

PERSONAL EXPLANATION: JACKIE WATTS

Response in relation to:

Series of comments by councillors at FMC on May 17, 2016, radio comments, tweet, and related print media engagement.

Personal Statement

I speak to set the public record straight on what I believe has been a series of misleading, false, disrespectful, disparaging comments by four Councillors about my professional conduct, my affiliations, my honesty and my motivation

It is my belief that these statements had the potential to discredit me and adversely impact on my personal and professional reputation.

At FMC on May 3, which occurred during Knowledge Week, minutes will confirm that I registered an Apology. As Chair of the Knowledge City portfolio, my presence was required at events across the city throughout the day and into the evening.

I was not present for, nor made aware of, any behind the closed-door agreement or discussions by Councillors, to adjust the FMC agenda in order to avert another loss of quorum brought about by the conflicted Doyle Team.

Yet immediately after FMC on May 3, my absence became the subject of Twitter commentary by a Councillor who, based entirely on conjecture, falsely attributed a political motive to my absence. This triggered media inquiries the next day, questioning my honesty and the legitimacy of my absence.

The matter did not end there. Two days later on May 5, constituents alerted me to a Councillor interview on 3AW. Audio records revealed once again reference to a female Councillor, who may have deliberately absented herself at FMC, in order to orchestrate the loss of quorum. This could only have been referring to me. Such comment in the public realm about my legitimate absence was, I believe, an opportunistic attempt to deflect negative media attention from the loss of quorum at FMC due to the Doyle team's conflict, by discrediting me.

Then two weeks later at FMC May 17, audio records confirmed yet another Councilor, in an angry tirade against my Motion 7.1 proposing campaign donations reform, alluded in a denigrating manner, to a Councillor being absent from FMC on May 3. Once again, this can only have been me and again, I believe the intention was to discredit me.

It is pertinent to note that from the Minutes of FMC on May 3, when the loss of quorum did occur, two Councillors were absent - myself and Cr. Ong. Yet my absence alone was singled out for prolonged critical comment, the absence of the male Councillor apparently beyond question. Leaving aside the possibility of gender bias, I question whether party affiliation could account for this inconsistent treatment?

On a different matter, at FMC on May 17, audio records will confirm that in response to my Motion 7.1 proposing campaign donation reform, three Councillors launched, I believe, an extraordinarily savage attack on me, and those who have shown support for me outside the Chamber. The volume, innuendo, the fallacious assertions could not, I believe, be judged as acceptable in any civil debate. All three Councillors appeared to have intended to belittle, offend and discredit me. Misleading reference was made to my political affiliation and to political opportunism on my part.

The truth is that:

- (a) I was elected as an independent Councillor holding strongly the view that party politics have no place in local government and
- (b) I have campaigned for electoral reform for more than a decade - including donations reform.

My Motion was a response to current community disquiet, not political opportunism. It warranted respectful consideration by Council, not ridicule.

The litany of mis-representation, innuendo, false assertions and disrespect had, I believe, the potential to damage my personal and professional reputation, my work as Knowledge City Portfolio Chair and as a Councillor.

Taken as a whole, I believe that a pattern of denigration, bordering upon bullying, a pervasive political opportunism appears to have trumped truth, justice and certainly collegial respect.

At all levels of government, peer abuse should not be an acceptable standard of practice. It brings the Council into disrepute and demeans us all. And it must cease.

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Cr Jackie Watts

31 May 2016