

# Board head refuses to go to Beth Din

**Shira Sebban**

NSW JEWISH Board of Deputies president Peter Wertheim has refused to appear before the Sydney Beth Din in response to a complaint by Board of Deputies member Eliana Freyfel Miller, calling her complaint "vexatious" and "lacking in substance".

Ms Miller recently requested the Beth Din to call Mr Wertheim and Shalom Institute chief executive officer Dr Hilton Immerman separately for a *Din Torah* (Torah judgment).

The Beth Din arranged a meeting with Mr Wertheim for April 6, but he



**Peter Wertheim**

told the *Australian Jewish News* this week that he has written to Beth Din Registrar Raymond Apple, stating that "in view of Ms Miller's failure to specify the

reasons for her complaint in any intelligible way, I've declined to discuss the matter further with the Sydney Beth Din".

Mr Wertheim wrote that "there would be no purpose served in proceeding with the conference ... Ms Miller's inability or unwillingness to specify precisely what her complaint is about is an indication that the complaint is vexatious and lacking in substance. As I assume that the Beth Din only deals with matters of substance and with issues which are real and not speculative, I trust that this will not cause you any inconvenience."

Ms Miller had made "a series of non-specific and largely unintelligible assertions which made it impossible to ascertain what her complaint is really about", Mr Wertheim wrote. "The only clear statement which Ms

Miller has made is her assertion that the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies should not have the freedom in certain cases (which she has not specified) to decide who its members should be. I respectfully submit that this is an issue exclusively for the Board to determine in accordance with its Constitution, and Ms Miller's complaint in this regard is both misconceived and, it would appear, speculative."

Dr Immerman is believed to have been requested to appear before the Beth Din in connection with the fact that The Shalom Institute hired out its premises for a Shabbat service and dinner on the eve of the Mardi Gras.

Shalom Institute president John Glass told the *AJN* that the matter would not be considered at his board's next meeting because the Beth Din had not responded to his request for clarification. "Perhaps the best resolution to the 'invitation' to participate in a *Din Torah* on an unspecified matter is to gather it with the *chametz* and let it burn," he said.

"As I sit at the seder table joyously singing *Dayenu*. I will now always offer a grateful thought to Dawn Cohen and her colleagues at the Dayenu Association for the additional insight I have gained. As I recite *Hallel*, I will offer a special *Halleluyah* for our community that, as witnessed by the letters to the *AJN* editor, has shown overwhelming tolerance of, and support for, diversity in our community, including of course gay and lesbian Jews. As I open the door for Elijah, I will reflect upon not only those nations that would harm us, but also, those within our community who thoughtlessly and needlessly express ideas hostile to *shalom bayit* [peace at home] in our community."

Two weeks ago, *AJN* editor Vic Alhadef also declined a request to attend a meeting of the Sydney Beth Din to discuss its unhappiness at the newspaper's coverage of Jewish participation in the Mardi Gras.