

THE BLOC 10-YEAR ANNIVERSARY

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?



PETER YOUNG
He won the 2004 election, despite the cashed up campaign run against him by Brian Rowe.

Cr Young was re-elected at the 2008 election but ahead of the 2012 election announced he would run for the Gold Coast Mayoralty.

He was not successful and since then has established his own business exporting products to China.

He admits the fallout from the 2004 election and the CMC inquiry took a financial and emotional toll.

"There were a lot of positives that came out of it, in the sense of people being more aware of probity issues, transparency and accountability," he says.

"But in my opinion some of the legislative response were over the top and very difficult to work with and that caused a backlash."

Mr Young estimates he spent up to \$100,000 defending himself at the CMC inquiry. He was not covered under the council's insurance policy because there was no allegation of wrongdoing against him.

"I wasn't entitled to free legal representation provided by the council's insurance," he says.

DAWN CRICHLAW
Despite the developer-funded campaign by Roxanne Scott, Dawn Crichtlow was returned as councillor for Southport's Division 6 at the 2004 election. She won again in 2008 and 2012 but has said this will be her last term as a councillor, marking 25 years in public office.

She believes council is now in a good place. "I think the council is more cohesive, they're thinking whole-of-city most of time."

"No, I don't think the events of 2004 will happen again. I think genuine business people are now having a say about what happens on the Gold Coast, not fly-by-nighters."

LIONEL BURDEN
Eco Energy Group managing director, which according to the website is led by a highly skilled management and technical team, to deliver integrated retrofit solutions to reduce energy.

DAVID POWER
Eco Energy Group development director. According to the Eco Energy website, David is a business strategist and management specialist with more than 25 years of senior management experience, including as managing partner of a

strategic planning firm. His own website lists his time as CEO at Nyst Lawyers and director at Power Strategic, but fails to mention the many years he spent representing the public at the Gold Coast City Council.

GRANT PFORR
Mr Pforr's (above) personal website labels him a "man of action" and in-

Lobbyists, slush funds and secret candidate meetings from a decade ago have changed local politics forever

Council's murky moneyball

THIS weekend marks the 10th anniversary of the March 2004 city council election. It was the election targeted by a group of "like-minded" business people who contributed to a fund to bankroll the campaigns of a bloc of so-called common sense candidates. The *Bulletin's* then council reporter, Alice Gorman, faced denial after denial as she attempted to seek clarity on just who was funding the aspiring politicians and what they wanted in return. Finally in the dying days of the campaign developer, the late Brian Ray revealed who was involved. What followed were denials, backflips and accusations of a biased media. The events led to an inquiry by the Crime and Misconduct Commission.

ALICE GORMAN

FOR a supposedly sophisticated strategy, involving nearly \$200,000 and some of the Gold Coast's top developers, business people and lawyers, the response to questioning was surprisingly ill-prepared.

First there were the outright denials from seasoned politicians who should have known better. Then came the sarcasm. "If somebody has a big pot of money I wish they'd tell me about it," said one would-be politician.

Then finally, three days before the 2004 Gold Coast City Council election, common sense prevailed.

Developer, the late Brian Ray, laid it all out nice and simple, begging the question: why all the secrecy?

A group of developers and business people had contributed money to a "concept".

Among those approached were Brian Ray, Soheil Abedian, John Fish, Bill Roche, Graham Ingles, Col Dutton, Con Nikiforides, David Devine and Brent Hailey.

They were told the funds would support the campaign's "sensible" council candidates so as to help overcome the "dysfunctional, illogical decisions being made by council".

"We're not responsible for any of the campaign," Ray told me. "We simply believe if a more coherent outcome can be achieved for the membership of that council, it will be in the interest of the city."

"The issue was really about trying to establish a caucus-

style of council so there could be some discussions about issues on a collegiate basis, prior to a decision being made. Nothing illegal about that. So why not tell voters sooner? As the *Bulletin's* council reporter at the time I spent long hours on the phone, trying to get some clarity on what was happening. It was clear from the quality of the election materials being circulated by certain candidates that someone was bankrolling them.

Today Alice Gorman and Andrew Potts look back at what happened, who was involved and what impact the CMC inquiry had on the Gold Coast City Council.

Rumours were rife, but it was hard to decipher fact from fiction. The city's elected representatives were doing their best to obfuscate.

The lead-up to the 2004 election had all the hallmarks of a classic quirky and crazy Gold Coast Council event.

Mayor Gary Baidon, a solid, sensible man, was under attack from cashed-up former Olympian Ron Clarke, who was spending his retirement fund in an attempt to get his hands on the mayoral chains.

Then there was Dean Vegas, the Elvis impersonator. What he lacked in knowledge about local government he made up for in razzle dazzle.

Then, of course, there was the usual city council circus: the two warring factions. On one side the self-righteous mob, led by the city's then planning boss David Power.

Suave, polished but ever so sarcastic, he denied having any involvement in a "ticket".

Yes, he and fellow planning boss, the late Sue Robbins, had been asked to provide advice to candidates and, yes, they gave it, he begrudgingly told me.

During our phone conversation, two days out from the election, Brian Ray named Lionel Bardon as the man behind the idea to fund a "bloc of candidates". Yet when I rang the then director of the now defunct Innovation Showcase he

questioned by the *Bulletin* prior to the election, Rowe claimed most of his funds came from family and friends and yes, some came from a trust fund but he wasn't aware who had contributed to it.

That a community leader would open himself to influence from unknown financial backers begged belief. "I have money from a trust fund but I'm unsure who's made contributions to any of that," he told me. "(My manager) can't release names because he has to go back to them and ask if they mind, because of the privacy laws. I have enough trouble being a candidate, let alone worrying about funding."

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was listed in the Independence, Influence and Integrity in Local Government report as a major player in the saga in his role as the Surfers Paradise Chamber of Commerce president. However, Cr Tate is only briefly mentioned in the report as having attended a



me he hadn't spoken to Ray for "at least four years". "I cross my heart, ... I'm telling you the truth," Bardon said. "I have heard there are people who have put money up."

Confused, I called Ray again to clarify. "Lionel Bardon was, as I understood it, the face of the campaign. I'm surprised he's told you that," he said.

Bardon, like Cr Power, was sticking to his strategy of deny, deny, deny. It made me even more suspicious. And with good reason. In the aftermath of the election it was revealed that candidates received cheques from law firm Hickey Lawyers, drawn from an account entitled the Lionel Bardon Trust Fund.

I knew that Bardon and Power were friends. In fact the pair continue to work together in Bardon's new company Eco Energy Group Ltd.

Bardon is listed as the managing director of the company

which, according to its website, features "an extremely strong group of professionals". Power is the development director, a "business strategist and management specialist with more than 25 years' senior management experience". Yet go to Power's website, davidpower.brandyourself.com, and there's no mention of the many years he spent as a Gold Coast City Councillor and deputy mayor of Australia's sixth-largest city.

Then again things didn't go so well for Power toward the end of his political career. His reputation was tarnished by the CMC inquiry and then in 2012, when he was making a pitch for the city's mayoralty, two of his former flames went public and labelled him a love rat for seeing them at the same time. What's the saying? You play with fire ...

So on March 27, 2004, Gold Coast voters were forced to go to the polls with only half the

measured by a yardstick cut down to take account of the fact they live on 'the Coast'.

There were occasions during this inquiry when an ordinary observer could have been forgiven for thinking they had fallen through a hole, not just into a foreign country but into a Wonderland where all the usual notions of reasonableness and honesty were reversed.

"This report details many instances of false or misleading statements made by candidates during the election process, and also highlights the less than frank evidence from some witnesses who attempted to explain away words attributed to them in the media and in emails and other documents.

"Overall, the evidence given by some councillors at the inquiry, and their conduct outside the inquiry, has created an impression they are entirely unwilling to accept responsibility for either their actions or their words.

"They have shown a worrying lack of insight into how their actions might be perceived by the general public and an even more worrying mindset that the only remedial action necessary in this matter is punitive action against those who have made complaints."

He concluded by saying the Gold Coast is not a foreign land, nor is it a Wonderland. It is part of Queensland and its citizens are entitled to hold their elected officials to the same standards of conduct that apply to other parts of the state.

"This report makes recommendations for changes that might assist the process. But unless elected officials and public officers are willing to take a healthy attitude towards compliance obligations, rather than looking for loopholes to avoid them, legislation will do little to change the present public perception that private interests are being placed above public duty on a regular basis on the Gold Coast."

Government as having played a part in the selection of candidates who were eventually chosen to receive financial support during the election. "That was a difficult election because there was a lot of innuendo floating around," he said. "The dossier given the government was inaccurate, leading to misinformation being put out there."

He became city planning boss but was defeated at his bid for re-election in 2012. He now operates a mobile coffee business in Mudgeeraba.



Key players of the time included (from left) Brian Ray, councillor David Power and Coast City Council councillors (left to right) Sue Robbins, Daphne McDonald, (Unknown Man), Ted Shepherd, Bob La Castra, Ray Hackwood and David Power in July 2004.

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WHO GAVE MONEY

- Con Nikiforides of Blue Sky Capital: \$10,000
- David Devine, Devine Ltd: \$10,000
- John Fish, Fish Group: \$10,000 to the Lionel Bardon Trust Fund, \$10,000 to Grant Pforr and \$24,000 to Brian Rowe
- Tony Hickey as power of attorney to Great Southern GMBH: \$10,000
- Graeme Ingles, Ingles Group: \$10,000
- Gregory Phillips, Phillips Group: \$30,000
- James Raptis, Rapticivic: \$10,000
- The Ray Group: \$10,000
- William Roche, Roche Group: \$10,000
- Col Dutton, Stockland: \$10,000
- Philip Sullivan, City Pacific: \$10,000
- Sunland Group: \$10,000 to the Lionel Bardon Trust Fund and another \$7700 directly to Quadrant Advertising
- Villa World Ltd: \$10,000

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