Cycle of dysfunction

Councillor absence not making us fonder of bike lanes

PHILIPPA BUTT
Council Reporter

TWO current Darwin Council aldermen have taken more than a year off during their term on Council. The figures, which were calculated by combing through the minutes of council agendas, can be revealed just as an expected vote to axe the controversial bike lanes was delayed because of an absent councillor.

Tuesday’s non-vote also came a fortnight after a vote to abolish the lanes was defeated by Lord Mayor Katrina Fong Lim’s casting vote after the councillors were split.

It is understood a six councillor majority was expected to vote against the lanes at that meeting but one was absent. The leave figures show Aldermen Garry Lambert and Robyn Knox have taken 413 and 367 days respectively as leave of absence days.

Of the aldermen who have been with the council since the 2012 election, Rebecca Want de Rowe has the lowest leave of absence days number at 232. The Lord Mayor Katrina Fong Lim has taken 312 days. Since the first council meeting in April 2012, there have been 1604 days of governance.

There have only been 99 days when no aldermen were away from the municipality. Lord Mayor Katrina Fong Lim said she didn’t see an issue with the amount of leave aldermen had taken, as some of it included time off due to illness.

“There is no one who has given me great concern about their leave time,” she said.

Leave without absence is required if an aldermen is leaving the municipality, or will miss two or more consecutive council meetings.

Technically, aldermen are required to ask for a leave of absence when they travel to Palermo, though this is overlooked due to proximity.

A leave without absence includes all council related travel; however council could not provide a list of all council related travel undertaken in the past four years.

The aldermen earn an annual allowance of about $21,000 each year, with an additional electoral allowance of about $8000 each year. The total maximum claimable allowances aldermen can receive each year are about $48,000.

The Lord Mayor can receive $52,000 each year.

The next meeting will be held on November 15.

Public ‘may have to rely on Maccas’ at Christmas

ASHLEY MANICAROS

TWO Gold Plate winning restaurants will not open on Christmas and New Year’s Eve in response to public holiday changes.

The Pearl and the popular Hanuman restaurant will close while Little Miss Korea, also a Gold Plate winner, is looking at its costs before deciding.

The Darwin Turf Club is reviewing the implications of staff working past 7pm as part of its post-New Year’s Eve race day celebrations.

It is expected to make a decision later this week.

Internationally recognised restaurateur Jimmy Shu, owner of the Hanumans Darwin and Alice Springs, told the NT News the extra cost burden was too prohibitive.

“We’ll be closing,” he said. “The public may have to rely on Maccas.”

“I do not charge a surcharge because I believe it leaves a bad taste in the mouth charge because I believe it leaves a bad taste in the mouth... more sustainable.”

Meanwhile, the Australian Industry Group weighed into the decision to make Christmas and New Year’s Eve half-day public holidays calling for them to be capped at 11.30am.

AIG chief executive Innes Willox said the decision should ring alarm bells in Canberra.

Small business owner Elle Kearns is frustrated with the announcement regarding public holiday wages.

“I do not charge a surcharge to cover costs. "I will have about 24 staff front of house and about 20 back of house and the minimum charge for staff would be $52 per hour.”

He said closing also resulted in less GST revenue collected and less taxation paid.

Pearl owner Ellie Kearns said trade was already down and now she would close on both days, cancelling a New Year’s Eve dinner.

“Everyone is experiencing a downturn. Our trade is 27 per cent down on last year. "... Giving a tiny fraction a leg up with a few extra public holiday hours doesn’t make it more sustainable.”

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Gunner heads to Asia on trade mission

CHIEF Minister Michael Gunner’s first international trip as Northern Territory leader will see him lead one of the jurisdiction’s biggest ever overseas trade delegations.

Mr Gunner will visit Japan, South Korea and China on the 10 day trip. In Japan, he will meet with Inpex officials before travelling to South Korea to visit offshore gas facilities.

The trip will end in China, where the business delegation will meet Mr Gunner for the two-day Ruhao Economic Summit.

Representatives from 68 Territory businesses will attend the summit.

Man charged over Jabiru copper stabbing

POLICE have charged the man accused of stabbing a police officer six times with a screwdriver in Jabiru.

Acting Commander of Crime Travis Wurst said the man was facing six charges including assaulting a police officer and recklessly endangering life.

He was also charged with resisting police, being armed with an offensive weapon, unlicensed driving and low range drink driving. The man is accused of stabbing Jabiru Sergeant Robert de Vos in the neck and shoulder.

He was remanded in custody to appear in the Darwin Local Court on November 8.

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