

Candidate regret over comments

By **PETER DOUGLAS**

ANIMAL Justice Party (AJP) candidate Leah Folloni has apologised over comments she made on an online forum, which followed her attendance at a local candidates debate.

Ms Folloni spoke at the La Trobe Candidates Forum at Tecoma on Tuesday 14 June, which was held to give the Dandenong Ranges community greater insight into the candidates and their policies before the upcoming Federal Election.

However, Ms Folloni said she was made to feel unwelcome at the forum, in particular by those who were organising the event.

Afterwards, she described her experiences on an online forum.

"I had heaps of meat eating hills greenies come after me last night," she wrote.

"At one stage, there were about 100 people yelling and abusing me and the mediator let them do it, so I had to yell back.

"It was awful."

When asked to explain her comments, Ms Folloni was remorseful.

"I made that comment on a private vegan activist page between friends, and I am still not sure how they got on there to get it, in hindsight I shouldn't have said it," she said.

Ms Folloni went on to say there were many against her before she even spoke at the forum, also reiterating her stance there was little mediation.

"When I explained why AJP preferenced (sitting La Trobe member) Jason Wood, and that he led the charge to stop lion trophies being brought into Australia ... it became apparent ... these people had no care about the welfare of animals," she said.

Attendee Garry Muratore, who viewed the post, described her behaviour as unprofessional and demanded a public apology.

He also questioned her

comments about crowd members yelling at her, which, he said, was untrue, adding that there was video footage to prove his point.

"The hills community is a progressive one and a cause such as animal rights should resonate well," Mr Muratore said.

"Instead, Folloni has undone all the good work the AJP has done from the last State Election.

"Folloni needs to make a public apology to the community.

"If not, the AJP has no choice but to disendorse her."

Mr Muratore said this was no smear campaign against the candidate.

"I certainly have a leaning to the left, but I was not involved in the organisation of the forum in any way," he said.

"I found out about it (the forum) on social media and attended simply on the basis that I wanted to hear all candidates."