

News

**'I had Oxley remove my lover' boasts Vellar, in phone call**

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543 words

21 February 2008

Illawarra Mercury

First

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English

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THE ICAC INQUIRY

WOLLONGONG developer Frank Vellar boasted on the phone to a friend that he had lover and council planner, Beth Morgan, removed from any role in the controversial North Beach Bathers' Pavilion project - to hide her connection with him.

The commission heard that he had pushed for her involvement in the project but, as controversy over the project grew, he began trying to sever any links.

He told commissioner Jerrold Cripps QC that he had asked council general manager Rod Oxley to remove her, after she confided to him she was fed up with handling development applications.

"She wanted ... to get away from the controversy of the project.

"However, she said she would not be removed because that would piss off Oxley," Mr Vellar said.

It was at this stage that a tape of a September 2007 telephone conversation, between Mr Vellar and a woman whose name has not been released by the commission, was played in the hearing room.

Vellar: "Who do you think requested her removal from my application on North Beach Bathers' Pavilion? This idiot. I requested her removal from that."

Female: "Why?"

Vellar: "Because then I don't want this situation here where I'm deemed to be favouring - her providing favours to an individual for an outcome. You know?"

The North Beach Bathers' Pavilion is such a hot potato you'll see it coming back on line now in the next couple of weeks."

Female: "Hmmm."

Vellar: "But, um, but I went to see John Gilbert and Rod Oxley and she was removed from the application and Mark Burgess was installed as, as the planner to that, just to mitigate any of this shit here that could potentially come out."

Mr Vellar then told the commission that, at the time of his request to Mr Oxley, he had not disclosed his relationships with Ms Morgan or Mr Gilbert.

When asked why, Mr Vellar said it was a "private matter".

Hemmings: "You didn't think it would affect her duties?"

Vellar: "No."

Hemmings: "But it did."

Vellar: "Yes, I believe so."

Mr Vellar told the commission he had received "two or three" internal emails from Wollongong councillor Val Zanotto about the pavilion project, marked confidential and signed off by Cr Zanotto using the name Franco Magnagatto.

It was not a code Mr Vellar said, but a place in Italy where they both came from.

"It was a nickname, not code," he said.

Mr Vellar agreed that he had held a number of discussions with Cr Zanotto, about doing possible development projects together and rezoning of certain areas in which they owned property.

"I discussed progress of the pavilion and sought his political help," he said.

"What support was there other than a favourable vote?" Mr Hemmings inquired.

"His political support was through the Labor Party," Mr Vellar said.

On May 23, 2005, Cr Zanotto participated in a council debate about the pavilion project (as reported in the Mercury, see left).

Mr Vellar said he was friends with Cr Zanotto and did not know if it was appropriate for Cr Zanotto to participate in council discussions on the project.

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