



Deakin: Phillpot discreet amid leadership vacuum

Description



Former Warrnambool mayor Glenys Phillpott OAM, third from right, was one of 16 Deakin University council members until her recent resignation. Image: Deakin University.

Opinion – Carol Altmann

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #DC943C;"] A[/dropcap]s the long-term future of Deakin University, Warrnambool, remains in the balance, there is one person who has had a ring-side seat to the action, former Warrnambool mayor **Glenys Phillpott** OAM.

Until it was drawn to my attention recently, I didn't know Ms Phillpott was a long-standing member of the Deakin University Council, which is effectively the "board" for a university and has the power to do all manner of things, including appointing a Vice Chancellor and overseeing the finances, university performance and overall direction.



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Ms Phillpot served on the 16-member council from 1 January, 2013 and was reappointed in January this year, but for some reason resigned on 30 June. When I asked why she had stepped down, Ms Phillpot said it was not appropriate to comment.

Given Ms Phillpot has been so close to the heart of the discussion and is no longer a council member, I had hoped she might be in a position to be able to shed some more light on what Deakin planned to do about the troubled Warrnambool campus, which has only 872 enrolments and, according to Deakin, needs at least 2000 to be viable.

But Ms Phillpot has opted for discretion, declining to comment beyond saying: "I just hope that there is an outcome that brings benefit to all of our community".



The sprawling Deakin-Warrnambool campus has less than 900 students enrolled. Image: Deakin University.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #DC943C;"] T[/dropcap]he absence of Ms Phillpot's voice from the public discussion is a pity, because as former local Liberal MP **Adam Kempton** [recently wrote in his opinion piece](#) for Bluestone, the demise of Deakin-Warrnambool can be sheeted home to a lack of leadership on multiple levels.

For my mind, Ms Phillpot could help to fill that void by adding a reasoned, informed view on what needs to happen next if Deakin is to stay or go. God knows we need strong local leadership at this critical time.

As has already been reported, but somehow easily forgiven, local federal Liberal MP **Dan Tehan** said [he was shocked to learn of Deakin](#) considering pulling out of Warrnambool. Former local Liberal member and Premier **Denis Napthine** was [equally as outraged](#) when the news broke earlier this year.

Surely both men, as long-standing local MPs, should have had their finger on the pulse well before it got to this? (For the record, Ms Phillpot is also a member of the Liberal Party.)

Why did nobody apparently see this coming, especially when people like **Toni Jenkins**, who [also wrote an Opinion piece](#) for Bluestone on the issue, have been shouting from the rooftops for years about the poor educational standards in the south-west?



Many south-west students are either failing to complete Year 12 or achieving only low ATAR scores. Image: eStock

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #DC943C;"] One of the biggest problems for Deakin-Warrnambool is that it relies heavily on local enrolments and yet we have the lowest Year 12 completion rate in the state.

And of those who do finish year 12, many are struggling to reach an ATAR of 50.

In other words, many of our students are not qualified to go to university.

As it happens, I was working at Monash University Gippsland when exactly the same scenario played out there in 2012-13.

In the wake of falling enrolments and local school students from the Latrobe Valley failing to reach university entry scores, Monash sold the campus to Ballarat/Federation University.

The loss of the prestigious Monash “brand” was significant to the Gippsland academics, some international students and no doubt some local students, but the campus is still alive and growing again by returning more to its roots (Gippsland started as the Gippsland Institute of Advanced Education).



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In my view, Warrnambool would be best served by a TAFE/Deakin university hybrid, based out of the TAFE complex in Timor St, with the Sherwood campus land sold off and used for eco-friendly housing or a conference centre.

Can it be done? Is it possible or feasible? I don't know, but we all need to be a part of this critical conversation.



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