
Snapshot: Investigation into allegations of collusion with property developers at Kingston City Council

The Case

It was billed as a new vision for Kingston Council's Patterson Lakes area. A welcoming community hub to be used for boating, as well as a residential, commercial, and entertainment precinct providing greater public access for the community to the riverbank. These plans, first established in 1988, later included restaurants, car parking, offices and residences with heights of two to four storeys, plus access to open space.

A witness told the investigation: "The original vision for the Patterson Lakes Marina was to be something like Port Douglas". But what the community got, was very different. There were several residential buildings along the marina, a 40-lot subdivision, and a six-storey residential development where a car park was shown on the 1999 plans.

The investigation found that Council's lack of strategic oversight effectively allowed the area to develop in line with the developer's objectives rather than the original vision. As a result, the community lost trust in how Kingston City Council handled the development and subsequent amendments. Conflict of interest perceptions increased after the planner dined with developers at up market restaurants.

Key Findings

- Council approved extra and higher buildings
- There are 396 residences in the Marina – 146 more than in the original 1994 proposal
- Several examples of planning officer reports with incomplete and incorrect information.
- Insufficient records explaining the Senior Planner's decisions.
- A lack of clear Council protocols on how meetings should be conducted between developers and Council officers
- The Senior Planner had an annual Christmas lunch with the developer from 2014 to 2018
- The Senior Planner failed to properly record meetings with Developer and declare the lunches.
- Evidence obtained didn't show the Senior Planner gave the developer favourable treatment in exchange for bribes or kickbacks.
- The developer was given allowances and concessions on several permit conditions including those relating to height and car-parks
- The Senior Planner made successive errors of judgement that fell short of the expectations of his role.
- Council provided deficient response to concerns raised by local residents about decisions
- No evidence of collusion or corruption between councillors John Ronke and Geoff Gledhill with the Senior Planner or with developers.

By the numbers



1988

the year planning started for Patterson Lakes Marina



1,000

the number of residents that live in the marina



25 years

the senior planner was employed at the Council

Final word

"Development may always be a contentious issue for councils and their communities, but with transparency and good governance it should not be seen to undermine public trust." Deborah Glass, Victorian Ombudsman