Gary Higgins, Member for Daly

**Auditor General to Investigate taxpayer funded push polling**

11 June 2014

Member for Daly Gary Higgins has formally asked the Auditor General to investigate inaccurate push-polling “surveys” being circulated by the Opposition using taxpayer funds.

The four misleading “surveys” relate to TIO, Power and Water, Education and the public consultation being conducted on the future of the Old Darwin Hospital site and were raised at today’s Parliamentary Estimates Hearings.

“Of particular concern is the Old Darwin Hospital site “survey” which was distributed widely in the electorate of Port Darwin,” Mr Higgins said.

“It makes a number of claims, including that there had been no community consultation and that the proposal being considered by the Planning Commission is a mix of 70 per cent development and 30 per cent parkland.

“These assertions are completely untrue. A formal consultation process is currently being conducted by the independent NT Planning Commission and the figures used are inaccurate.

The “survey” has drawn the ire of the Independent Planning Commissioner Gary Nairn who has written to the Opposition Leader to complain that the public is being misled.

In the letter, Mr Nairn says that the plan used by the Leader of the Opposition in the survey "has been reproduced differently to the one the Planning Commission actually released."

“This would suggest that the Office of the Leader of the Opposition has deliberately altered information that was already on the public record which is of grave concern and warrants thorough investigation,” Mr Higgins said.

“Given the serious nature of these deliberate factual errors that have now been raised by an independent statutory body, I have formally referred the matter to the Auditor General."

The “surveys” are paid for using public funds and must comply with the Public Information Act which clearly forbids party political references and requires that statements of fact are clearly distinguished from opinion.
“One of the "surveys" on education contains an inaccurate assertion about teacher staffing numbers, as well as referring to political parties and referring people to the Labor Party website,” Mr Higgins said

“The Opposition Leader has been using taxpayer funds to conduct push polling and we look forward to seeing the Auditor General's findings in relation to this matter.”

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