

CEO sacking: prising open the clam of confidentiality



Acting W'bool City Council CEO Vicki King replaced CEO Peter Schneider who was sacked by the council just three months before the election. Images: WCC

Carol Altmann – The Terrier

Well this is intriguing – the [release of the non-confidential part of the minutes](#) from the Warrnambool City Council meeting where CEO Peter Schneider lost his head.

The minutes prise open, just a little, the tight clam shell around what happened that night of the long knives on 13 July, including the following facts:

Mr Schneider was sacked using a “no reason” clause in his contract;

The motion to sack the CEO was moved by Cr Kylie Gaston and seconded by Cr Sue Cassidy;

This same motion offered the role to the council’s Community Services director, Vikki King, who would start the very next day, 14 July;

Ms King was given a fresh set of “priority” goals or KPIs

(key performance indicators);

The recruitment of a new CEO will start after the next council election in October;

The new Mayor – whoever that will be – will start that recruitment process;

The whole meeting lasted less than 90 minutes;

Mr Schneider was in the meeting for three minutes;

The council's Director of Corporate Strategies, Peter Utri, and former Moyne CEO Graham Shiells, who is now a local government consultant, took the minutes;

Cr Peter Sycopoulis was the sole councillor to vote against the meeting going into confidence.

So we now know the council sacked the CEO without having to give a reason and did so before the next elected council, or Mayor, could have any say in the matter.

[As an aside, if the council elections are postponed because of Covid 19, the Mayoral election will still go ahead when Cr Tony Herbert's time expires in November.

Given the 4/3 divide, Cr Herbert will not be Mayor again.

Cr Mike Neoh has already said he wants to run for Mayor a sixth time, and Cr Sue Cassidy is champing at the bit, so if the elections are postponed, the new Mayor will be one of the Four Horsemen who lopped off Schneider's head.].

So what was the motivation behind this coup?

We still don't know, but there are suspicions and theories, as there always is when there is secrecy.

One theory is the CEO became unpopular while cutting staff to save the council money, because, as our Mayor told us, the council was “unsustainable in its current form”.

The Mayor was quite right.

At least \$31 million a year – every single dollar collected in rates – was going toward 730 staff salaries, and the number of people on \$100,000-a-year-plus was growing.

In fact figures given by the council to a parliamentary inquiry in 2016 [said the council](#) **had 21 officers each earning a total salary package of more than \$120,000 a year.**

That sounds like a top-heavy outfit to me, especially for a city of only 35,000 people.

Many senior positions remained vacant under Mr Schneider’s rule.

As it happens, Ms King’s own five-year contract was due to expire in early August.

Mr Schneider might have been on to something in terms of removing or blending jobs, because Ms King is now both acting CEO AND head of Community Services.

Wow, talk about multi-tasking.

Another position to keep an eye on is the Governance Officer, a \$140,000 a year role created under former CEO Bruce Anson, which has been vacant since December.

The previous person in the job, Anne-Marie Neal, is taking the council to court in a WorkCover claim over a series of events that is also subject to much speculation.

In the meantime, applications to fill that role closed on 24 July.

There is a lot going on, and there is still a lot to uncover –

but uncover it, we will.

[For some unexplained reason, the 13 July minutes made available remain “unconfirmed” despite being voted on at the August meeting. I have asked why. The minutes, which must be published under the Local Govt Act, were released after requests from terriers. [You can read them here.](#)]

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