

Dear Sir, Following your front page article “Council cleared of Corruption Allegations” 5<sup>th</sup> March 2008, I am left wondering what all the fuss is about. Although I was initially relieved to read that Council had been cleared of corruption allegations, the article goes on to confirm that the only submission made to ICAC (the only government body that deals with corruption within local government), was submitted by the LPSC (ie themselves.) Doesn’t have quite the same ring to it does it? So-called allegations by Caroon Coal Action Group (CCAG) of council corruption are non-existent. They are totally unfounded, inaccurate, and I am disappointed that such misleading information should be printed in your paper.

Last August, following the secret signing of the BHP Billiton access agreement through a series of confidential council meetings, CCAG did express grave concerns, in this paper and publicly, regarding alleged breaches of the democratic process, lack of council transparency, and breaches of gazetted meeting procedure and council process by LPSC. At this time, it was also made public that BHP Billiton had offered all councillors tickets to the Sydney Symphony Orchestra following their signing of this agreement. CCAG questioned the appropriateness of such a gift. CCAG were not the only ones to do so. In subsequent media, Garry Payne, Director General of the Department of Local Government was quoted saying “such gifts are not appropriate” (SMH 28 August 2007). At no time did CCAG seriously consider that the acceptance of such a token gift by any Councillors could possibly be corrupt, did not allege so, and hence did not make any submissions in that regard.

It is disappointing to note that, although clearing council of their own alleged corruption charge, correspondence received from ICAC on 12 February 2008 did nothing to “exonerate” council from breaches of “improper meeting procedures” as stated by Cr Perkins in your article. In CCAG’s submission to the Minister for Local Government, Mr Paul Lynch, and subsequent tele-conferences with his representatives, CCAG outlined their concerns regarding serious breaches of democratic process as already stated. CCAG forwarded a copy of that submission to the Council, each Councillor, local parliamentary representatives, and now to this paper as well. There can be no doubt that the CCAG did not at any time allege corruption by Council. Any so-called allegations are a figment of the council’s imagination and subsequent indignation at having been called to account. CCAG are still waiting for an official response from the department concerning Council’s alleged breaches of process.

The community should be aware that the CCAG is not and never has been opposed to sustainable development of the Liverpool Plains. The CCAG insists however, that Council follow proper procedures and retain full transparency in all their decisions so that the fragile environment and people of the Liverpool Plains are protected for future generations.

Fiona Simson  
Secretary, CCAG