

Going for broke

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The State Opposition has called for a Parliamentary inquiry into the Government's purported buy-out of a financially-stricken catering kitchen part-owned by Greater Dandenong Council for as little as \$1.

Opposition health spokesperson Georgie Crozier says the inquiry is needed to "get to the bottom" of the proposed sell-off of Community Chef - which is said to be on the brink of receivership.

"The Andrews Government has many ques-

tions to answer including plans to buy Community Chef for the reported peppercorn amount of just \$1."

Community Chef is a joint enterprise owned by 16 local councils which provides more than 1.2 million meals a year for Meals on Wheels, aged care homes and hospitals.

After opening in 2010, it has been propped up by a \$2.9 million "recallable grant" from the Department of Health and Human Services.

It also reportedly owes \$7 million to banks.

Greater Dandenong councillor Peter Brown said the council, with about 10 per cent share-

holding, would be exposed to about \$700,000 of the bank debt.

As a shareholder, the council may also be exposed to "unknown" other liabilities, Cr Brown said.

He said the enterprise was close to trading insolvent but for an emergency bailout by its stakeholders in 2019.

"It's been trading at a loss for quite some time.

"We're mad if we don't sell it."

The take-over would be a "great public benefit" by continuing the supply of "critical"

hospital meals and Meals on Wheels food to vulnerable clients, he said.

Cr Tim Dark said Greater Dandenong was "behind by several hundred thousand dollars" since the kitchen opened in 2010.

It was preferable to sell Community Chef to the State Government for \$1, rather than put it into receivership and jeopardise the supply of meals, Cr Dark said.

"Thousands of meals have been provided for people in the community, so arguably we've done well out of it."

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