levy is not a magic wand and will not resolve these fundamental problems, which is why a levy has attracted so much dissent in places such as [Croydon](#), [Bendigo](#) and [Adelaide](#).

And for every success story about the levy in other towns,

there is equally a story about those Warrnambool traders who feel the extra cost would provide little benefit above the promotional schemes that are already in place via [Warrnambool City Council](#), the [Great South Coast Group](#) and the [Great Ocean Road Regional Tourism Board](#).

There are also those traders, like the one who called us this week, who run the sort of businesses that don't usually feature in marketing campaigns – think laundrettes, funeral parlours, architects and the like – but who will still pay the fee.

Given the scale and scope of this levy, it needs careful thought and absolute transparency as traders decide whether to support the idea or whether, as is their democratic right, they simply say no.

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Art environment award delivers a message



Albumen, by Collingwood artist Julia de Ville, took out the \$5000 first prize in the 2014 SCOPE Galleries Art Award Exhibition.

A “seductive” art work with a powerful message has taken out the 2014 SCOPE Galleries Art Award for works based on an environmental theme.

Collingwood artist **Julia De Ville** won the \$5000 first prize for her work, *Albumen*, which features three taxidermy chicks with eyes of black diamond, sitting in a highly-polished, engraved silver goblet.

And while the piece is immediately visually appealing, if not even humorous, it contains a sobering message about battery hen farming and the many ways – beyond a dozen eggs – that battery hen products slip into the food stream.

The SCOPE Galleries Art Award: Art Concerning Environment is a biennial, non-acquisitive award that is fast becoming one of the most prestigious and lucrative awards in South-West Victoria since it was first held in 2012.

This year the award attracted a range of first-class entries from around the south-west and every state of Australia, making it a difficult task for guest judge **Marita Smith**, director of Gallerysmith, North Melbourne, to select just one winner. Eventually, however, she settled on *Albumen*.

“Julia’s piece is really intoxicating and seductive in its presentation,” Marita said.

“You are seduced by the work and, because of this seduction, you are drawn to look at the work in greater detail – and that’s when it delivers its punch.”



SCOPE Galleries director Dr Liza McCosh, left, with guest judge for the award, Marita Smith, director of Gallerysmith North Melbourne.

[dropcap style="color: #dc943c;"]S [/dropcap]COPE Galleries director **Dr Liza McCosh** established the award to encourage the

exploration of environmental issues through art and provide a forum to provoke discussion around the environmental challenges of today.

The environmental focus also complements SCOPE's location in Warrnambool, which sits between some of Victoria's most dramatic coastline and its most beautiful hinterland: a combination that continues to inspire both local artists and those from further afield.

"Personally, my own work has always been influenced by the natural environment around me and its various elements – the sky, the landscape – so I am aware of its impact," Liza said.

[box type="bio"] The Art Concerning Environment Award exhibition will run until July 20. SCOPE Galleries, at 38 Kelp St, is open Thur-Sun 12-5pm.[/box]

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Scrap trader levy and start over



An attempt to unite Warrnambool traders through a new marketing levy has run off the rails: perhaps it is time to start fresh?

OPINION:

[dropcap style="color: #a02f2f;"] A [/dropcap] ballot will soon be held on whether Warrnambool traders should pay a special levy to fund a \$600,000 marketing plan by [Commerce Warrnambool](#), but the main game – to unite the traders as one – has already been lost.

Traders for and against the annual levy are deep in their trenches and, no matter how the ballot falls, there will be bitterness on at least one side.

Even the ballot process itself is fundamentally negative: rather than relying on enough traders to vote *for* the levy, it will go ahead unless enough traders vote *against* it. Hence

there is now a very active and growing grassroots campaign by the [Warrnambool Traders Action Group](#) asking traders to be sure they object.

Given this no-win situation, I would suggest it is time to scrap the levy idea and start over.

It is three weeks since *Bluestone Magazine* [exposed the full extent of the plan](#) by Commerce Warrnambool (a chamber of commerce) to ask the Warrnambool City Council to attach a levy to 1346 commercial and industrial properties based on their capital improved value.

The levy, which would rise by 5 per cent each year for the next five years, would fund Commerce Warrnambool to operate as a major promotional and marketing body for the city.

Of the \$600,000 to be raised, around \$200,000 will be used for administrative and professional development costs, \$100,000 will go toward an annual infrastructure project, and the remainder will be used for a range of promotional and marketing activities.

Regardless of its intent, however, the roll-out of the levy plan has so far been a dismal failure.



*To stop the proposed
Commerce Warrnambool
levy
You must **OBJECT***

The slogan
produced by the
Warrnambool
Traders Action

Group.

[dropcap style="color: #a02f2f;"] D [/dropcap]espite Commerce Warrnambool saying it had contacted hundreds of people about the idea, a large number of traders, including several high-profile businesses, said they knew nothing about it until they read it in *Bluestone*, on Facebook, or after it was tabled as a fait accompli at the May 19 council meeting.

These traders fall into two broad camps:

i) those who object to paying any more than what they already do in council rates and various tourism levies;

ii) those who might support the concept, but fear Commerce Warrnambool will only duplicate what is already being done by [Warrnambool City Council](#), the [Great South Coast Group](#) and the [Great Ocean Road Regional Tourism Board](#).

Last week, the city of Geelong was [held up as an example](#) of how a trader levy for marketing and promotion can work very well, but the Geelong model is run completely differently to that being proposed for Warrnambool.



The City of Geelong has operated a trader levy since 2001, but it is a very different model to that proposed for Warrnambool. Image: www.g21.com.au

[dropcap style="color: #a02f2f;"] I [/dropcap] taking a closer look at Geelong, there is a template for how things could work here.

First, the Geelong Chamber of Commerce has nothing to do with the special levy: it does not collect it, spend it, administer it or receive a cent from it.

Instead, the [Geelong Chamber of Commerce](#) – which has been running for about 160 years – is an independent body funded through memberships, corporate partners and fundraising events and does all of the things that a business group aims to do, such as networking and lobbying.

Second, the [Central Geelong](#) marketing levy, as it is called, is collected by the City of Geelong Council and is administered by a special committee set up *within* the council.

The Central Geelong Marketing Committee is made up of [12 volunteer representatives](#) from local businesses and sectors, plus one councillor, and supported by a four-person executive team that is employed by the council, including CEO Jodie Reyntjes. (You can [read more here](#)).

The committee manages a levy that in 2012-13 raised \$671,000 and the process appears entirely transparent and fully accountable: they hold monthly public meetings, upload their monthly minutes and produce an annual report.

Indeed, in 2009, Ms Reyntjes wrote an [interesting presentation](#) that underscored the importance of being able to measure the success of the levy in real and meaningful ways: right down to counting the number of pedestrians in the city on a given day.

Such an approach avoids unnecessary duplication of staff and projects, and sits the levy within an established civic framework rather than trying to replicate this framework outside the council and from the ground up.

The Central Geelong levy has been running since 2001 – although not without its detractors – but its ongoing survival and successes indicates that it is doing something right.

Could we learn something from our coastal cousins?



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We still have jumps racing? Can't get over it.

A love story built on literary lives

[printfriendly]



Wendy and Allan Scarfe will next year celebrate their 60th anniversary...and a literary partnership that has created more than 26 books.

Words and photos by Carol Altmann

[dropcap style="color:#A5CECD;"] T [/dropcap]o spend time with authors **Allan** and **Wendy Scarfe** is to experience the lovely ease that comes when two people have shared their lives

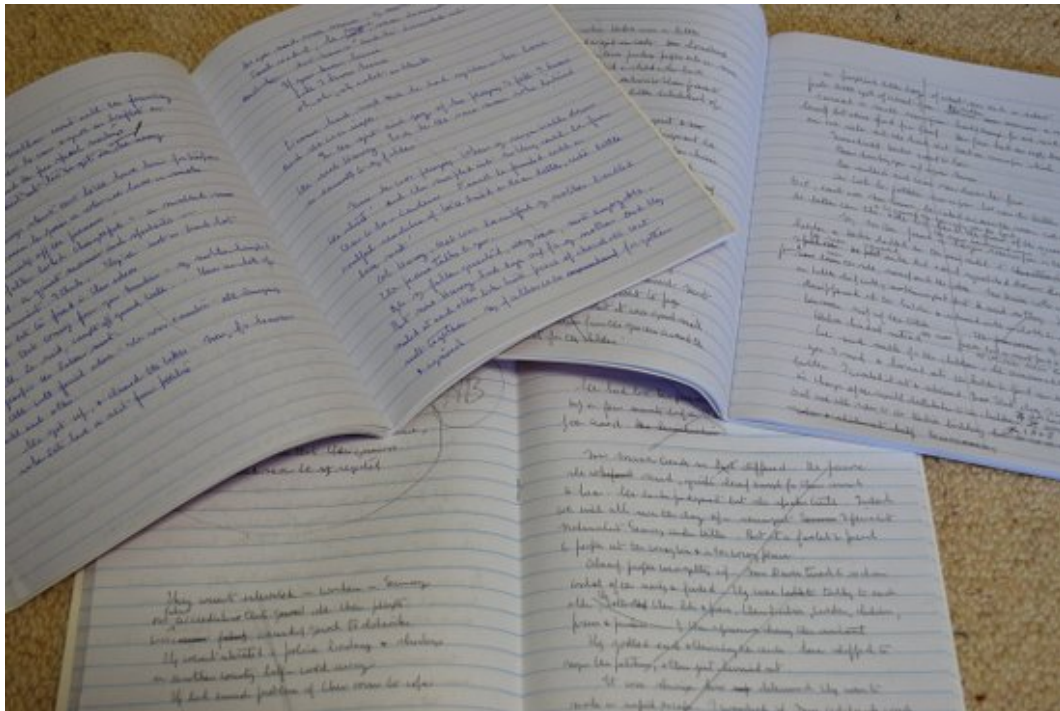
together, on the same path, creating works that will last beyond their lifetimes.

The Warrnambool couple, now aged in their 80s, have between them produced 26 books and are currently working on bringing Wendy's latest – and probably last – novel to life: a political and romantic thriller, ***Hunger Town***, that will be published later this year.

While Wendy has spent the past three years coaxing the novel out of a mash of ideas into a fully formed manuscript of 145,000 words, *Hunger Town*, like all of the Scarfes' work, is very much a joint production.

Over tea and warm biscuits (baked by Allan) in a home crammed with books and art, Wendy outlines the thrust of her new work – more about that shortly – while Allan drops in an extra detail or two about the plot or the main characters. It is a story he knows very well because he has read – and typed – every word.

"I don't use a computer to write," Wendy explains, "or a typewriter".



Where it all begins: Wendy Scarfe writes her books longhand, in exercise books, after which Allan transcribes them on to computer.

[dropcap style="color:#A5CECD;"] I [[/dropcap]nstead, *Hunger Town* was drafted by Wendy in long-hand, using exercise books bought from the local supermarket. Each book, and there is a box full, is crammed with notes, word lists and page after page of neat cursive script. There are no chapters, but rather a collection of scenes that are then pieced together.

"I have always written this way, where I use line breaks to move through scenes. I find this much better than creating self-contained capsules," Wendy says.

"I am just lucky that Allan is a very good and patient typist," she adds with a laugh.

The Scarfes' is a relationship that spans 60 years (they met at Melbourne University and married in 1955), four children, and joint careers as secondary school teachers of English and English literature, including seminal years working in impoverished communities in India.

Given their life experiences, the Scarfes use their writing to expose the reader to deeper issues than those found in an average airport paperback: social justice, equality, oppression, feminism, political activism and the impact of conflict, are common themes.

“I have always been a political person, but not a party political person,” Wendy says.

“I am more interested in the actual political systems and how people are affected by them.”



A young Wendy at the time of her marriage to Allan in 1955.

[dropcap style="color: #A5CECD;"] N[/dropcap]ot surprisingly, an exploration of politics also underpins *Hunger Town*, which is set in the Great Depression and centres around the story of a fictional character, Judith Larson. Judith is

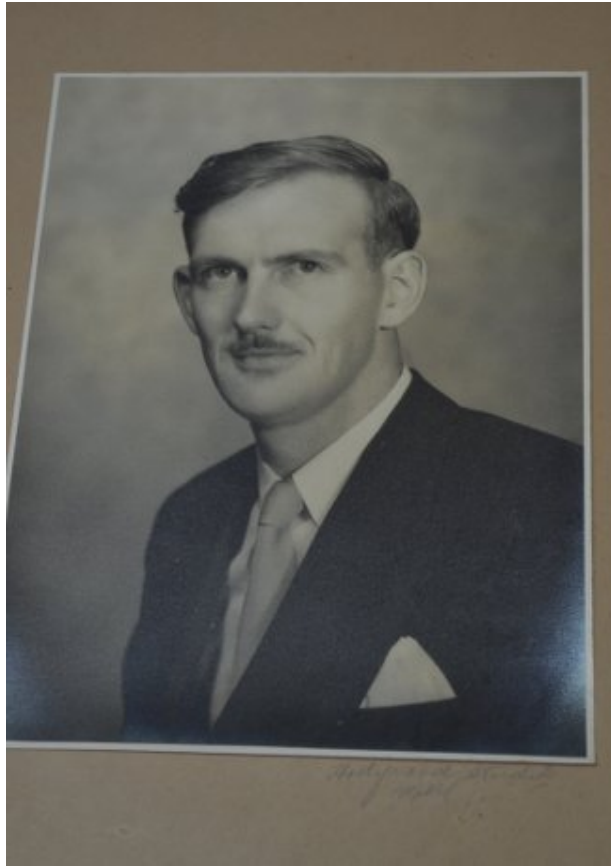
raised on a hulk on the Port River, at Port Adelaide, and her life as a young adult traverses the tumultuous political events happening in Australia and overseas during the late 1920s and early 1930s.

It is a novel that promises to be intellectually satisfying and a heart-racing read, particularly as Judith embarks on a frantic search for her husband who goes missing in Spain after becoming caught up in the brutality of fascism. Those who have read Wendy's manuscript say it is impossible to put down.

Hunger Town is shaping up to be one of the Scarfes' most commercially successful works since *A Mouthful of Petals: The Story of an Indian Village*, which was first published in 1967, re-printed in 2011, and now also available as an e-book.

On the subject of e-books, Allan is pleased to point out that the Scarfes have embraced the digital age and created a [Wikipedia page](#) for Wendy, but unfortunately not one for himself.

"There were already three Alan/Allan John Scarfes – a Canadian actor, a bishop in Iowa and a clergyman in Middle England – and they didn't have room for one more," he laughs.



Allan also had a touch of Hollywood about him as a younger man, but fortunately it was words, not film, that sparked his creativity.

[dropcap style="color: #A5CECD;"] T [/dropcap>he Scarfes do, however, have a [website](#) that captures the full breadth of their output over the past 40-plus years and is illustrated by nature photographs taken by daughter, Nalini.

So will *Hunger Town* be Wendy's last novel, as she has been suggesting?

"There are always more ideas, so many ideas, but it is a lot of hard work to produce a book out of those ideas," she says.

Will we take that as a "not sure"? Let's hope so.

[box] ***Hunger Town*, Wakefield Press, should be published by November and will be available from local book specialists, Warrnambool Books.**[/box]

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Ignore Shaw and focus on the real issues



The actions of Frankston MP Geoff Shaw could lead to the unravelling of the State Government. Image: www.womensagenda.com.au

OPINION – ROY REEKIE

A [dropcap style="color: #A02F2F;"] someone with a keen interest in politics and a local political profile, I've recently been asked my thoughts on **Geoff Shaw**, State Member for Frankston and parliamentary recalcitrant.

Ex-Liberal Shaw holds the balance of power in State Parliament and seems to hold something of **Premier Denis Napthine's** political destiny in his hands. Personally, I think that we – the people of the South West – should decide Dr Napthine's political destiny.

What are my thoughts on Shaw? Precious little as it happens. My thoughts are focused on more substantial, positive and progressive things, about our region, community and its future, rather than the fate of a parliamentary representative of an outer suburban seat.

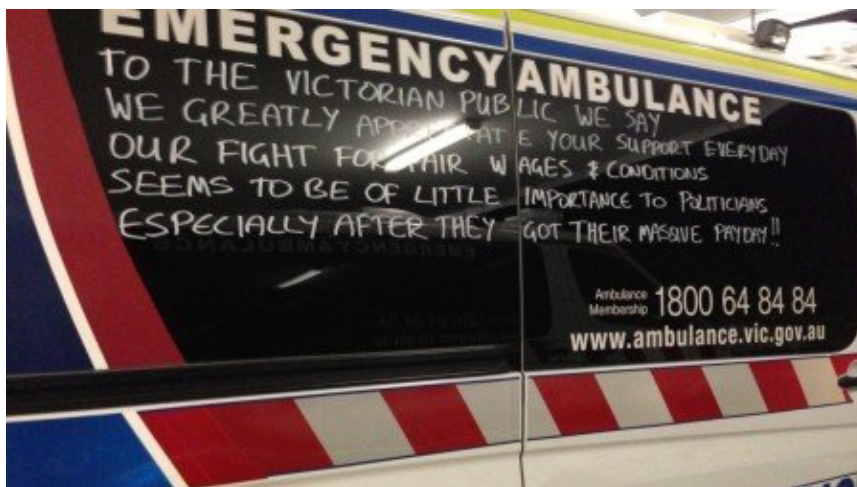
However, I do have some thoughts about the process that seems to be unfolding around him.

This Tuesday (10/6), Opposition Leader **Daniel Andrews** and his Labor parliamentary colleagues are likely to present a motion that might result in Shaw being expelled from Parliament. The

pressure will then be on Denis Naphthine and his coalition colleagues to either support that rather moral motion or oppose it and save Shaw's bacon.

Liberal member and ex-Speaker of the Assembly, **Ken Smith**, may cross the floor to vote with the Labor Opposition. In this case, the motion would succeed and Shaw would be tossed out, perhaps heading immediately to the Supreme Court to lodge a writ challenging his expulsion.

[Crikey](#) recently published an excellent analysis and critique of the situation. I tend to agree with Crikey's William Bowe's view that Parliament voting to expel a member, even one as scurrilous as Shaw, creates a dangerous precedent on a slippery downhill slope towards a potential political cesspool.



The focus on the future of the Member for Frankston is detracting from the real issues facing Victorians, such as health care, jobs and emergency services. Image: aeavic.com.au

[dropcap style="color: #A02F2F;"] T he Geoff Shaw situation mirrors that in Federal Parliament recently when the Coalition Government attempted to use its parliamentary

majority (and an accommodating Speaker) to have comments made by an Opposition member excised from Hansard and replaced with words that the Government saw as more acceptable.

Here was a Government that espouses free speech as an inalienable right seeking to exploit its numerical advantage on the floor of parliament to put words into an Opposition member's mouth in place of her real views.

Meanwhile, in Victoria, the State Government may join with the Opposition to form a super-majority to expel a member, someone from their side of politics no less. This is a government that decided to drop criminal charges against that member, most probably for political expediency and survival. So, Shaw's future will now be decided by a parliamentary vote. Criminal charges remain a genuine alternative to this intensely political process.

This is my point: it is dangerous – and morally murky – to use a parliamentary political process to solve what is arguably a criminal issue and inarguably a moral question that society, rather than Parliament, should judge.

If anyone of us committed a serious fraud against our employer, we'd most likely face two consequences – criminal charges and dismissal by our employer.



Surely the people of the South-West should

decide the future of their local member, Denis Naphthine, not an MP from a seat in Melbourne.
Image: Angela Wylie, The Age.

[dropcap style="color: #a02f2f;"] S [/dropcap]haw's employer is not the Parliament, but the people; in this case, the people of Frankston.

One genuine option now might be for Daniel Andrews' motion to be re-framed so that Geoff Shaw's fraudulent actions are the subject of criminal charges, rather than seeking to expel Shaw from Parliament.

Let the courts decide on his criminality.

Let the people of Frankston judge him in November.

Ignore Shaw.

Focus our politics on the most meaningful issues that impact on our communities – jobs and training for our young people, health services for our ill and aged, emergency services to keep us all safe – rather than on the criminality and morality of individuals. Lift our political discourse to the intellectual and moral heights that the issues our society faces deserve.

Let's realign our political compass.

While Spring Street sorts itself out, I'm going to continue to try to realign the politics of the South West. Frankston electors can sort out their own member.

[box] Warrnambool lawyer Roy Reekie is a member of the ALP and stood for the now-defunct seat of Warrnambool in 1999. He then contested the new seat of South West Coast against Denis Naphthine in 2002, coming within a few hundred votes of victory. Reekie last ran against Dr Naphthine in 2006.[/box]

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