

# COUNCIL WATCH FLEURIEU INC.

Accountability with Integrity — The time for change is Now !

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## Victor Harbor in the Spotlight as Council Accountability Crackdown Looms.



Local government across South Australia is facing imminent scrutiny and potential legislative overhaul, following a significant deputation delivered to the **City of Victor Harbor Council** on 27 April 2026 by Carlos Quaremba.

Now serving in the Legislative Council, Mr Quaremba used his address to signal that **reform of local government is firmly on the parliamentary agenda**, with proposals that could fundamentally alter accountability, financial oversight, and administrative structures.

At the centre of the proposed reforms is a move to **remove legal protections currently shielding councillors from civil liability**, a change that would expose elected members to direct accountability for their decisions.

### ► WATCH THE FULL DEPUTATION (SouthCoast Television)

*View the complete address by Carlos Quaremba to the City of Victor Harbor Council:*

**<https://youtu.be/tiAhTfaiAWA>**

### KEY DEVELOPMENTS

Mr Quaremba confirmed he will pursue the **repeal of Section 39 of the Local Government Act 1999 (SA)**, arguing the current provision enables a culture where responsibility is easily avoided.

Under the existing framework:

1. councillors can rely on administrative advice without consequence
2. accountability is often deflected between elected members and staff

3. poor decisions carry limited personal risk

The proposed change would:

- require councillors to exercise demonstrable due diligence
- eliminate “rubber stamping” practices
- introduce real consequences for negligent decision-making

This represents one of the most significant accountability reforms proposed in the sector in decades.

### **VICTOR HARBOR COUNCIL NAMED AS A TEST CASE**

In his address, Mr Quaremba described the City of Victor Harbor as being at a “**critical crossroads**”, capable of becoming either:

- a **model council demonstrating transparency and fiscal discipline**, or
- a **case study used to justify statewide reform**

The message was clear:

**what happens in Victor Harbor will not remain local — it will influence policy at the state level.**

### **PRECINCT PROJECT UNDER IMPLICIT SCRUTINY**

The deputation also highlighted concerns regarding large-scale council spending, particularly in the current economic climate.

Mr Quaremba warned against:

- escalating borrowing
- reliance on **unsecured grant funding**
- increasing financial pressure on ratepayers

While not naming individual projects in isolation, the remarks align closely with ongoing concerns surrounding the **Victor Harbor Sporting Precinct**, including:

- rising capital costs
- long-term operational risks
- uncertainty regarding funding assumptions

His position was direct:

Councils should prioritise essential services and avoid high-risk, non-essential expenditure during periods of economic pressure.

### **PUBLIC–PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS TO FACE INQUIRY**

A further key development is the intention to initiate a **parliamentary inquiry into public–private partnerships (PPPs)** across local government.

Mr Quaremba characterised such arrangements as:

“privatisation of profits and socialisation of losses”

The proposed inquiry will examine:

- long-term financial impacts on councils
- sustainability of operational models
- the extent to which risk is transferred to ratepayers

This has direct implications for councils engaging in major infrastructure and partnership projects.

### **STRUCTURAL REFORM — TARGETING ADMINISTRATIVE BLOAT**

Importantly, the reform agenda does not include forced council amalgamations.

Instead, Mr Quaremba proposed:

- maintaining local elected representation
- **amalgamating council administrative functions and bureaucracy**

The objective:

- reduce duplication
- cut excessive costs
- improve operational efficiency

This approach is likely to gain broader acceptance, as it preserves local democratic representation while addressing structural inefficiencies.

## **GOVERNANCE CULTURE UNDER QUESTION**

Beyond legislative reform, the deputation exposed ongoing concerns regarding governance culture within councils.

Mr Quaremba identified:

- over-reliance on administrative advice
- limited scrutiny of major decisions
- a pattern of shared or avoided responsibility

The result, he argued, is a system where:

**no single party is ultimately accountable for poor outcomes**

## **PROTOCOL BREACH AT THE MEETING**

The meeting itself revealed a lapse in formal protocol.

**Mayor Moira Jenkins** failed to introduce Mr Quaremba by his correct title, “**The Honourable Carlos Quaremba MLC.**”

Mr Quaremba was required to correct the record during proceedings.

While seemingly minor, such an oversight reflects:

- a lack of procedural precision
- diminished adherence to formal governance standards

In a formal civic setting, correct recognition of office is a basic expectation.

## **WHAT HAPPENS NEXT**

The implications of the deputation are immediate:

- **State-level reform proposals are advancing**
- **Council decision-making processes will face increased scrutiny**
- **Major projects may be subject to retrospective examination**
- **Accountability standards are likely to tighten**

For Victor Harbor, the message is unequivocal:

The current operating model is under review — and change is approaching.

## **COUNCIL WATCH POSITION**

Council Watch Fleurieu Inc. has consistently raised concerns regarding:

- financial transparency
- governance accountability
- prudential oversight
- community engagement

The developments of 27 April 2026 confirm that these concerns are now being echoed at the parliamentary level.

**BOTTOM LINE**

Victor Harbor now stands at a defining moment.

It can:

- lead reform and restore confidence

**or**

- continue current practices and risk becoming the example used to justify external intervention.

**The time for change is now.**

**Terry Andrews**

Chair – Council Watch Fleurieu Inc.

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“Accountability with Integrity”

*This correspondence is provided in good faith as part of Council Watch’s public interest oversight activities.*