

# EVA<sub>sio</sub>NS in pre-election promises

With a NSW election due by March, some artless political evasion is coming from local State MP Lee Evans (Liberal, Heathcote) on grass-roots concerns in his electorate.

*By Don Pagé*

After decades of traffic gridlock on the high-level Woronora Bridge, he has made more promises but only for paperwork, not roadwork.

More studies were announced in December to please key Menai voters, but only in vague terms: *“to scope and investigate the viability of upgrades... towards finding a solution for this gridlock along the Woronora Bridge”*.

A warning for potential complainants: On past performance as a backbencher, MP Evans’s response to difficult questions is to delay for months, then to dodge the issues, and finally to ignore completely anyone still unhappy with his evasions.

His latest pre-election promises for Menai voters are to “free the gridlock” at Woronora’s high-level bridge, and to spend more money reviewing old problems rather than actually fixing them – as at the deadly bridge at Heathcote Road, near Engadine.



Both issues were highlighted 25 years ago by locals, who wanted an effective solution for traffic problems rather than band-aid projects with photographic opportunities.

In the 1990s, the high-level bridge was predicted by locals to become “a peak-hour carpark” without proper linking roads -- a prophesy which came true within a few short years, and still is.

Likewise, Heathcote Bridge over the Woronora River has had millions spent on past studies, with little to show but promises and paintwork -- while the crashes keep happening.

To his credit, MP Evans tried to get duplication of the infamously fatal Heathcote Rd Bridge, as did local activists 25 years ago. He was refused by the Berejiklian Government with promises of a few more centimetres of road width -- but no second bridge.

Motorists are still dying in high-speed crashes there with another \$130million promised -- starting with more studies, of course.

*Among the local grants achieved by MP Lee Evans are:*

- \$11,000 for Woronora RSL (drainage),
- \$25million to rebuild Heathcote Railway Station, a minor stop,
- \$130million to review Heathcote Road (in a State-wide program),
- \$?? ... *“to scope and investigate the viability of upgrades... towards finding a solution for this gridlock along the Woronora Bridge”*(between Menai and Sutherland).

## **MANY WORDS, LITTLE ACTION**

A typical case was a local objecting to MP Evans over advertising projected on the iconic Sydney Opera House for a horse race. Many saw it as cheapening the popular landmark for big money, an advert dominating the night skyline, with no way to change channel or turn the page for millions of unwilling viewers. In his reply:

- 1- MP Evans took 9 weeks to respond – until after the public reaction subsided.
- 2- Then he had a bet each way: first supporting his own Government on the issue, while also supporting his voter, “However, I do agree with you on this occasion.”
- 3- Looking on the bright side, he said that it could have been worse: “The display was greatly toned down from what was originally proposed.”

- 4- He justified advertising projected onto the Opera House, saying that it had been used in past promotions.
- 5- He shrugged off the objector: “the community has a range of opinions on this Issue”.
- 6- To round it off, he chanted the jobs-and-growth mantra, “as we seek to build a stronger, better future... I believe the Government has acted in what they believe is the best interest of NSW as supporting NSW as a major events capital.”

The reply filled an A4 page nicely, with plenty of white space around his paragraphs. It was a bit more polished than his first speech in NSW Parliament in 2011, which managed to string together three mossy platitudes in a single paragraph:

*“Every journey starts with a single step. I now start the journey to be part of the solution, not part of the problem. I know my dad would have been proud. “*

### **BLIND EYE TURNED**

It has been a common complaint from local community groups who felt ignored by MP Evans. In the past, party faithful reported that his blind eye to unwelcome feedback is a deliberate tactic. MP Lee Evans takes credit for megabuck projects which the NSW Government promotes. He has also embraced expensive policies decided at higher levels, such as the controversial “poles-and-wires” sell-off.

But at local level his promises have often fallen short of success. They are often made as vows ‘to fight for’ something, rather than to deliver a clear result.

Helensburgh police station remains a part-time operation despite MP Evans’ promise in 2011: “Over (this) Parliament, I will fight for a fully manned police station for Helensburgh.” To be fair, he did not promise to deliver, only “fight for” it.

He has backed other causes where little opposition was likely.

Lee Evans MP won his Heathcote seat with a 22 percent swing in the 2011 landslide against a Labor Government plagued by scandal. In 2015, he lost 11percent of his margin as some ALP voters returned to the fold. Redistribution has made the seat more Liberal-leaning in recent years.

The national mood has drifted away from the right lately, in by-elections and the Victorian State election.

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