

Lack of charges a 'disappointing' end

By SHANNON TONKIN

THE former Director of Public Prosecutions has admitted he was disappointed that more of those named in the Wollongong City Council corruption scandal did not face court.

Retired DPP Nicholas Cowdery made the comment during a panel discussion before last night's performance of the play *The Table of Knowledge*, in response to an audience member's statement that many in Wollongong felt let down by the overall lack of the prosecutions stemming from the 2008 inquiry by the Independent Commission Against Corruption.

"I feel pretty disappointed too, I can tell you," he said.

"But needless to say, it was a

matter that was thoroughly examined and dealt with by very senior lawyers, very competent, independent and highly skilled lawyers who understand their jobs very well."

Mr Cowdery said after the cases had been considered it was decided there was "just not the evidence that would get a prosecution over the line".

He also explained to audience members much of the evidence used by ICAC to come to its conclusions was not available for prosecutors to use as it was considered "inadmissible" in a criminal court.

Mr Cowdery told the *Mercury* during an interview after the session that he was in two minds about the outcome of the ICAC prosecutions and the lack of charges.

"Professionally, I don't have any regrets at all. I'm entirely confident the right decisions were made for the right reasons," he said.

"But it was quite clear to me from all the sources that there was a great deal of corruption involving a lot of people at Wollongong council - for significant personal benefit on the part of many of them - and there was a great deal of criminal conduct associated with that.

"I thought it was regrettable that the criminal process could not be applied to those people in addition to whatever other actions might be taken against them.

"But the point is very clear - rules have to be followed in the criminal justice system and

unless you can satisfy those rules then you can't take action."

Mr Cowdery would not comment on individual cases, but did say the DPP was underfunded and understaffed during his 16 years at the helm, which covered the ICAC proceedings and subsequent prosecutions.

"No doubt resources for ICAC and the DPP are a relevant factor and when there are not enough resources to do everything immediately, then priorities have to be assigned," he said.

When asked if he thought more DPP resources might have led to a greater number of prosecutions in the Wollongong ICAC case he replied: "I'll go this far - it's possible that could have made a difference."



Disappointed: Nicholas Cowdery, who was DPP at the time of the ICAC probe into Wollongong council, at the panel discussion session held before last night's performance of the play *The Table of Knowledge*.

Picture: KEN ROBERTSON

Skewered at The Table of Knowledge

REVIEW

By KERRY SKINNER

THERE she was, balanced precariously atop a crudely made Lego building on the notorious table of knowledge, spilling her guts.

Beth Morgan, the one-time Wollongong City Council planner, ashen-faced, shaken and betrayed by her former lover, the wealthy developer Frank Vellar. All of this in front of a full house at the Illawarra Performing Arts Centre.

What had she got herself into - why had she sold her soul and the council's integrity to a shonky developer?

Was it all for a bit of part-time sex, a couple of lousy handbags, a watch and a few bucks? Or was there more?

Morgan (played by Kym Vercoe) was the star turn in *The Table of Knowledge*, a

brilliantly adapted play now showing at the IPAC and depicting one of the darkest periods in Wollongong's history.

I've been around Wollongong, the *Mercury* and journalism for nigh on 40 years now and I've seen and worked on some pretty big yarns in that time. But none of them come within cooee of the table of knowledge as far as intrigue, scandal, corruption and salaciousness go.

When ICAC officers raided Wollongong City Council on December 5, 2006, they would set in train a series of events that would lead to the sacking of the council, the jailing of a councillor and charges laid against several others.

The ICAC trail would also lead to the table of knowledge, a simple plastic table outside a North Wollongong kebab shop.

It was here that some of the city's main players met regularly, among them developers Frank Vellar and Glen Tabak, and a petite, blonde town planner named Beth Morgan.

What transpired in the months and years ahead was a story of sex, deception, lies and even a couple of stand-over men from the criminal underworld.

All of it is meticulously chronicled in *The Table of Knowledge* from newspaper reports and ICAC transcripts and written and performed by the team of Arky Michael (Vellar), Jane Phegan, Yana Taylor, Vercoe and David Williams (former Wollongong City general manager Rod Oxley).

It is an outstanding production, aided by some striking video visuals, that will shock you, make you laugh and cringe. It is a performance we should all see.

And so should the likes of Vellar, Joe Scimone, Frank Gigliotti and others who helped trash Wollongong's good name.

THE Table of Knowledge
Gordon Theatre,
Illawarra Performing Arts Centre
Extended season until September 20. Tickets: 4224 5999 or www.ipac.org.au



COMMUNITY
UPDATE

FIND A BARGAIN AT OUR GIANT CAR BOOT SALE!

When: Sunday 11 September,
from 9am to 3pm

Where: Underwood St Carpark,
Corrimal

Come and enjoy the community spirit and uncover a treasure or two at our Giant Car Boot Sale. This event is part of the Spring into Corrimal festivities, so make a day of it and enjoy perusing the pre-loved goods available for purchase.

This is a great opportunity to find a bargain while helping to reduce the amount of materials ending up in landfill. If you're interested in holding your own garage sale, visit Council's web site and search for 'garage sales and reuse' for a helpful guide to hosting your own garage sale. And remember to 'Reuse, Repair and Recycle' where possible.

HOUSEHOLD WASTE AUDIT

Council will undertake an audit of 366 household waste bins during October. The bins are selected randomly and steps are taken to ensure the privacy of all the sampled households. Results of the audit - a requirement of the State Government - will be used to assist Council to develop programs to support the NSW Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Strategy.

For more information you can write to the Waste Services Manager at the address below.

BRING OUT YOUR UNWANTED CHEMICALS OR POISONS

On Sunday 25 September there will be a free household chemical collection at Berkeley's Fred Finch Park Sporting Complex, Hooka Creek Road, Berkeley, between 9am and 3.30pm.

Only household quantities are accepted (20 kg or 20 litres max) at the chemical cleanout, coordinated by the Office of Environment and Heritage NSW. Make your home a safer place for you and your family and dispose of unwanted chemicals. Transport your chemicals carefully so they don't leak or break. For more information call the Environment Line on 131 555.

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WOLLONGONG CITY COUNCIL