

Skate bowl clash heats up

Cathy Withiel

FEDERAL MP Chris Pearce is vowing to lobby Knox Council to stand up for his constituents in their fight to retain the Lewis Park skate bowl.

The Aston MP said Mayor Jim Penna told him to butt out of council issues and that he (Cr Penna) would not provide him with the information he sought about the skate bowl.

But Cr Penna told the *Knox Leader* the Liberal MP's version of the conversation was incorrect.

Cr Penna said he sent letters 10 days ago to both federal and state MPs outlining council's move to revisit, at its February 26 meeting, an earlier decision to decommission the skate bowl.

This followed a 573-signature petition by the community to save the skate bowl, tabled at a recent council meeting.

Mr Pearce said he sent a letter to the mayor asking the council to justify its decision to decommission the popular site.

Mr Pearce said Cr Penna then telephoned him with a conversation that left him "shocked".

"He (Cr Penna) told me it was not my role to represent my constituents on this issue and would not provide any meaningful information to my request."

Mr Pearce said he would always act on his constituents' concerns and would not be "intimidated" by the mayor.

The MP told the *Leader* that the



Skaters and BMX riders staged a rally recently to save the skate bowl at Lewis Park in Wantirna South.

council lobbied both state and federal MPs on a wide number of issues on behalf of their ratepayers, and that he expected the same courtesy.

Cr Penna said Mr Pearce's version of their telephone conversation was incorrect.

He said he told Mr Pearce that the

council was not accountable to a Federal member for local government responsibilities.

Cr Penna said that the council, at the request of ratepayers, had lobbied MPs over funding issues.

Cr Penna said he told Mr Pearce that he would send a letter to the MPs to fully update them on the

issue after the February 26 council meeting.

The cost of decommissioning the Lewis Park facility is expected to cost between \$20,000 to \$25,000. Its annual maintenance cost is \$15,000-\$20,000. It will need immediate improvements of between \$20,000 and \$25,000 if retained.

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