



4th August 2015

Email to:

The Honourable Mike Baird MP, Premier of NSW office@premier.nsw.gov.au

The Honourable Paul Toole MP, Minister for Local Government
office@toole.minister.nsw.gov.au

Kate Washington MP, State Member for Port Stephens
portstephens@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Dear Premier, Minister and Member

Recently a number of local residents applied for Public Access to air concerns about a Development Application being considered by the Port Stephens Council.

Council's web site states, in relation to this matter; "Public Access provides a forum for members of the Public to speak directly to the Mayor and Councillors about local or Council issues. Public Access sessions are restricted to a total of twelve (12) speakers per month with five minutes per speaker and a limit of two speakers for, and two speakers against any issue."

The Mayor has delegated authority to approve or refuse applications to speak at the Council meetings.

Since being elected the Mayor, Mr Bruce MacKenzie has, on many occasions, seen fit to reject applications for public access. This dictatorial process is flawed as it allows one individual to control access to our elected representatives in Council. Our mayor has done this on a regular basis since being elected.

Another example of this took place last week when our Mayor, Bruce MacKenzie, denied requests on Monday 27 July 2015 from two residents without giving any rationale for that decision. In this case, he was quoted in our local paper, the Port Stephens Examiner (Page 4 of the 30 July 2015 edition) as saying that in this case: 'I believe that any Public Access could be a form of harassment'.

This statement clearly shows that he has absolute control over the Public Access process and denies residents from presenting their views to the Mayor and Councillors on local



issues without having to provide any rational, valid or accurate statement to support his decision.

It is our contention that this is done to remove any speakers from public access where they request the opportunity to speak against a motion which he plans to support.

Democracy and the right to free speech have been curtailed in this Local Government Electorate. This is a disgrace and one which our Association strongly condemns. No amount of complaints, either direct to the Mayor or to the Minister for Local Government has made any difference to the manipulation of our Public Access process.

The question we place before you is this:

How can we, the voters in this regional area of NSW regain our democratic right to speak freely and openly to our elected Councillors?

We are aware that other residents have recently brought this issue to your attention, but they are only recent additions to what is known locally as “the Mayor’s blacklist”.

Colin Howard, Vice President of Tomaree Ratepayers Association Inc who prepared this letter to you on behalf of TRRA Inc has been repeatedly denied public access, as have many others in our Association. This is not an isolated case but a regular occurrence managed solely by our Mayor, where our members and others are denied the right to express their views on local issues.

Our association needs your help, as the Mayor has a stranglehold (via his voting bloc in Council) for any rational debate or review of the current public access process within Port Stephens electorate.

How can we fix this problem?

Yours sincerely
Via Email
Margaret Wilkinson
Hon Secretary

Prepared for TRRA Inc by Vice President, Colin Howard in consultation with other Committee members.