

NEWSPAPER OF THE YEAR

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Costings spark row at council

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A ROW has erupted between council bureaucrats and the woman campaigning to be their new boss with mayoral candidate Cr Debbie Blumel forcing staff to publicly reveal details of their investigation into the costs of Noosa's de-amalgamation.

Noosa Independence Alliance spokesman and former Noosa mayor Noel Playford contacted Cr Blumel last week after hearing claims council had commissioned a report into the cost of freeing Noosa.

Despite repeated denials from council bureaucrats about the existence of any such report, Cr Blumel said senior council management had engaged a consultancy firm to carry out the work, which she claims is "significantly advanced".

While council officials have long refused to comment on the prospect of de-amalgamation, claiming it was a "State Government issue", a spokeswoman this week told *The Journal* "there is no report at this stage" but added "a brief has been prepared".

In their ordinary meeting on Wednesday councillors unanimously passed a motion put forward by Cr Blumel recommending council authorise CEO John

Knaggs to make the brief available to the public immediately.

The council meeting heard that the report had cost \$70,000 to complete.

Cr Blumel said she was concerned that the terms of reference for the report had been drafted by council officers and managers who could potentially be affected by de-amalgamation.

"There will always be bureaucrats with their own agendas that seem interested in preserving the status quo," she said.

"People will resist change if they are doing well in the bureaucracy.

"Openness and transparency in local government are essential in order for people to have confidence in the processes that we use.

"We didn't get to vote on amalgamations and we won't get to vote on de-amalgamations so we shouldn't have an agenda here, but I think this should have been made public and council should have been informed before this brief was commissioned." Cr Blumel said.

"This was never bought to Council for a decision, we were never consulted about the terms of reference, it was simply commissioned by senior management."

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Beating the odds

ISOBEL COLEMAN
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WHEN Garry Maher opened *The Noosa Journal* on July 10, 2008, it changed his life.

The 68-year-old Noosaville resident was so inspired by the story of Aprile Nuske that despite two heart attacks, bypass surgery and a knee reconstruction, he vowed to take up karate.

And this week Garry was celebrating after gaining his black belt.

"The journey has taken three years, three months and three weeks and it has been wonderful," he said.

"Now I even train with Aprile and she is a lovely, sweet inspiring lady."

Retired company director Garry found himself sitting at home, bored and gaining weight, due to his "colourful medical history".

"I was on life support after my bypass operation and in a bad way," he said.

"I was at home, preoccupied with the TV and the computer and starting to balloon out. I knew I had to do something to get fit and keep my weight down or I would face further heart problems."

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LEG UP: Garry Maher decided to take up karate despite two knee reconstructions.

Picture: BEN VOS

Minister's ambo staff backflip

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EMERGENCY Services Minister Neil Roberts has been forced to perform an embarrassing backflip over claims Noosa's ambulance station is understaffed.

Noosa MP Glen Elmes quizzed the minister about the rostering for the station after three Noosa residents were pronounced dead on arrival after ambulance crews allegedly failed to arrive on the scene within the appropriate response time.

Mr Elmes claimed that the "responses of the Queensland Ambulance Service were delayed due to the current management practice of minimum rostered shifts not being filled."

While he initially claimed that "the North Coast Region does not have a policy of leaving shifts vacant", Mr Roberts' formal response to the question on notice revealed that shifts "may not be filled" which could result in a "single officer response". "Whilst a shift may not be filled it does not mean that there is no response from the station," Mr Roberts said.

"The response may occur in the form of a single officer response or a response from another station."

Parliamentary documents revealed that one Noosaville resident who lived three minutes away from the hospital waited nearly 20 minutes for an ambulance, while a Cooloolan resident died waiting just over 17 minutes for a Maroochydore vehicle.

Mr Roberts said every effort was made to ensure shifts were filled.

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