

30 OPINION

FRIDAY SEPTEMBER 6 2019 ADVERTISER.COM.AU



The spotlight should shine on the high salaries paid to the state's hundreds of council executives - Colin James

RATEPAYERS are entitled to be perturbed about councils turning out to be the most generous employers in the state. According to a new study, local government workers have received higher pay rises than other South Australians for the past decade.

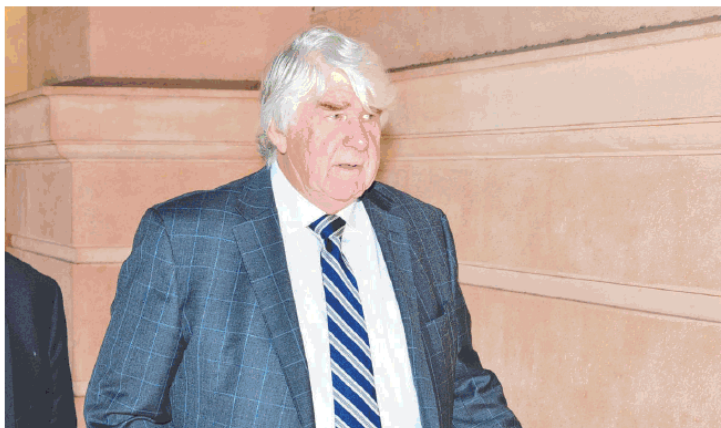
While council employees received an average pay rise of 37 per cent a year, wages across other sectors – both private and public – went up by 2.8 per cent. At the same time, rates charged by the state's 68 councils on residential properties, businesses and farms increased each year, along with their borrowings.

Collectively, the various metropolitan, regional and rural councils are responsible for total annual spending of about \$2.2 billion while managing \$24 billion of assets. Wages account for one third of their annual budgets.

How they can cut costs – and keep rates down – by becoming more efficient is being examined by the Productivity Commission as part of the Marshall Government's plans to reform local government.

In its first draft report – released this week for public consultation – the commission has revealed councils are annually spending about \$790 million on almost 8900 full-time "indoor" and "outdoor" employees. Wages for most of these staff – ranging from librarians to gardeners – are set by enterprise-bargaining agreements negotiated between the councils and unions, with most earning between \$65,000 and \$90,000.

These are the people who physically deliver council services paid for by your rates, such as the maintenance of parks, cleaning public toilets,



sweeping streets and catching stray dogs. Ratepayers should not be too concerned about how much they are paid. They seem to be largely decent people working hard to serve their communities.

If there is one area on which the spotlight should shine, it is the high salaries paid to the hundreds of highly mobile chief executives and senior managers employed by councils, both urban and regional.

Unlike their white-collar or blue-collar staff, they are on contracts, some of which – such as the \$372,978 paid to former Playford Council chief executive Mal Hemmerling – have justifiably attracted publicity for their generosity.

In recent weeks, it has emerged that it is a longstanding practice by councils to offer senior executives extra annual leave, training and development "allowances", luxury motor cars, credit cards and rent assistance in lieu of pay

rises, which must be disclosed on registers available for public inspection.

In the case of one chief executive recently granted an extra two weeks' annual leave, a council meeting heard he already was owed 10 weeks while some of his staff had 20 to 25 weeks' leave in the bank.

His council, like many others, had introduced a policy where untaken leave could be cashed in, meaning he effectively could receive a \$10,000 pay rise without the monetary value going on the books.

Then there was the chief executive of a small regional council south of Adelaide who got a 4 per cent pay rise – or \$9000 – two years ago, with another 2 per cent pay rise recommended this year by a committee comprising his mayor and two councillors. They also wanted to give him an extra two weeks' annual leave.

Instead of taking the extra leave, he got council approval

to look for a second-hand top-of-the-range Tesla S electric sports car valued between \$80,000 and \$100,000.

Like Mr Hemmerling, who drove a \$125,000 Toyota Land-Cruiser to Elizabeth from his home at Stirling, the chief executive planned to drive the car from his home in Adelaide to the council's offices at Yankalilla. As it turned out, he ended up with a sporty Kia Stinger after wisely deciding getting a car capable of going from 0 to 100km/h in 2.6 seconds "wasn't a good look".

While he can be praised for exercising common sense, the situation should never have arisen. It says much about the sense of entitlement that pervades the upper echelons of too many councils. To this observer, local government is infected by chief executives and mayors who act like they are in control of personal fiefdoms.

Their power needs to be diluted. Substantially.

HIGH RATES: Former Playford Council chief executive Mal Hemmerling was on more than \$370,000 a year.

Hold the phone, you may need new job



GARY MARTIN

REMEMBER the time you arrived at your destination, only to realise you left your mobile phone on the bedside table?

You feel your heart starting to pound like a jackhammer as you break into a sweat – in the middle of winter.

Nomophobia describes the no-mobile-phone phobia experienced when you are disconnected from your smartphone either physically or because you are unable to use it because of your situation, lack of coverage or a flat battery. Symptoms include anxiety, respiratory alterations, trembling, perspiration, agitation, disorientation and fast or irregular heart rhythms.

Not surprisingly, given our society's reliance on mobile phones, nomophobia is recognised as possibly the largest non-drug addiction of the century. Fallout for sufferers can range from low-level anxiety to extreme panic attacks.

The primary characteristics of nomophobia are impulsive smartphone use and compulsive checking to see if messages or calls have been received.

Sufferers have a burning need to carry their phone with them at all times, feel incomplete or inadequate without it, sleep with a phone by their side and check the device during the night. Frequently, they continue to use a smartphone while eating meals and even during lovemaking sessions.

While businesses once embraced smartphone technology as a key driver in building workplace efficiency, that same technology is now being

linked with tanking productivity. Some experts suggest those with even a mild smartphone addiction spend about a third of workdays engaged with their smartphone on non-work related matters.

Even simple but regular smartphone notifications,

They continue to use smartphone while eating meals and even during lovemaking

alerts and pings can derail a worker's train of thought. Constantly switching between tasks and a smartphone only serves to limit opportunities we have to engage.

Others say the smartphone has made lateness the norm in many workplaces, with workers habitually running late, knowing they can text ahead to warn of late arrival.

Employers will respond to the rising tide of nomophobia

in our workplaces by putting in place strategies to manage workers and their perceived need to remain connected throughout the day. These will likely involve putting in place policy frameworks and guidelines, which attempt to assist those with addictions but also

restrict continuing employment opportunities for those who continue to overindulge.

Simply becoming aware of the seductive attributes of our electronic self-affirmation machines and taking concrete actions to combat them could help prevent many nomophobia sufferers from needing to send a tweet with the tagline #lookingforwork.

PROFESSOR GARY MARTIN IS A NATIONAL WORKPLACE EXPERT

THE LAST WORD

WITH MARTY SMITH



MOUTHING OFF

- (1) Question in need of an answer: Why didn't Jack just walk around the candlestick?
- (2) Laughter is the best medicine: A lawyer was on vacation in a small farming town. While walking through the streets on a quiet Sunday morning, he came upon a large crowd gathered by the side of the road. Going by instinct, the lawyer figured there was some sort of car accident. He was eager to get to the injured parties but couldn't get near the car. Being a clever kind of guy, he started shouting loudly. "Let me through! Let me through! I am the son of the victim." The crowd made way for him. Lying in front of the car was a donkey.
- (3) Headline from the online satirical Australian newspaper *The Betoota Advocate*: "New blender at grandparents' house points towards discovery of Aldi's middle Aisle of Dreams." (4) Wordplay: Those who jump off a bridge in Paris are in Seine.
- (5) In the Twittersphere: "My greatest problem with American food is its insistence that melted marshmallows are an ingredient." - Australian television chef and author Adam Liaw.

INSIGHT

"Missing husband and dog. Reward for dog." - bumper sticker.

QUOTE, UNQUOTE

"With a library you are free, not confined by temporary political climates. It is the most democratic of institutions because no one – but no one at all – can tell you what to read and when and how." - British author Doris Lessing.

KEEPING COUNCIL

8400 – the hours in 50 weeks.

JUST A THOUGHT

The less a politician knows, the longer they take to tell it.

REMEMBER WHEN

- Today is September 6, Fight Procrastination Day and the 249th day of the year. There are 116 days until the end of the year. On this day:
 - 1666: The Great Fire of London was extinguished.
 - 1950: Midget bike racing was a feature of the Nailsworth and Norwood Technical School Old Scholars' Association annual ball at the Palais Royal, North Tce, city.
 - 1952: From Adelaide's afternoon newspaper *The News*: "Although (Australian athlete) Marjorie Jackson will race in Japan next month, she will still run in Adelaide on Saturday, November 8, at a carnival to assist *The News* Pound for Pensioners Appeal."
 - 1962: Channel 9 comperes Lionel Williams, Kevin Crease, Joan Disher and Leona Gay presented a live 90-minute program from the Royal Adelaide Show.
 - 1968: Radio station 5AD listed *MacArthur Park*, by Irish actor Richard Harris, as Adelaide's No. 1 hit single.
 - 1976: Russell Ebert (Port Adelaide) won the 1976 Magarey Medal.
 - 1989: A computer error resulted in 41,000 Parisians receiving letters charging them with organised prostitution and murder instead of traffic fines.
 - 1996: From *The Advertiser*: "South Australian wine group BRL Hardy is on target for its fourth consecutive record annual profit after strong bottled wine sales pushed the group's interim result to \$8.7 million, well ahead of last year."
 - 1997: The funeral service of Diana, Princess of Wales, was held in Westminster Abbey, London.
 - 2001: Comedian and television comperer Rove MacManus failed to find a Bertie Beetle show bag at the Royal Adelaide Show.
 - 2005: Writing in *The Advertiser*, columnist Rex Jory suggested Jetty Rd, Glenelg, should be converted into a weekend pedestrian mall.

TODAY'S THOUGHT

Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God.
1 Peter 2:16

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