

Commission of Inquiry into South Gippsland Shire Council

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Template for submissions

Members of the public are welcome to make written submissions to the Inquiry which address one or more of the Terms of Reference.

The Terms of Reference for the Inquiry are:

1. To conduct an inquiry into matters relating to the affairs of the South Gippsland Shire Council, including through an examination of:
 - a. The final report from the municipal monitor and any responses from the Council or Councillors to the Minister's letter dated 2 April 2019;
 - b. The conduct of individual councillors during the term of the current Council;
 - c. Processes and decisions in the lead up to the conclusion of the current Chief Executive Officer contract, including the appointment of an Acting Chief Executive Officer;
 - d. Any other decisions made, or actions taken, by the Council after the Minister's letter dated 2 April 2019 to the Council;
 - e. The efficiency and effectiveness of the Council's governance arrangements in delivering services to its constituents; and
 - f. Any other matters identified by the Commission that have an impact on the Council's ability to function.
2. To report to the Minister for Local Government in writing on the matters outlined above by 13 June 2019.

Authors of submissions can also indicate if they would like to speak about their submission with Commissioners, either privately or publicly.

All submissions will be made public on the website unless:

- The author requests that their submission is not made public; and/or
- They are considered to contain content which could be defamatory.

Name:	Paul & Penny Hamlett
Name made public on the website?	Yes
Submission made public on the website?	Yes

Please outline any matters relating to the Terms of Reference for the inquiry:

We wish to make comment on 1(b) and 1 (e) of the Terms of Reference. We haven't had the benefit of access to the Municipal Monitors report and therefore don't know the if the points we will be making have been covered by the Monitor.

At the last Council elections in 2016 the community sent a clear message to Council that we wanted change, as is evidenced by the election of 6 new Councillors out of the 9 places available. Our assessment of this desire for change was born from dissatisfaction in the performance and culture of the incumbent Councillors and the organisation more broadly. Many of the new Councillors were elected based on their more progressive and pro-development platform which aligned to the prevailing community views.

Unfortunately, being first term Councillors, they were by necessity on a steep learning curve and coupled with the expected workload placed at a huge disadvantage in comparison to some of the more conservative returning Councillors. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] and we hope that the Municipal Monitor's report addresses this fundamental issue.

The community's attitude to Council effectiveness is formed as a result of individual ratepayer experience when accessing services. Poor experiences, particularly where people don't feel they have been treated fairly, soon negatively influence the broader community. The recent 2018 customer satisfaction survey would seem to reflect high levels of community dissatisfaction, most pointedly in relation to [REDACTED]. While we are not in position to determine definitively via formal benchmarking if this is how all local government regulatory services are viewed, anecdotal evidence would suggest that South Gippsland performs at the lower end of the satisfaction scale. Dissatisfied ratepayers are more likely to contact their Ward Councillor in an attempt to resolve their problems. If Councillors are unable to broker a resolution or at least provide a satisfactory explanation, then they are also seen being as part of the problem. Councillors should not be left to shoulder all the blame for disfunction and conflict.

Our recent and ongoing experience with the [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Councillors have not been updated on issues as they arise and instead kept in the dark. It should not be left to frustrated ratepayers to keep their Councillors informed. We did make direct representations to Council regarding our circumstances and believe we received a fair hearing. However, we question the impartiality of the conduct of the Council meeting when it came to vote on the preferred strategy to progress the matter. We are happy to provide a more detailed account of our experiences privately to the Commission. However, given that we believe our case is not unique, we ask the Commission to consider recommending a comprehensive and independent review of Council's regulatory service delivery. This measure could be implemented regardless of the decision to suspend or otherwise the current Councillors and will help establish ongoing benchmarked targets and [REDACTED]

The Shire has stagnated over recent years and has developed a reputation as being difficult with which to do business. This is in part is evidenced by low growth rates in comparison to neighbouring municipalities. We want to see vibrant and viable communities so that the entire Shire can respond effectively to the drivers of change.