

**Submission
No 325**

**INQUIRY INTO PLANNING PROCESS IN NEWCASTLE
AND THE BROADER HUNTER REGION**

Name: Mrs Ruth Adams

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To the Chair, Reverend the Hon Fred Nile MLC and members of the Select Committee on the Planning Process in Newcastle and the Broader Hunter Region, NSW Legislative Council.

I appreciate the opportunity to make this submission particularly in the light of the lack of transparency in decision making by Newcastle City Council and by several Departments in the NSW Government. In addition, recent events including ICAC investigations and the subsequent resignations of elected local and state government officials, have contributed to my complete lack of confidence that ethical and legal processes have been used to arrive at decisions affecting Newcastle and the entire Hunter Region.

My submission centres on parts:- a) b) d) and e) in the terms of reference.

The city of Newcastle has some unique features including its history, the existence of rail transport into the city, low rise (more human scale) development and natural beauty of beaches and green space. These features contribute a great deal to the liveability of the city and appeal to visitors as well.

Recent proposals / decisions to remove rail access into the city and to construct high rise towers in the East End of the CBD have, it seems, been made to benefit developers.

It is my view there is a conflict of interest with Urban Growth-Landcom (NSW Government) in partnership with GPT and another arm of the NSW Government responsible for approving this development.

There are many other developments coming online in Newcastle that have met the requirements of the previous low rise LEP. It seems both unfair and unethical to have different rules for those who use threats (GPT) and developers who appear to have the ear of those in a position to deliver them. I see this as an extreme example of poor practice and governance from a government who promised openness, transparency and genuine engagement with the community.

The decision to remove the rail line into Newcastle on 26th December, 2014 without a viable alternate for residents of The Hunter and visitors alike would be laughable if in an episode of a television series such as Yes Minister or Utopia. Unfortunately, the reality is The Minister for the Hunter and for Transport NSW has not been able to explain how the decision was made, what the final cost of removing part of the heavy rail and providing light rail on the proposed route will be, or in fact a full outline of the project and its management! Nor has a plausible explanation been given as to why the rail line into Newcastle will be closed on 26th December 2014 .

Events such as New Years Eve, Asian Cup 2015 etc all require efficient integrated public transport. As will users of new developments such as University of Newcastle facility to be constructed near The Civic. My level of mistrust is very high with regard to the motives behind this decision. This decision would seem to contravene the NSW State Planning framework as it destroys transport infrastructure and discourages the use of public transport rather than encouraging it.

The proceeds from the leasing of the Port of Newcastle are considerable. The decision to allocate the majority of the portion of funds 'ear marked' for the Hunter on the poorly planned and not yet costed project to remove existing transport structure seems to have been driven by a developer lobby and twentieth century CBD thinking. It has left the remainder Newcastle, Lake Macquarie and the Hunter 'out in the cold' as was also the case with the very limited consultation processes cited in some explanations about how decisions have been made.

Another matter I wish to draw attention to with regard to decision making processes was the decision by NSW Government not to contribute to the planned expansion of the Newcastle Regional Art Gallery. At the time many ratepayers, myself included, found it almost inconceivable that a situation existed where local and federal governments had each committed to a third of the funds required and the state government refused to make a commitment. The funds allocated by the federal government were then removed from the table. The taxpayers of Newcastle have paid an increased rates and this was one of the projects listed to justify the increase.

It is a matter of public record the former Lord Mayor of Newcastle, Mr McCloy who resigned after ICAC investigations linked him with illegal donations to the political campaign of Tim Owens (former Member for Newcastle who also resigned following revelations at ICAC) did not want this project to proceed.

Who made the decision the NSW Government would not commit funds to The Newcastle Art Gallery expansion and why ??? Once again there is a complete lack of transparency. The case for flow on economic benefits to the community and for the its positive contribution to the revitalisation of Newcastle were well made.