

**Submission  
No 251**

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

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**Date received:** 24/10/2014

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## **THE INQUIRY INTO THE PLANNING PROCESSES IN NEWCASTLE AND THE BROADER HUNTER REGION AND LAKE MACQUARIE 2014.**

As concerned citizens of Newcastle, we wish to protest about a number of the planning decisions that have been made in Newcastle in 2014, particularly those influenced greatly by the former Lord Mayor, Jeff McCloy.

The particular decisions that worry us are those that relate to the termination of the rail line at Wickham, the decision to place light rail down Hunter Street instead of on the heavy rail line, the extremely high tower plans for the city centre, the stopping of the Art Gallery redevelopment and the dismissal of the Art Gallery Director.

We urge the Enquiry to recommend to the Premier of NSW that none of these projects should proceed. There has been inadequate community consultation on every one of these issues and all of them have been unduly influenced by the former Lord Mayor and the former Newcastle MP, Tim Owen.

Judging by the numerous articles and Letters to the Editor in the *Newcastle Herald* over the past few years, the overwhelming majority of residents in Newcastle, Maitland and other outlying areas are in favour of the retention of the heavy rail into Newcastle.

Among those that support light rail, the majority want it to utilise the present rail line. Why would any reasonable person rip up a rail line to provide an almost parallel one just hundreds (sometimes fewer) metres away? It was the previous Lord Mayor Jeff McCloy who suggested that it should go down Hunter Street. Who owns the newly opened hotel in Hunter Street? Who owns many other properties in that Hunter Street vicinity? Why did the NSW Government allow this plan to be accepted?

We have been Stockton residents for over 60 years and we are not against development or change. In fact generally we are keen supporters of the foreshore Honeysuckle development, despite some minor reservations.

As proud Novocastrians involved in many community groups including the Stockton Historical Society, we are alarmed by the proposed massive increases to building heights in the centre of the city. Newcastle has a very fine historic cityscape centred on the Hill and the Newcastle Cathedral. This will be entirely spoiled by the proposed towers, particularly as they will damage the commanding presence of the Newcastle Cathedral.

With regard to the excellent Newcastle Art Gallery, it is very difficult to understand why both Newcastle City Council (with a designated contribution of millions of dollars raised by a rate rise) and Tim Owen, the Member for Newcastle, should enthusiastically support the planned redevelopment in 2011 but withdraw support afterwards. The only answer is the undue influence of former Lord Mayor Jeff McCloy after his election in 2012.

In 2014 both men have been disgraced by ICAC and subsequently resigned after it was revealed that Lord Mayor Jeff McCloy contributed approximately \$10,000 to Mr Owen's election campaign. Interestingly Mr Owen withdrew his support of the Art Gallery extensions after the election of Mr McCloy.

Why was the Art Gallery Director removed from his post and Ms Judy Jago dismissed from Newcastle City Council without any explanation being given for many months? This matter still has not been satisfactorily resolved or their "guilt" proven. Why was there a Council restructure that removed the positions of Director of Newcastle Museum and Newcastle Art Gallery under the recommendation of the new General Manager Ken Gouldthorp? We believe that the Lord Mayor used his casting vote in this matter as well in preventing the extensions to the Art Gallery.

Although this is only a short submission, we urge the Inquiry to consider all these matters because they will greatly influence the future of this great city, which we love dearly.

Barbara Witcher and Bernie Bernard