

**Submission
No 135**

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

Name: Mr Ron Brown

Date received: 22/10/2014

ATTENTION: Teresa McMichael

Dear Teresa,

I had been directly involved in the affairs of the Newcastle City Centre Committees from 1997 through to 2010.

During that time I had been a member of the Tower, City East and City Wide Committees for almost 10 years.

I had also held the positions of Chairperson for the Tower Precinct, Deputy Chair and Treasurer for the City East Committee.

I regularly attended the monthly City Centre Committee meetings held over this period.

As a result I was able to observe the manner in which the affairs of the CBD business community were managed.

In 2000 the Newcastle Alliance was formed in partnership between a selected group of Business representatives and Council.

While, this organisation offered the potential to assist in the development of the City I was concerned that the members of the Alliance did not provide true representation of businesses in the CBD. Neither were they accountable to the broader business community.

After several months of protest I was able to get the Alliance to agree to publish the minutes of their meetings.

Council had granted this unelected group of business people the role of managing the funds collected via the Main Street Special Benefit Levee from businesses in the Newcastle CBD.

Attached is an exchange between myself and the then Chair of the Hunter Business Chamber in regard to the relationship between the Business Chamber, The Alliance and the City Centre Committees.

I questioned the validity of the representation provide by the Alliance to Council on at least two occasions and I found myself in the position where I was been subjected to personal attacks with allegations that I was providing false and misleading information to the media.

These attacks were made under the direct watch of Council representatives who failed to apply Council's own Code of Conduct rules on each occasion.

In 2007 council teminated the Alliance Contract as service provider for the City Centre Committees. I understand that following the termination of this contract the Newcastle Alliance found itself holding onto a substantial amount of unspent City Centre Funds which, Council did not seek to reclaim.

I was reappointed to a position on the City Centre Committee in 2008 and continued to be actively involved in its affairs until November 2010.

At the end of 2010 Council agreed to establish a Business Improvement Association to run the affairs of the City Centre Committees. During the transition from the City Centre Committee to the BIA, Council dismissed several members of the City Centre Committee including myself. Council endorsed the establishment of a Transition Team consisting of Ed Duc, Paul Murphy, Claire Williams, Christine Gregson and Grant Keene.

With the exception of Grant Keene the members of the Transition Team were all members of the Newcastle Alliance. I voted against the establishment of this Transition Team and wrote to Council

expressing my concern that they had placed the affairs of the City in the hands on a none representative group.

By July 2011 the Newcastle NOW BIA was established. In 2012 my application to be a member of Newcastle Now was rejected without explanation even though I contribute directly to the funds they collect via the Special Benefit Levee.

I have prepared this background to the Newcastle CBD structures that were in place in 2011 to provide the inquiry an understanding of the environment that existed in the CBD at the time of the 2011 State Election.

A small group of none representative business people had been able to gain a position of power and influence in the management of the affairs of the Newcastle CBD. They were able to present themselves both during and after the State Election as the voice of Newcastle that could not be challenged.

The subsequent revelations relating to the activities of people involved in The Alliance demonstrate that they were not a-political as they claimed.

I believe that members of Alliance were placed in a unique position where they were able to effectively execute they own none representative views and influence on the planning processes undertaken by the current State Government in Newcastle.

Ron Brown
Transport Planner