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LP EXCLUSIVE

A PARRAMATTA councillor who backed the \$135 million sale of land containing Ermington's minigolf course to a Chinese property developer now wishes he had the chance to review his vote.

TD Pierre Esber has become so alarmed at how much property Australia is selling to foreign interests that he is willing to take flak over his actions to raise the issue in the public consciousness.

"I have been part of the decision-making process and now my conscience is starting to get the better of me," he told The Daily Telegraph.

Mr Esber said if he had the chance to vote again "I would have reviewed my decision and maybe changed it".

"I will cop some criticism from my colleagues on the floor of the council, and from the community, but that doesn't bother me," he said.

"I want this issue to be in front of the Prime Minister and Treasurer." Mr Esber spoke of the dilemma he faced between getting the best deal for his local constituents and doing the best thing for the country's future.

The 2ha council-owned block at the corner of Wharf Rd and Victoria Rd, Ermington — home to a well-known putt-putt course for the past 45 years — was sold to the top bidder, the Shanghai-based Aqualand group, which plans to build up to 1400 units on the site.

He said the top bid from an Australian company was \$5 million lower. "I had a responsibility to get the best dollar I could for the city I represent ... but the bee in my bonnet is foreign ownership. I have a concern for the country where I was born." Mr Esber said he had nothing against the Chinese, and no quibble with the developer, but wants a freeze on sales to overseas investors, and believes each state should have a cap of perhaps 2-3 per cent on the amount of its land it sells to foreigners."Foreign owners buy our land, develop it, make a profit and the profits get shipped offshore. We do need foreign ownership, but how much?"

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