



LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 7 – PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENT

MEDIA RELEASE

REPORT HANDED DOWN IN INQUIRY INTO THE HILLS SHIRE COUNCIL AND PROPERTY DEVELOPERS IN THE REGION

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
2 MARCH 2023**

An Upper House Committee has today handed down its report on allegations of impropriety against agents of the Hills Shire Council and property developers in the region.

Chair of the committee, Ms Sue Higginson MLC, said: 'This inquiry was sparked by a speech made by the Member for Castle Hill, Mr Ray Williams MP, in Parliament on 23 June 2022. Mr Williams made serious allegations regarding the selection of Liberal Party candidates for The Hills Shire Council election in December 2021. Among other matters, Mr Williams claimed that senior members of the Liberal Party were paid significant funds by a property developer, Jean Nassif of Toplace, in order to install councillors who would be supportive of future Toplace developments.'

After four public hearings, which key witnesses refused to attend, the committee's report makes a number of important findings, including that:

- Christian Ellis and Jean-Claude Perrottet sought \$50,000 from a businessman in an operation to unseat the federal member for Mitchell, Alex Hawke and that the failure of certain individuals to engage with the inquiry added weight to the allegations made by Ray Williams MP
- Christian Ellis, Councillor Virginia Ellis and Jean-Claude Perrottet engaged in serious and deliberate attempts to avoid service of a summons issued for their appearance
- Charles Perrottet and Jean Nassif, while out of jurisdiction, engaged in serious and deliberate attempts to avoid giving evidence to the inquiry
- Jeff Egan, an employee of Toplace, Jeremy Greenwood and Dylan Whitelaw, also engaged in deliberate attempts to avoid giving evidence to the inquiry.

The Chair stated: 'You will see from our report the active steps and effort the committee has taken to contact, invite and encourage all of these individuals to attend a hearing and answer important questions. While we acknowledge that some individuals have engaged with the committee via correspondence, it is clear that many have engaged in a serious, deliberate and co-ordinated attempt to obstruct or impede the work of this committee'.

The Chair continued: 'The challenges this committee have experienced are unprecedented. Never has a committee been faced with such serious, deliberate and co-ordinated attempts to evade service of a summons'.

The committee's report also makes a number of significant recommendations, including that:

- The NSW Legislative Council refer an inquiry into the *Parliamentary Evidence Act 1901* to the Privileges Committee, with a view to identifying amendments that would deal with some of the challenges the committee experienced in summoning witnesses
- A new inquiry into the issues be commenced in the 58th Parliament, with Christian Ellis, Charles Perrottet, Jean Nassif and Jean-Claude Perrottet to be called to give evidence
- The influence of property developers and others in political, legal and democratic processes in the Hills Shire region be referred to the Independent Commission Against Corruption.
- The Minister for Local Government undertake an investigation into The Hills Shire Council and consider what steps should be taken, including whether the Council should be put into administration.

Further information about the inquiry, including the terms of reference can be found on the committee's [webpage](#).

-ENDS-

For further information please contact Committee Chair, Ms Sue Higginson MLC, on 9230 2273