

WCC rate rise and May Racing Carnival corporate tent



The W'bool City Council's corporate tent at the May Racing carnival has been a permanent fixture in its budget for at least 15 years. Image: Vinfoлио

Carol Altmann – The Terrier

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Today is another reminder rather than a revelation: for at least the past 15 years, the Warrnambool City Council has hosted a marquee at the final day of the May Racing Carnival at a total cost to ratepayers of around \$225,000.

I am still waiting for a response on how much the council paid last year for this corporate networking tent, but in 2014 it spent more than \$17,000.

For one day.

If we tally this up over 15 years, at an average, conservative cost of around \$15,000 each time, we are suddenly up around a quarter of a million dollars.

This money has gone into hiring the marquee, the catering staff, the chairs, tables, decorations, hors d'oeuvres, alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks, member's reserve entry tickets and wristbands.

Ratepayers even paid for the race books.

I [first wrote about this marquee](#) in 2014, when it emerged the guest list was largely made up of members of council and their partners, local MPs, local executives, representatives from the council's Melbourne law firm, Maddock's, a couple of associates of then-councillor Brian Kelson, and current Mayor Tony Herbert, who was invited as the then chair of Commerce Warrnambool.

So much for it being a networking opportunity.

Networking is supposed to involve connecting with people you don't already know.



The final day of the May Racing carnival is seen by the council as a networking opportunity. Image: Only Melbourne.

Cr Peter Hulin has long challenged the justification for the

marquee, but it remains firmly in place.

Indeed when Cr Hulin again questioned its relevance in 2015, then Cr Jacinta Ermacora said the marquee was an important part of the council “supporting the local racing industry”.

This made thoroughbred horse racing sound like some form of charity rather than part of a multi-billion dollar enterprise based on gambling.

I am pretty sure the council could find far more needy causes who are out turning sausages in the carpark at Bunnings each Saturday.

And this is the bigger problem, because while \$17,000 a year is not much in an \$89 million council budget, it is still a lot of money to a majority of people: this is what the council loses sight of.

It can drop \$17k of our money on one afternoon's entertainment without batting an eyelid or producing one shred of evidence as to its value.

Because it is all about “networking”.

In this case, however, the networking is not working, especially now the council is asking ratepayers to either pay more in rates, above the 2.5% State Government cap, or face service cuts.

The final instalment tomorrow.

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