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13 February 2011

“ APRIL FOOLS DAY WOODCHIP PRANK “NO JOKE” - Response by Greens Candidate for Bega, Harriett Swift to Gary Nairn

On April Fools Day 2005 Gary Nairn was the subject of a satirical prank, designed to draw attention to multi million dollar cash grants from the taxpayer to the woodchipping industry.

His political nose was put so out of joint by this; he has spent years and wasted tens of thousands of taxpayer dollars seeking his revenge on the joker.

“While Mr Nairn deserves full marks for persistence, apparently he still doesn’t get the joke,” said Harriett Swift.

April Fools Day 2005 fell just days after Mr Nairn had announced a package of grants to loggers, including one for a “mechanical logging simulator.” Most people reading the mock media release that has so incensed him would have seen it was a joke immediately, as the following extract shows:

“I am so excited by the positive response to my announcement last week ... for a mechanical harvester simulator, I have realised that the electorate would be much better off if the whole industry were simulated.”

“The Japanese paper industry will be happier as it will be able to simulate a better quality woodchip at a more reasonable price.

“The local councils will be happier with fewer potholes in roads caused by simulated trucks.”

“The forest animals will be happier, only having to simulate death, starvation and homelessness.”

For full text of this and the other jokes, see: <http://www.chipstop.savetheforests.org.au/nairn%20vision.pdf>

Mr Nairn thought it was definitely not funny and called in the Australian Federal Police for the start of what was to become a \$66,000 waste of police time.

“He used his position to insist that the AFP conduct a witch hunt to discover the identity and punish the perpetrator of the joke. Initially a magistrate refused to provide a search warrant because he did not believe any offence had been committed. The AFP eventually obtained a search warrant and while they found plenty of evidence, they could still not find a crime.

An AFP letter to Mr Nairn on 3 May 2005, said:

“I draw your attention to the date of the correspondence, being 1 April 2005 and the potential that the correspondence related to April Fools Day.

..... the decision was made that this matter not be accepted for investigation due to AFP being committed to matters of higher priority”

“When the Director of Public Prosecutions refused to prosecute me, that should have been the end of that,” Ms Swift said.

Not to be daunted, Mr Nairn then had the whole thing referred to the Parliamentary Privileges Committee, where he had more luck.

media release

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"If there is one thing that unites politicians of both major parties, it is indignation about having jokes made that wound their pride," Ms Swift said.

"The Privileges Committee is above and beyond the law. Sitting as judge and jury, it did indeed find me guilty of a breach of privilege, as Mr Nairn claims, although he has embellished, twisted and misquoted to make this look far graver than it really was."

"The Privileges Committee can imprison a person, fine them or ban them from Parliament House, but my penalty was 'a reprimand'," she said.

"Far from being a secret, this heavy handed aftermath for a satirical April Fools Day joke was widely publicized at the time. Much of this was initiated by me and local media covered it extensively. Some people even thought it was funny, although obviously not Gary Nairn."

For anyone who was not aware of it at the time, all of the details and most of the documents have been available ever since on the internet for the world to see at:

http://www.chipstop.savetheforests.org.au/april_fools_day.htm

"I believe that jokes are a good way to encourage people to view old problems and issues in a new light. Woodchipping, tragically has been around for so many years that it is an ideal subject to be approached in this way," she said.

Ms Swift has been strongly supported by Upper House Greens MP, David Shoebridge.

"Harriett Swift is an outstanding candidate for Bega. She is a passionate campaigner and, unlike Mr Nairn, has a solid sense of humour that people here in the South Coast really appreciate.

"It is about time that Mr Nairn worked out what the AFP realised 6 years ago as soon as he called on them to prosecute Ms Swift, that it was an April Fools Day joke," he said.

"What kind of representatives do we want to see elected to our Parliaments? Someone like Ms Swift who understands the larrikin Australian sense of humour and can knock out an April Fools day joke that pokes fun at her political "betters" or yet another faceless, dour and well-screened representative from the Coalition like Mr Nairn?" Mr Shoebridge asked.

Ms Swift said that the least funny aspect to this whole affair is that taxpayers are still subsidising the destruction of the forests and both major parties are unapologetic and seem determined to continue.

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