

# Vote theft concern

## Council elections open to rorting, Upper House MP warns

### LOCAL GOVERNMENT

#### Craig Cook

POSTAL voting in local government elections is open to easy manipulation, with too few checks and balances, a State MP has warned.

Upper House MP John Darley, a former state valuer-general, has raised the concerns in the lead-up to this month's council elections.

The leader of Advance SA, who has been in Parliament for 11 years, said he was the victim of a voting rort at the 2010 council elections.

Believing he had not received his ballot paper in the post, he rang the Electoral

Commission. "They told me I'd already voted," Mr Darley said.

"I said that was news to me."

Mr Darley asked to see the signature on his vote, but was told that would not be possible. "I put the pressure on them (the Electoral Commission) and eventually they caved in," he added.

"There was no similarity between my signature and the one on the ballot paper."

Mr Darley said the council election ballot papers were easily identifiable and easy to steal.

"On Portrush Rd, you've got these blocks of flats where

dozens of these readily identifiable envelopes are sticking out of boxes for days," he said.

"It's just easy pickings for someone unscrupulous to

pinch them and vote."

The penalty for interfering with voting papers is a maximum fine of \$5000 or 12 months jail. In a written statement, the Electoral Commission said it was not aware of any prosecutions for interfering with ballot papers in the past 20 years.

In an earlier response the commission said the requirement of the voter's date of birth on local government

election ballot papers was a compulsory requirement that underpinned the integrity of the vote.

However, the *CoastCity Weekly* understands that as well as the electoral roll, there are supplementary list of voters, including those with holiday homes and business owners in a region, that include birth dates.

The commission has confirmed that date of birth is part of the information provided for "designated persons contained on the voters' roll".

The Electoral Commission said it made voting paper en-

velopes easy to identify to "promote the event" to electors and so people did not "throw it out as junk mail".

Asked if it checked every ballot paper and every signature, the statement said: "We subject every envelope to a preliminary check and can undertake further validations where the signature or date of birth needs to be checked for accuracy."

Mr Darley was not reassured: "The bottom line is the

council election is easily open to rorting and just because no one's been caught doesn't mean it isn't going on."