

Submission
No 354

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

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially Confidential

23 October 2014

PLANNING PROCESS IN NEWCASTLE AND THE BROADER HUNTER
REGION (INQUIRY)

Legislative Council
NSW Parliament
6 Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

**RE: BIASED PLANNING PROCESS FAVOURING GPT/URBANGROWTH
NSW HIGH RISE DEVELOPMENT FOR NEWCASTLE'S HERITAGE CITY
CENTRE – DA2014/323**

Dear Committee members,

I wish to raise concerns with the NSW Legislative Council Inquiry into *Planning Process in Newcastle and the Broader Hunter Region*. My concerns as a citizen of the state and a long-time resident of Newcastle are with the lack of transparency, inadequate community consultation, perceived conflict of interests and excessive developer influence on planning decisions surrounding the sudden rezoning of Newcastle's Mall and East End heritage area to facilitate the development application **Newcastle East End DA2014/323**.

I am a firm supporter of urban renewal in Newcastle and have watched with pleasure and interest the naturally occurring renewal of the East End through local, civic action and funded programmes like Renew Newcastle. I am, however, shocked and alarmed at the proposal submitted by joint developers GPT Group / UrbanGrowth NSW, for extreme, high rise apartment towers in the low rise heritage precinct of inner city Newcastle. This proposal, for the area bounded by Hunter, Perkins, King and Newcomen Streets, Newcastle, strips bare the previously agreed and planned restriction of height to 8 storeys, tripling height limits to 20 storeys and significantly increasing floor space ratios.

The proposed development runs contrary to the guiding principles of the adopted Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy (NURS-2012) in which high-rise towers were to be located at Wickham, or Newcastle West End, not in the heritage East End. I firmly believe that the process by which this excessive and inappropriate development plan came to be produced and submitted when the existing strategic planning documents specifically ruled out high rise

in Newcastle's East End heritage precinct should be condemned and reversed after investigation of its details by your committee.

Your committee will be well aware of the details by which the Newcastle Local Environment Plan (LEP-2012) was altered through significant amendments to the State Environmental Planning Policy (SEPP-2014) that specifically favoured two developers – GPT/UrbanGrowth NSW. How those amendments were recently approved, through the minister, in the atmosphere of corruption and developer interests surrounding the activities of certain members of the NSW parliament and their associates in the wider community has not been adequately explained and should be investigated.

My specific concerns that I hope the inquiry will investigate include:

1. The ludicrously small amount of time allowed for genuine public consultation of this radical change to the planning decisions already taken for Newcastle's inner city. Such astonishing amendments, amid a mounting public suspicion around donations to political parties, required more extensive and genuine engagement with the set views of the Newcastle community, not less. It smacked of deliberate haste to railroad the community into these decisions in favour of the state's own developing arm in concert with its favoured private developers.
2. The atmosphere of suspicious complicity with these changes at Newcastle City Council meetings open to the public, with the General Manager of Council business closing down all attempts by Councillors to discuss the issues, by using dubious legal arguments that flew in the face of the manifest public interest involved. This atmosphere was reinforced by the Lord Mayor, Geoff McCloy, now exposed as having contributed to the corrupt atmosphere around political party donations, supporting these moves to shut down debate and reasonable civic discussion.
3. The fact that no reasonable attempt was made to investigate reasonable alternative options very quickly suggested by members of the Newcastle active community groups or individuals, both at the level of City Council discussion and on a wider state level. Individual City Councillors allied to McCloy and the General Manager sought to discredit individuals and community groups who put forward constructive alternative development proposals that sat within the parameters of the Newcastle Local Environment Plan and were based on the facts of an already renewing city centre.
4. The subsequent dismissals by Lord Mayor McCloy of community concerns about the impact of high rise towers on the visual integrity of the Newcastle city scape ('Novocastrians should get over their concern with sightlines to/from the Cathedral dominating the Newcastle skyline'). These comments, combined with the above interventions on

Council, and McCloy's unsolicited support of a tram line down Hunter Street instead of the rail corridor already existing, have raised community suspicion of a betrayal of the agreement to preserve the existing rail corridor in public hands, for public purposes, not developer enrichment.

5. The domination of Newcastle region's special living conditions by Sydney bureaucratic planners and their favoured private capital developers. The centralization of big planning in Sydney hands does an injustice to the reasonable local interests and values of regional communities of this state and allows for openings to potentially corrupt alliances between non-local bureaucracies and private capital that may be destructive of local community amenity and public benefit. I am concerned about the lack of transparency, and the role of local and state government agencies and officers in changing planning controls.

I therefore respectfully urge the Legislative Council Committee members to please consider making the following recommendations:

1. Revoke the SEPP amendment by providing a revised SEPP amendment overriding the 2014 approval.
2. With respect to building heights, restore the NURS (2012) that includes:
 - acceptable height limits (maximum 24 metres or roughly 8 storeys)
 - appropriate floor-space density provisions
 - maintains iconic public vistas to and from the city, and
 - facilitates high rise development in the West End rather than the heritage precinct.
3. Place an immediate moratorium on all development associated with the amended parts of the Newcastle LEP.

I trust this information may assist the Parliamentary Inquiry into *Planning Process in Newcastle and the Broader Hunter Region* and hope the Committee will consider my concerns regarding the controversial GPT/UrbanGrowth NSW development proposal - DA2014/323 - for high rise towers in Newcastle's heritage city centre.

This information is confidential and intended for the *Planning Process In Newcastle and the Broader Hunter Region* (Legislative Council Inquiry).

Yours sincerely,