

WCC Mackay trip: Keeping it in the family

Description



Analysis – Carol Altmann

The Warrnambool City Council recently went on a short, “fact finding” visit to north Queensland, but the odd thing is that the partners of two councillors were also part of the delegation.

As [was reported in the local paper](#), Councillors Rob Askew, Jacinta Ermacora and Kylie Gaston took a flying visit to Mackay on August 17 and 18 to see progress on an \$18 million upgrade of its central shopping strip.

What wasn't mentioned is that CEO Bruce Anson and Crs Peter Sycopoulis and Peter Hulin were also part of the “fact finding mission”, as were two, less expected attendees: Francis Broekman, who is Cr Ermacora’s husband, and Dulcie Askew, wife of Cr Askew.

From what *Bluestone* understands, Mr Broekman and Mrs Askew were not just merely helping to carry the luggage, but were active participants in the discussions and behind-the-scenes-briefings with the Mackay Regional Council.

This begs the question, of course, as to who paid the expenses for Mr Broekman and Mrs Askew, including any portion of airfares, accommodation and meals, and what was their official role in the delegation, if any?

We put these questions to the council yesterday (25/8), alongside another question: were the partners of *all* councillors invited to come along on the “fact finding mission” – even at their own expense – or only some? (We are yet to receive a response.)



Francis Broekman, partner of W'bool City Councillor Jacinta Ermacora. Image: Twitter.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A02F2F;"] P[/dropcap]erhaps Mr Broekman and Mrs Askew were holidaying with their spouses in Queensland at the time of the council's visit, but that still doesn't explain why they were included in what was essentially council business.

The other nagging issue is just how useful was an eight-person delegation to Mackay toward progressing Warrnambool's long-awaited revitalisation of Liebig St?

The report in the local paper confirmed that it was not the first time Warrnambool City Council representatives had visited Mackay to see what was happening in this region of 120,000 people that is halfway between Townsville and Rockhampton.

Bluestone has been told some council staff have travelled to the city at least twice in the past three years before this most recent "fact finding mission".

Why Mackay? Why not save a 5000km round trip and see what is happening in other cities around Victoria like Bendigo, Castlemaine or Geelong?

By the time you add up airfares, food and accommodation for at least six people, travelling to Mackay is surely not the most efficient option.

Meanwhile, back in Liebig St, the silence is deafening – no jackhammers, no shovels, no clusters of busy people in hard hats and safety vests – while we wait to see if the multi-million dollar upgrade will be funded by the State Government.

And while we wait to hear about funding, a few shops are playing musical chairs by relocating to new premises in the same strip – creating an illusion of growth – while more businesses disappear altogether and a record number of shops remain vacant.

At the risk of sounding gloomy, it is only going to get worse before it gets better.

If the revitalisation goes ahead, as it must, businesses already feeling the pinch will have to hold on tight as customers deal with messy roadworks and construction sites.

Some retailers who have gone through a similar street upgrade have suffered a 40 per cent drop in trade. Where were these businesses? Mackay.

Bluestone didn't have to travel 5000km return to find this out: the details are [all there online](#).

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1. Archive

Tags

1. Cr Jacinta Ermacora
2. Dulcie Askew
3. Francis Broekman
4. Mackay City Council
5. Peter Hulin
6. Peter Sycopoulis
7. Rob Askew
8. Warrnambool City Council trip

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