TRANSCRIPT

STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING

Subcommittee

Inquiry into rate capping policy

Ballarat — 28 April 2016

Members

Mr David Davis — Chair
Ms Harriet Shing — Deputy Chair

Mr Richard Dalla-Riva
Mr Shaun Leane

Staff

Secretary: Mr Keir Delaney
Research assistants: Ms Annemarie Burt and Ms Kim Martinow

Witness

Mr Garry Fitzgerald (affirmed).
The CHAIR — I am going to ask an additional witness, Garry Fitzgerald, to come forward. We are slightly over time, so this will be a brief comment.

Mr FITZGERALD — Sure. I understand that. Thank you very much for allowing it.

The CHAIR — It is a pleasure.

Mr FITZGERALD — I am a resident of Ballarat. I have been for 18 years. I am also a local justice of the peace. I have attended most of the council meetings over the last 12 to 15 years. I am known by the local newspaper here as ‘council watcher’. Those are my credentials.

I did not make a formal submission before. It was not until I listened that I wanted to fill you on the fact that Local Government Victoria in most years does a survey of different councils by phoning 400-odd people and asking a series of questions. Then they put a survey thing together and that is available. Ballarat has the lowest rating in the state for consulting members of the public — the lowest in the state. We are the third largest city in the state, yet we have the lowest consultation. It also goes on to say that public awareness of the council is that they do not listen to us anyway.

I think that is a damning statement from the local government minister’s office. With my experience over the years of attending meetings, I think consultation is not on. It does not seem to happen. It is something I have been on a platform about for many years and at times I have actually stood for council. That is the one big issue that is wrong with this council. If you do not get that consultation, as the gentleman said before, you do not get ideas, you do not get anything else.

I sat last night at a council meeting until 1 o’clock to decide on the Civic Hall. They just did not listen to reports that were given et cetera and people walked away frustrated. I know that might be out of the realm of what you are doing here.

The CHAIR — Do you have a view on the city hall? I think this has been a controversial issue.

Mr FITZGERALD — Sorry, am I what?

The CHAIR — Do you have a view on the city hall?

Mr FITZGERALD — Yes, I do. I am a member of the Save Civic Hall committee. We have been working for three years to get to the stage that it is at and then they disappoint us by not even accepting their own officers’ reports saying, ‘That’s not valid now’. As I said, I take a big interest in what happens in Ballarat and that is why I chose, after listening here, just to make a few comments to you.

The CHAIR — We are appreciative of your evidence and your input. I put on record the importance of civic engagement in the broad sense of that word. I think there are opportunities for us to make some recommendations around those matters.

Mr FITZGERALD — Thank you very much.

The CHAIR — Before I draw the hearing to a close, I want to acknowledge Louise Staley, the member for Ripon in the Legislative Assembly, a nearby area here. Certainly some of the evidence that we have heard today relates to municipalities in her area.

I again put on record formally my thanks to the City of Ballarat for the provision of these facilities. We are used to moving around country Victoria but not always in such grand surroundings. Thank you to Hansard and the staff too.

Committee adjourned.