Mrs. Julie Waters,

PO Box 101,

MILDURA. VIC. 3502.

28th September, 2020.

Attention: Christine Allen

RAPPS Inc Admin Team Leader

Dear Christine,

Firstly thank you for giving us all the opportunity as candidates of our up and coming Council election respond to your letter with questions of concern and comment asked for as this now has become quite a contentious issue that has lacked community consultation from the very beginning before granting the approval to allow this IAA P/L to commence pilot training of foreign only students. I personally find this very disappointing that all Council Staff and Councillor’s didn’t see fit to present this to the community as a whole for comment before approval was given.

My response to your questions are as follows:

1. ILS installation and the processes followed by Council to approve this expenditure was lacking totally of any community involvement and consultation from the very start. Firstly the Chinese Flying School was approved by MAPL without any knowledge of the townspeople and more the affect it would have on the residents, not just near but also further surrounding areas were never truly explored or justified. How can one approve something when there should have been a full investigation into how it would affect the residents of this community and if so I would like to see it made public because from my view it just appeared in our township when announced by our Mayor, our Federal MP candidate and the hierarchy of the School while election campaigning was taking place. Then we come to the expenditure and I would have thought with the detrimental impact of the COVID-19 on our community financially that this would and should have been deferred until further notice, not rushed through without community consultation again taking place. My question raised is about Mildura Airport funding their contribution of $1milllion , along with our Council contributing the same. Aren’t we one of the same? Hence, I would suggest that actually the Ratepayers are contributing $2Million and Federal Government $2Million. This unwarranted rush doesn’t justify the financial costs or gains (if any).
2. The Conflict of Interest between Mr. Clemence being the Mayor and the CEO of the IAA P/L is totally out of line in terms of public sector regulations. The Mayor’s taking on the position of Group CEO, the conflict of interest arises because he is in a key position both of MRCC and the Flying School. If he was merely a Councillor holding employment in a private sector enterprise it would not be a conflict as his position does not come with any special influence. However, he is both Mayor, the top position in Council as well as CEO, the top position of the Flying School. That is where the conflict of interest arises. The Councillors were within their right to elect him as Mayor in November, 2019, but Mayor Clemence violated public sector regulations by taking on the position of CEO of the Flying School in Febraury, 2020. The Councillors subsequent to this development debated (within the LG Act) and concluded that he could hold both positions with impunity. However, they failed to account for the fact that the position of Mayor itself holds influence over other Councillors in decision making and even if Mayor Clemence withdrew from the room during discussions about the ILS and other related matters, his influence as Mayor would be sufficient to sway the decision in his favour. Hence, the conflict of interest remains.
3. The International Flying School’s are not just an issue here, but an issue in many townships as they have all come in without consultation carried out with the townspeople and what affect it would have on the township and its people in general ie: mental health, property valuation, stress load, lack of privacy with the continual invasion of planes flying over residents property daily. When you have the likes of Dick Smith and Ben Fordham raise concerns on why, when and how I think we as a community need to do the same, we have the right to protect our lifestyle, our property and health, which should all be put first and foremost. From what I have witnessed along with many social flyers who have their small planes either located at the airport or fly in and out regularly, there have been many breaches of safety, of radio procedures, complaints of which that just seem to fall on deaf ears. This present situation is and will be an accident waiting to happen, but all the powers seem to think not. I ask how many Councillors actually fly and what knowledge they do have on the correct procedures on what is required when taking off, while in the air with other planes around and landing procedures because as it stands this is not being addressed and is being dismissed by the people who hold the positions that should be addressing it.
4. The ownership structure of the MAPL is quite interesting to say the least, as it is an asset owned by the MRCC to start with which means we as Ratepayers have the ownership like all of our assets but at no such time do we as Ratepayers get to have a say or consulted in the everyday running of such. The Board from memory was made up of local business people who resided in Mildura and had built their business’s in this township, so you would have assumed that they had the best interests of the community while residing on the Board. Current Board I would raise is not all local so I ask do they have the best interests of the people they are said to represent as many matters transpire there without the community even being aware of until it starts operating. Once this school started operations and the community felt its impact effective immediately, with multiple and ongoing complaints being lodged the response was “this will inject up to $130 million into our economy which would generate further and additional employment opportunities for many local business’s but to date none of this has been substantiated.
5. Noise Pollution – so where do I begin on this subject, what is being inflicted on all residents and has been for quite some time is totally unacceptable. The residents have lost their privacy, their tranquillity, the lifestyle they had taken for granted and are entitled to, which has now been affected, their reasoning to function on a daily basis let alone the mental strain it has had on so many for such a very long time now, and I would ask at what stage was there ever a report done on this before approval was granted because if there had been there would have been a permit issued with time limits set, but again no community consultation or involvement whatsoever, the residents are just thrown totally under the bus all because of their location of residence and you don’t have to live next door to be affected, it is much further widespread than acknowledged.

Due diligence I would say was never carried out.

I would like to add the following – proper monitoring of our airspace remains in our view a top priority. As we know from past experience, having MPs supporting a project does not necessarily mean that all procedures are being dealt with in the best interests of communities at heart (eg. MDBA). With a decentralised government in Australia (States) it is important that we monitor who enters our airspace and who does not. The Flying School is just the tip of the iceberg. In this case, we are assuming that Mildura Airport Pty Ltd is taking the necessary precautions, but in reality is this so?

The Council has a “Mildura Future Ready” plan which is available to the public that outlines future projects to inject growth into this “third most disadvantaged region in Victoria”. I note that the Flying School was not included there.

This is because the International Aviation Alliance (The Flying School )was set up as a private enterprise. It was never a direct Council project, and permissions were granted for usage of airspace etc by the Mildura Airport Pty Ltd (fully owned by MRCC). Hence, MRCC will wash its hands of MAPL, denying liability, whilst it cannot legally say it has nothing to do with MAPL.

Yours truly,

Julie Waters

Candidate for MRCC