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A Clayton's award

December 15, 2017 · by Your Herald · in Think ·

***BOB PRIDE** is a former journalist with the ABC's flagship current affairs program *Four Corners* and a Melville resident. For this week's **THINKING ALLOWED** he takes an investigative reporter's gander at the recent national award that Melville council's been crowing about and reckons it's not quite as special as they'd have you believe.*

City of Melville ratepayers should not be fooled by their Council leadership's misleading boast to have won a fabulous national award for professionalism and business excellence, which it would have us believe transcends growing perceptions in the community that the council is actually on the nose.

No-one really wants to rain on another's parade – and as a ratepayer I wish it was all true. But it is not, and the council's nauseating and continuing self-congratulation about this so-called award and its exaggerated account of its significance calls for a microscope to be taken to the facts.

Some simple Googling is enough to tell you that the council did not 'win' anything at all.



- Melville mayor Russell Aubrey.

No competition

There was no competition or contest, or any other contenders to be outscored for this glowing first prize heralded in the *Melville Times* by Mayor Russell Aubrey who bragged: "The city has been recognised as the nation's leading organisation for business excellence in 2017." What rubbish.

A reading of the website for the awards, conducted by a private body called the Australian Organisational Excellence Foundation set up in 2013, indicates that parties have only to apply and pay a fee and follow a series of steps that end with receipt of the award of their interest.

There appears to be no government oversight or sponsorship of these awards. What they are is a carryover by private interests of those conducted in the 1990s by the Australian Quality Council, a quango the Federal government flogged off in 2002 to become SAI Global – a large business consultancy now wholly owned by Baring Private Equity Asia in Singapore.

An application for an AOEF award requires the purchase from SAI Global of a copyrighted product called the Australian Business Excellence Framework and an evaluation against it by "technical specialists in the field of excellence". SAI Global specialises in compliance and risk management consultancy.

That the City of Melville may have followed this path was confirmed by Melville acting CEO Christine Young who said in the same *Melville Times* article "the win was the result of a rigorous external assessment undertaken over six months by an international evaluation team."

Wow, how much did that cost and who paid for it? By the way, it was not a one-off. The latest award is the fifth secured by the council under this program since 2001.

While some private business gurus may have judged the council a winner, their finding is not consistent with the views of real stakeholders who the council is there to serve.

In the October local government elections, a swag of councillors known for backing the mayor and the CEO were voted out.

And only last week, the annual meeting of ratepayers passed a vote of no confidence in the CEO.

Add to this the local government minister's finding that the mountain of complaints about Melville Council warrants a departmental enquiry.

These, surely, are assessments that actually matter – certainly over and above a certificate on the wall for meeting a consultant's benchmark.

Please Mr Mayor, spare us the spin. Ratepayers will be pleased the council is an efficient operation but should expect nothing less.

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