

# Taxi licence overhaul Drivers fear for the future

By PAT NOLAN

ELIZABETH Jones has been driving taxis for nearly 30 years.

It is her livelihood. But she fears proposed changes to the taxi industry will ruin her way of life and potentially even leave her bankrupt.

Professor Alan Fels last month released a report into the taxi industry after a 14-month investigation, pushing for a swag of changes to the industry in a list of 145 recommendations.

Among the most drastic proposals was a vast overhaul of the licensing system, whereby the cost of a taxi licence in Ballarat would be cut back from about \$400,000 to about \$12,000 a year.

The proposals have been widely criticised by Melbourne and regional taxi operators, including Ballarat Taxis chairman Stephen Armstrong.

For Mrs Jones, who first

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ELIZABETH JONES

bought her taxi licence in 1983 with her late husband Ken, said her future was extremely bleak if the proposals went ahead.

"When we bought the licence we took a massive risk. It was the equivalent of buying a new home at the time," she said.

"Now if they change the rules and make licences worth nothing, that is 30 years of work gone."

The vast majority of Ballarat's taxi drivers have foregone any superannuation and benefits they would receive in other jobs by becoming drivers, with the eventual plan of selling

off their taxi licence for retirement money.

Now, with little money to be made from selling their licences should the proposal be approved, taxi operators feel they will be severely short-changed.

"I'll never be able to retire," said Mrs Jones.

"I'm sure the politicians wouldn't like to lose their superannuation at the stroke of a pen."

The proposed changes have been designed to increase the number of taxis that operate at one time, particularly in Melbourne.

But as Ballarat Taxis chairman Stephen Armstrong says, the city does not need any more taxis.

He said aside from the early hours on Sunday mornings, Ballarat had plenty of taxis and any more would hurt both drivers and customers.

Submissions to the inquiry are open until July 13, before the final decision in September.



**WORRIED:** Elizabeth Jones fears her investment will be wasted. Picture: Justin Whitelock

## Religious leaders' swipe at Pell

RELIGIOUS leaders have taken a swipe at Sydney's Catholic archbishop George Pell for denying the science of climate change and drowning out other voices in the debate.

Sydney rabbi Jeffrey Kamins and retiring Canberra bishop Peter Power were in Canberra yesterday to argue Australia needed to tackle climate change.

Rabbi Kamins said global warming couldn't be ignored.

"It's really unfortunate that Cardinal Pell has a such a great command of the press and it's very difficult for other people to get their voice out, especially because of his very strong alliance with Tony Abbott."

## Palmer sorry for Abbott stoush

CLIVE Palmer has apologised to federal Opposition Leader Tony Abbott after the pair had a disagreement over a push by the mining magnate to bar political lobbyists from the Liberal Party executive.

Mr Palmer yesterday confirmed he and Mr Abbott met at a Melbourne hotel last Thursday and had a conversation that involved bad language.

"I certainly regret and I apologise to Mr Abbott that I may have raised my voice and said the most inappropriate things that my wife would have thrown me out of the house for," he told reporters in Brisbane yesterday.

But Mr Palmer, who plans to put a resolution to the Liberal Party conference in Melbourne this weekend, said he had to stand up for himself and he was "not afraid of anybody".

"I was gracious enough to put to him in very strong terms what things should be," he said.



Clive Palmer

"There certainly was swearing in that match, and I certainly was guilty of it as well."

Asked about the incident, Mr Abbott declined to elaborate but said if there was any "heat" it wasn't coming from him.

Mr Abbott rejected Mr Palmer's push to ban lobbyists from senior positions in the party, saying the federal executive should be open to people from "all walks of life if

they have the talent".

"There is no evidence whatsoever that any serving members of the executive have in any way been compromised," he told reporters in Canberra.

If Mr Palmer's resolution is successful, it may lead to two party vice-presidents - former ministers Santo Santoro and Alexander Downer - losing their positions.

Mr Palmer said his resolution was not aimed at the two men personally. But he challenged them to make a decision.

"And that decision could be that 'I don't want to be a paid political lobbyist any more, I want to carry out my duties and obligations as vice president or president'," Mr Palmer said.

Mr Palmer wants all Australian political parties to follow the lead of the Queensland Liberal-National Party and ban paid political lobbyists from holding positions on their party executives.



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