

NATIONAL

The King of Canterbury and his princely \$50k lunch bills

By Kate McClymont

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Cash-strapped Canterbury council has scrapped its immunisation program and closed its swimming pool over winter to save money.

[A](#)[A](#)

Yet Canterbury ratepayers have forked out almost \$50,000 over the past four years for the council's all-powerful general manager Jim Montague to dine at Il Buco, a restaurant in Liverpool Road, Enfield.



Most Fridays the man known as the "King of Canterbury" and his companions place their customary order of carpaccio (\$23), oysters, followed by the fish of the day (\$38), and dessert which is washed down with a \$48 bottle of Pepper Jack wine.

His extraordinary meal tabs came to light after an application made under the Government Information (Public Access) Act (GIPA).

<p>IL BUCO 142 LIVERPOOL RD ENFIELD PH 9747 5179 ABN 51 119 356 740</p> <p>REG 20-08-2014(WED) 15:25 C01 MC#01 029662 CT *1</p> <p>TABLE NO. 14</p> <table border="0"> <tr><td>1 CALAMARI</td><td>\$ 18.00</td></tr> <tr><td>1 CARPACCIO</td><td>\$ 23.00</td></tr> <tr><td>1 FISH OF THE DAY</td><td>\$ 38.00</td></tr> <tr><td>1 RISOTTO PORCINI</td><td>\$ 25.00</td></tr> <tr><td>1 FILLETTO GRILLED</td><td>\$ 34.00</td></tr> <tr><td>1 SMALL THICK CHIPS</td><td>\$ 6.00</td></tr> <tr><td>1 PEPPERJACK</td><td>\$ 48.00</td></tr> <tr><td>3 DESSERT</td><td>\$ 36.00</td></tr> <tr><td>TOTAL</td><td>\$ 228.00</td></tr> </table>	1 CALAMARI	\$ 18.00	1 CARPACCIO	\$ 23.00	1 FISH OF THE DAY	\$ 38.00	1 RISOTTO PORCINI	\$ 25.00	1 FILLETTO GRILLED	\$ 34.00	1 SMALL THICK CHIPS	\$ 6.00	1 PEPPERJACK	\$ 48.00	3 DESSERT	\$ 36.00	TOTAL	\$ 228.00	<p>IL BUCO 142 LIVERPOOL RD ENFIELD PH 9747 5179 ABN 51 119 356 740</p> <p>REG 14-08-2014(THU) 14:58 C01 MC#01 029632 CT 1</p> <p>TABLE NO. 5</p> <table border="0"> <tr><td>1 CARPACCIO</td><td>\$ 23.00</td></tr> <tr><td>1 FISH OF THE DAY</td><td>\$ 37.00</td></tr> <tr><td>1 SPECIAL</td><td>\$ 18.00</td></tr> <tr><td>5 WINE GLASS</td><td>\$ 37.50</td></tr> <tr><td>1 STILL</td><td>\$ 4.50</td></tr> <tr><td>1 DESSERT</td><td>\$ 12.00</td></tr> <tr><td>1 COFFEE</td><td>\$ 4.00</td></tr> <tr><td>TOTAL</td><td>\$ 136.00</td></tr> </table>	1 CARPACCIO	\$ 23.00	1 FISH OF THE DAY	\$ 37.00	1 SPECIAL	\$ 18.00	5 WINE GLASS	\$ 37.50	1 STILL	\$ 4.50	1 DESSERT	\$ 12.00	1 COFFEE	\$ 4.00	TOTAL	\$ 136.00	<p>IL BUCO 142 LIVERPOOL RD ENFIELD PH 9747 5179 ABN 51 119 356 740</p> <p>REG 07-08-2014(THU) 19:42 C01 MC#01 026975 CT 1</p> <p>TABLE NO. 5</p> <table border="0"> <tr><td>2 FISH OF THE DAY</td><td>\$ 76.00</td></tr> <tr><td>1 SMALL THICK CHIPS</td><td>\$ 6.00</td></tr> <tr><td>1 MW</td><td>\$ 5.00</td></tr> <tr><td>1 STILL</td><td>\$ 4.50</td></tr> <tr><td>1 PEPPERJACK</td><td>\$ 48.00</td></tr> <tr><td>1 DESSERT</td><td>\$ 12.00</td></tr> <tr><td>1 COFFEE</td><td>\$ 4.00</td></tr> <tr><td>TOTAL</td><td>\$ 155.50</td></tr> </table>	2 FISH OF THE DAY	\$ 76.00	1 SMALL THICK CHIPS	\$ 6.00	1 MW	\$ 5.00	1 STILL	\$ 4.50	1 PEPPERJACK	\$ 48.00	1 DESSERT	\$ 12.00	1 COFFEE	\$ 4.00	TOTAL	\$ 155.50	<p>IL BUCO 142 LIVERPOOL RD ENFIELD PH 9747 5179 ABN 51 119 356 740</p> <p>REG 01-08-2014(FRI) 15:19 C01 MC#01 028716 CT 1</p> <p>TABLE NO. 11</p> <table border="0"> <tr><td>2 CARPACCIO</td><td>\$ 46.00</td></tr> <tr><td>1 OYSTERS</td><td>\$ 33.00</td></tr> <tr><td>1 OYSTERS</td><td>\$ 28.00</td></tr> <tr><td>4 FISH OF THE DAY</td><td>\$ 152.00</td></tr> <tr><td>1 RISOTTO</td><td>\$ 42.00</td></tr> <tr><td>1 SPECIAL</td><td>\$ 22.00</td></tr> <tr><td>1 SMALL THICK CHIPS</td><td>\$ 5.00</td></tr> <tr><td>1 SMALL THICK CHIPS</td><td>\$ 6.00</td></tr> <tr><td>1 MW</td><td>\$ 5.00</td></tr> <tr><td>2 LLB</td><td>\$ 10.00</td></tr> <tr><td>1 PEPPERJACK</td><td>\$ 48.00</td></tr> <tr><td>1 STILL</td><td>\$ 4.50</td></tr> <tr><td>1 DESSERT</td><td>\$ 12.00</td></tr> <tr><td>3 COFFEE</td><td>\$ 12.00</td></tr> <tr><td>TOTAL</td><td>\$ 425.50</td></tr> </table>	2 CARPACCIO	\$ 46.00	1 OYSTERS	\$ 33.00	1 OYSTERS	\$ 28.00	4 FISH OF THE DAY	\$ 152.00	1 RISOTTO	\$ 42.00	1 SPECIAL	\$ 22.00	1 SMALL THICK CHIPS	\$ 5.00	1 SMALL THICK CHIPS	\$ 6.00	1 MW	\$ 5.00	2 LLB	\$ 10.00	1 PEPPERJACK	\$ 48.00	1 STILL	\$ 4.50	1 DESSERT	\$ 12.00	3 COFFEE	\$ 12.00	TOTAL	\$ 425.50
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Lunch dockets from Il Buco.

On one day alone in 2011 Mr Montague ran up a \$1000 bill spending \$576.50 on lunch at the Italian restaurant followed by \$421 at dinner, which included an entree of pan-fried king prawns and veal, accompanied by a \$105 bottle of wine.

Councillors contacted by Fairfax Media expressed their shock at the extent of the general manager's Il Buco bills especially as the council voted for a 7.5 percent increase in rates each year for the next three years. "None of us were aware of this and we'll be demanding an explanation," said one councillor.

Each month the restaurant sends the council Mr Montague's bills. There is scant information about the purpose of the lunches and who attended them. Recorded as "executive lunches", Mr Montague, who has run the council for the past 30 years, signs off on the receipts stating: "I have reviewed the invoices for the occasions that I was present and confirm that each occasion related to the conduct of the council's business."

One of his most regular lunch companions is the Labor mayor Brian Robson, who justified his Il Buco lunches with Mr Montague saying the food is "reasonably priced" and "there's a chance for me to sit down and have a quiet lunch with the general manager on a Friday." He said all their meals related to council business.

Mr Montague, who earns \$300,000 per year, said: "I can't imagine why anyone would be interested in my lunch time habits." He insisted all his meals relate to council business and that he was a person of "the highest integrity".

One of Mr Montague's occasional guests at Il Buco is his friend Bechara Khouri, once described in state parliament as a Labor party "fixer".

For years Mr Khouri has enjoyed close ties to a string of ALP mayors throughout Sydney's inner west and south western suburbs.

An associate of Mr Khouri said, "Bechara makes his money by opening doors for developers."

Mr Montague said he had "no idea what Bechara does for a living." When pressed, Mr Montague conceded, "I know he knows developers and architects" and that Mr Khouri acted as a lobbyist.

Mr Montague said his friend occasionally rang up to see where development applications were up to but "he has never asked me to do anything."



Il Buco restaurant in Enfield.

Photo: Fiona Morris

Cr Robson, also a friend of Mr Khouri, said: "Bechara has never ever asked me to do anything regarding any development, I will swear on a stack of bibles."

For his part Mr Khouri said he was a "consultant" who has "a sophisticated team of planners and architects" to help clients though the maze of development red tape.

Speaking about himself, Mr Khouri said, "People say Bechara is influential, Bechara knows people, Bechara gets what he wants, Bechara is connected. It is crap."

Mr Khouri said he deliberately kept his distance from Mr Montague and any calls were "to tell Jim what is happening on the ground."

Any suggestion to the contrary was "disgruntled, envious, malicious people throwing shit," he said.

On the day Fairfax Media attended the restaurant late last year, Mr Montague was lunching with Cr Robson, George Khoury, who runs a string of BP service stations, and accountant Graziano De Bortoli, whose client list has included the corrupt former Labor powerbroker Joe Tripodi.

The lunch was interrupted by Mr Montague having a phone conversation with Bechara Khouri.

Mr Montague, who initially declined to identify the other lunchers, told Fairfax Media that: "The BP man brought along the accountant fellow to give our mayor some advice about a matter he is involved in, namely the Bankstown Community College."

Mr Khoury, the petrol station owner, said that although he was sometimes the guest of Mr Montague's at Il Buco lunches, on this occasion he picked up the bill because he was providing the introduction to Mr De Bortoli.

In August 2014 the council was billed for a \$155 lunch for the community college's board members – Cr Robson, his friend Sam Pambris, who runs a Greek entertainment business, and then Bankstown mayor Khal Asfour.

In March 2014 the board of the struggling not-for-profit community college voted to bid a maximum \$1.11 million for the premises underneath the college in Chapel Street, Bankstown.

Fairfax Media has obtained documentation written by the college's auditor advising against this move as the "future outlook for the college is grim" and any cash reserves were needed to stay afloat.

The auditor also pointed out that the property was valued at \$840,000. In April, the premises were passed at an auction for around \$900,000 with the college reputedly the only bidder. But in June the board negotiated to buy the property from restaurant-owner Fouad Sayed for \$1.11 million, the maximum amount they had earlier agreed upon, which was \$270,000 over the valuation.

Land title records show the college has obtained a mortgage from Mr Pambris, a board member, who has lent the college \$605,000 with an interest rate of 10 per cent, or 6.5 per cent if the college pays its monthly interest bills early.

Mr Pambris has a caveat, protecting his interest in the property, which was witnessed by Cr Robson and Cr Asfour. His fellow board members also approved paying Mr Pambris's legal costs of \$2000.

The board also agreed to pay \$800 to Mr de Bortoli for providing what Cr Robson described as "a bit of a forensic audit on the books" of the college.

Both Cr Robson and Cr Asfour denied there were any development plans in the wings for the college site, which was rezoned to high density allowing 10 storeys to be constructed. Instead, Cr Asfour said the rent from Mr Sayed's Summerland restaurant was to "save the college from going under".

Mr Pambris did not return Fairfax Media's calls or emails.

CORRECTION

The original version of this story wrongly contained the name Steven Pambris. The Herald accepts Steven Pambris was wrongly named and is in no way involved in the subject matter of this article. The Herald apologises to Steven Pambris for any embarrassment caused.



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Kate McClymont



Kate McClymont is an investigative journalist at The Sydney Morning Herald.