

# L-Platers left in charge

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## Reluctant councillors to oversee major development

CONFLICTS of interest have led to a default pick of two independent councillors and the mayor to oversee one of the city's most important developments of the decade.

It left one Cairns Regional Councillor feeling like the least qualified "little fat kid" only chosen on the team because the teacher said he had to be.

Cairns Regional Council has received a suite of development applications from

Ports North relating to the upcoming Trinity Inlet dredging project beginning in May.

All seven Unity Team councillors and independent Linda Cooper declared interests under rules introduced in May following the Belcarra investigation into local government electoral donations.

Council CEO John Andrejic also declared an interest, meaning the decisions – unlike 24 others since May – could not be delegated to him.

Local Government Minister Stirling Hinchliffe rejected an exemption application from the Council, meaning a standing committee consisting of Crs Brett Olds, Cathy Zeiger and Mayor Bob Manning will assess the applications.

"I'm honestly not the best person for the job," Cr Olds said.

"Brett Olds and Cathy Zeiger should not be on that committee.

"It's like little Olds and

Zeiger have their hand up and the teacher says pick them first or it's not fair.

"I promise we will do our best and learn, and we will read more documents than you can poke a stick at.

"But we are not the most qualified people."

Cr Olds believed Crs Manning, Brett Moller and Max O'Halloran had the technical and background know-how to better serve on the committee.

The mayor, a former CEO

of the Cairns Port Authority, can ride shotgun on the three-person panel only because he will not hold a majority vote.

The bureaucratic burden of Belcarra laws is a sore point with elected representatives.

Cr Moller, a lawyer and the Council's go-to guy on matters of governance, said there was no option but to toe the line.

"If your moral compass is in the right direction, you have nothing to fear," he said.

"But in terms of making

declarations, you have to be very careful. The issues have been raised before.

"How far back do we have to go, what is the monetary value, where is the influence?"

"From a councillor perspective, it's something we are very mindful about and the repercussions are very severe."

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