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SHADOW MINISTER FOR IMMIGRATION AND BORDER  
PROTECTION**

**MEMBER FOR CORIO**

**OPINION PIECE**

**GEELONG'S CHRISTMAS TREE**

They say Christmas is the time for giving and thinking of others, so what then of our Council's decision to take nearly \$1 million in ratepayer funds and plough them into a 25-metre tree set to float in the Bay.

What kind of Christmas spirit does this project embody, given it will be propped up by money diverted from programs that make a genuine difference to Geelong people like Meals on Wheels.

Supporters of this project will be quick to cast as a Grinch anyone who doesn't trumpet it as a bold and ambitious venture. That is a sad reflection of the lack of scrutiny that has surrounded this project, including a worrying recent report in this paper that the Melbourne company that will be paid for the tree was casually announced last year – well before any final decision was made.

The very least Council could do on behalf of ratepayers is ensure the people of Geelong get absolute value for money now this costly tree has been given the green light. The right step would be for Council to be upfront with the community about how who gets what, has been chosen and why.

The bottom line is we don't need to be spending close to \$1 million on this indulgent, expensive and unnecessary project. With the closure of Alcoa only weeks away, Ford also on the way out and Tony Abbott's Federal Budget leaving a toxic waft blowing through Geelong, now just is not the time to be using other people's money to indulge in pipe dreams.

It is well known that our Mayor Darryn Lyons is an enthusiastic fan of Tony Abbott, and through Darryn's floating tree and the Prime Minister's parental leave scheme we see a clear snapshot of what current Liberal leadership offers Geelong from both a local and federal level.

Both Abbott's plan to give millionaires \$50,000 cheques to have babies and Lyons million-dollar floating pine and fir structure are vanity projects.

Both these Liberal leaders are simply out of touch with what Geelong needs now. Given all the jobs that are being shed in our community how can we justify throwing money at millionaires to have babies and a lap pool sized tree in the Bay?

We can't and we shouldn't. That million dollars could be invested in projects locally, including going back into Meals on Wheels and restoring funding to our library facilities, and if the Mayor is genuine about stimulating the economy, how about picking up the phone to Canberra and voicing his concern about how this Federal Budget has cut Geelong loose – from the cuts at Deakin to the fact we still have not had one single dollar from the Federal Government dedicated to help Alcoa workers find another job.

What Geelong doesn't need right now is to spend a million dollars only to end up on a cringe worthy list of 'Australia's big things', nestled somewhere between Ballina's Big Prawn, the Big Golden Gumboot in Tully, The Big Sausage King in Toowoomba or the World's Tallest Bin in Kalgoorlie.

Actually maybe we could do with Kalgoorlie's oversized bin. It would be the perfect resting place for this expensive, unnecessary and trivial pet project.

Let's keep the Christmas lights we already have, and let's focus on using our money and energy to make sure this December, our Christmas spirit isn't floating out on the Bay, instead it's all through our community.

**TUESDAY, 15 July 2014**