

# ROSE ISER: Legislation will not fix rorts

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**THE Victorian Local Governance Association (VLGA) is appalled at the reported behaviour of elected representatives at both local and state levels as described in one of the Ombudsman's Reports released last week.**

Unfortunately, while this behaviour is the exception rather than the rule, the rubble from recent events falls on us all.

Critics of local government need to remember the vast majority of councillors seek and maintain good standards of governance, take their responsibilities seriously, act in the best interests of their local communities, and do not bend to the undue influences of others when making decisions.

Nevertheless, the Ombudsman's concerns indicate we need measures to bring the behaviour of councillors and Members of Parliament in line with community expectations.

The VLGA welcomes the indication from the State Government that charges will be laid where appropriate. It is the poor enforcement of existing laws and codes of conduct that fuels the perception that local government has an unattractive underbelly. The VLGA also calls for both levels of government to enter into considered discussion and debate about the best ways to tackle undue influence being exerted on councillors, and to improve governance practices in the long-term.

A second report into Moorabool Shire emphasises the improvements that have been made to transparency and good governance after the relevant council implemented a few key changes.

A key issue highlighted by the Ombudsman is the lack of adequate resourcing for Local Government Victoria. It is time that the body serving the third tier of government received an improved share of resources, not just to draft the rules but to police them and ensure adequate training is provided.

Any further legislative responses need to be considered in a context of providing additional support and training to councillors. While we understand the recent State Budget priorities, the Ombudsman's reports justify a reconsideration of our previous calls for additional training and support to ensure all parties understand their obligations.

But clearly legislation is not the sole solution. Currently, Victoria has the strictest legislation of any State in Australia with clear provisions to prevent councillors making decisions when there is a conflicting direct interest. There are also laws to maintain confidentiality, behave honestly and act in the best interests of the community.

What is now needed is debate on the best measures to prevent inappropriate and allegedly unlawful conduct in government, not rushing legislation.

Cr Rose Iser is president of the Victorian Local Governance Association.

*This story found at:*

***[http://www.geelongadvertiser.com.au/article/2009/05/14/70375\\_opinion.html](http://www.geelongadvertiser.com.au/article/2009/05/14/70375_opinion.html)***