SUBMISSION to the Standing Committee in Finance and Public Administration

As Convenor of Planning Backlash, I take the opportunity to send a Submission to the Standing Committee on the subject of Community Consultation.

Groups across Victoria are united in their disappointment in the process called Community Consultation as conducted by the Planning Department of our State Government. From our experience, we find that we spend days and hours writing these serious submissions and they are simply ignored by the Department. We resent especially that they then have the nerve to say smugly ‘we have consulted with the community’. They never add that they did not listen to a word that was said. We call it ticking the boxes.

We feel that the Department already knows what it wants to do and we are just a nuisance that they have to go through the formality of ‘consulting’ us.

I personally have heard it said that every time Boroondara (my city) is mentioned in the department, eyes roll. There is a culture in that department that has nothing to do with democracy. It is said the culture of an organisation reflects the top management, so it puts a cloud over the Minister in this case and as I heard him say to your committee, at the time the committee disbanded, that he is responsible for his department. So we hold him responsible for this culture of disrespect for the community that exists in his department.

This disrespect saw the light of day with the Media leak by Peta Duke and we feel grateful to her mistake that proves to us what we have always suspected. Hence we have zero confidence in any community consultation and it makes us doubtful about even this one that is taking place with you. I have great sympathy with the Macedon Ranges Resident Association and their letter to you.
However, I am prepared to put this submission to you, in the hope of something coming out to improve things.

Through the years I have written and sent in many submissions making a lot of sense. All ignored.

Through the years I have had a number of meetings with a series of Planning Minister. Including I arranged 4 big meetings with Minister Madden, during which time leaders of 60 groups spoke of their issues. As I said publicly to him at the last meeting that we felt insulted, having listened to so much, we felt he had not heard a word of what was said. It was only politely listening and no further action or change. Just a waste of every ones time.

I wrote to Minister Madden asking for a meeting March 2009 and eventually I had a letter from his department dated 17 May 09 signed by Jane Monk saying NO MEETING. Though when I bump into him in Parliament, which I do quite often, he says he wants to meet me.

In addition there are cases where there is no community consultation at all eg Williamstown. There are cases where the Minister overrules his appointed panel, but it seems only if the panel have said less development that the developer wanted eg Tooronga. Not, it seems, if the panel has approved the development eg the Windsor.

We the Community are being sidelined as we see the Planning Department taking more and more planning power away from Councils and away from the people, and deliberately not listening to the people.

It is time this was rectified...

I would appreciate the opportunity of speaking to the committee.

Yours faithfully

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