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Council declares volunteers a 'risk'

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VOLUNTEERS have described as “digusting” Melville council’s decision to include them as a risk to the city, based on their potential to be politically active.

Members from the Friends of Booragoon and Blue Gum Lakes regard Tuesday’s vote as an attempt to silence their criticism of the way the council manages its environmental responsibilities.

Already, the council has “sacked” one veteran volunteer, Gavin Waugh, who’d criticised the council’s wetlands management (*Melville City Herald*, June 14, 2014). He’s been told he’s no longer allowed to identify himself as a council volunteer.

Alienated

During debate Tuesday on the recommendation to include volunteer groups as a risk, former mayor June Barton said the council’s approach had “alienated” volunteers, without whom “this city would have gone under”.

“We couldn’t afford to do the things volunteers are doing,” the veteran Bicton-Attadale ward councillor told colleagues.

Cr Susanne Taylor-Rees asked where the idea had come from to identify volunteers as a risk category.

Council CEO Shayne Silcox said there were “statewide examples” of the decisions of other councils being influenced by political volunteer groups. However, he failed to provide any examples either on the night or following subsequent questioning.

Cr Duncan Macphail seemed to channel former US defense secretary Donald Rumsfeld with warnings about ignoring “knowns” and “unknowns”, before mentioning the twin towers attacks on 9/11 to drive home a point we weren’t entirely sure of, except that it was supportive of the recommendation.

Only Crs Barton, Taylor-Rees and Nick Pazolli opposed the recommendation.

“This is providing a great deal more damage to the reputation of council than anything that any volunteer group may or had done,” Cr Pazolli noted.

He says the council is sending the wrong signal to volunteers that, “it is worried they may be a risk

to the council's objectives and reputation".

Dr Silcox said he has a "responsibility to identify risks".

"If someone wished to use the wrong mechanisms for political purposes or inappropriate work practices ... there is a potential liability, I make no apologies for that."

by CARMELO AMALFI

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