



Hon Melissa Horne MP

Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation
Minister for Local Government
Minister for Ports and Freight
Minister for Roads and Road Safety

1 Spring Street
Melbourne, Victoria 3000 Australia
Telephone: +61 3 8392 8020

Ref: CMIN-2-23-18897

Cr Laura Binks
Mayor
Strathbogie Shire Council
info@strathbogie.vic.gov.au

Dear Cr Binks

I am writing to express my serious concerns with ongoing conduct and governance issues at the Council.

This is despite the Council having had the benefit of an experienced municipal monitor for 12 months at a cost to the ratepayers of Strathbogie.

I asked the Council to provide me with advice by 28 February 2023 about what actions it would take to address the ongoing issues identified by the former municipal monitor, Janet Dore.

You note that while the Council informally agreed to actions in response to the monitor's report, you withdrew your notice of motion for the Council to formally accept these actions because you considered it 'disingenuous' for the Council to be voting on it 'in light of recent matters regarding conduct of councillors'. It is therefore unclear if the Council is implementing the necessary action in response to the issues identified by the monitor.

Further, serious concerns about governance and conduct have been raised with me by councillors, Council staff and members of the Council's Audit and Risk Committee. I am concerned that there are serious risks impacting the functioning of the Council and the health and wellbeing of its members.

I have therefore appointed Mr Peter Stephenson as a municipal monitor to the Council under section 179 of the *Local Government Act 2020* (the Act).

Enclosed is Mr Stephenson's Instrument of Appointment, including the terms and conditions of appointment and terms of reference. The period of the appointment is from 15 May 2023 to 15 August 2023.

The terms of reference make it clear that Mr Stephenson has been appointed to assess the Council's ability to function properly. He has been asked to make recommendations that will bring an end to the ongoing issues at the Council.

As they relate to his terms of reference, I have confidentially provided Mr Stephenson with a copy of the correspondence from councillors, Council staff and members of the Audit and Risk Committee.

It is disappointing that despite having had the benefit of an experienced municipal monitor for 12 months, the Council has been unable to successfully resolve these issues.

I will carefully consider the advice of Mr Stephenson to determine what further action I should take to ensure good governance at the Council. While exercising my powers under the Act are usually a last resort, I will not hesitate to do what is necessary to prevent further dysfunction at the Council and ensure it is acting in the best interests of its community.

Please ensure that all councillors and the Council's Audit and Risk Committee are advised of the monitor's appointment and receive a copy of the monitor's Terms of Reference and this letter.

If you have any questions regarding the appointment, please contact Mike Gooley, Executive Director, Local Government Victoria, Department of Government Services on 0407 841 159 or via email at mike.gooley@ecodev.vic.gov.au.

I expect the Council to provide Mr Stephenson with all support and assistance required to undertake his role as municipal monitor.

Yours sincerely



The Hon. Melissa Horne MP

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Date: 15 May 2023

Enc. Instrument of Appointment

cc. Ms Julie Salomon, Chief Executive Officer