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Online Submission

Mar 14 (31 days ago)

To:

Department of Planning and Environment

Draft Hunter Regional Plan: Submission.

14 March 2016.

My submission is directed towards the Draft Plan for Growing Hunter City, and specifically Inner Newcastle District.

Under Action 2.1.1 the draft plan states "The long term urban renewal and revitalisation of the city centre has greater potential to attract people, activities and investment". It identifies five major sub-precincts, one of which is "Civic" focussed around Wheeler Place; offers gourmet, cultural and educational hubs, including City Hall and Newcastle Museum, as well as the Newcastle Courthouse complex and the new University of Newcastle campus. No mention is made of the jewel in the crown of this cultural hub, the Newcastle Art Gallery which contains a \$90 million collection that is the envy of all other regional galleries in Australia. Neither does the document acknowledge the adjoining Regional Reference Library or the Conservatorium of Music with its fine concert hall.

In December 2012 the Hunter Region Action Plan produced by your Government's Department of Premier and Cabinet listed the now stalled Newcastle Art Gallery redevelopment as a catalyst project "underway" as part of the priority actions for the revitalisation of Newcastle City Centre. It was described as a catalyst project designed to "grow the visitor economy of the Hunter". This level of inconsistency between your departments is most distressing.

Finally, under Action 2.1.1, "The NSW Government will focus investment in infrastructure to: lead by example and partner with others to deliver landmark infrastructure projects". In 2006 the Newcastle City Council created a special purpose fund of \$4 million+ to initiate the process of funding the Newcastle Art Gallery redevelopment. Along with community fund-raising (of over \$1 million) it aimed to partner with the NSW and Federal governments to raise the (then) \$21 million required. In September 2011 the Federal government approved their contribution by way of a \$7 million grant. It was the failure of the O'Farrell government to provide a partnership contribution to the now \$14 million+ fund that saw in 2013 the return of the Federal grant, a devastating blow to the future of Newcastle's cultural precinct. With this recent past history are we able to trust the NSW government in future to lead by example and partner with us to deliver landmark infrastructure projects? Please let this not be just platitudes, but a means to restore our faith in your Government.

Action 2.1.2 talks of "an opportunity for inner Newcastle to be the catalyst that transforms the perception of Newcastle as a regional centre to Hunter City as a metropolitan city", and of "strengthening inner Newcastle's identity as the cultural urban heart of the region", of offering "urban amenity that reflects the region's heritage", and finally mentions the importance of "liveability". The transformational Newcastle Art Gallery redevelopment ticks all these boxes. It does this by providing a Gallery with the internationally accepted facilities

required for mounting major exhibitions and enabling it to display its extensive collection of works, which reflect its earliest settlement by Europeans (including their interaction with the Awakabal people), its growth and progress from convict outpost to NSW's most important industrial city, and its subsequent reincarnation as a centre of excellence in education and the arts. The people of Newcastle and the Hunter region and beyond would have access to these special and visiting exhibitions which encourage an engaged and creative community. Direct earnings benefits for business would flow from this as has been amply demonstrated in other regional centres such as Bendigo.

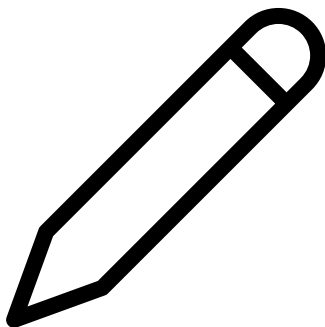
Finally to "liveability". In order to attract and retain an educated and highly productive work force in the post-industrial world, Newcastle needs to make itself a desirable place to live and work, to invest, to build a business enterprise. Cultural facilities such as art galleries provide a major contribution to this crucial enterprise. And if tourism and hospitality are to be part of the way ahead for economic prosperity in this region, then why are we not following the Bendigo example?

Although one can mount the most compelling argument, in the end the make or break of any decision (apart from of course political expediency) relies on the availability of the necessary finances. There have of course been submissions to regional funds such as H.I.F, but the really significant sources of funding lie elsewhere "the very considerable proceeds from the lease of the Port of Newcastle (of which Newcastle was promised a small portion) and secondly the NSW's government's promise to provide \$600 million from the sale of the "poles and wires" to Culture and the Arts in NSW.

Much as I am aware that \$400 million of that \$600 million is most likely tied to the grandiose but very important (for the whole state) redevelopment of the Art Gallery of New South Wales, it would appear that the bulk of the remainder is to head to Western Sydney. I'm sure you are aware of Andrew Taylor's article in the Sydney Morning Herald (Friday March 11, p.3) in which Cr Dickerson, the Mayor of Dubbo, from the very seat of the Deputy Premier and Minister for the Arts, bemoans the fact that "Giving money to western Sydney for culture and the arts isn't as important as giving it to regional areas". The proposed removal of the Powerhouse Museum to Parramatta would, I am sure, consume much of the remaining \$200 million.

I was encouraged to make this submission by a letter to the Newcastle Herald (N.H. Friday 19 February) from Scot MacDonald, Parliamentary Secretary for the Hunter, entreating citizens to do so. This was despite my becoming disheartened by the lack of reply, or even acknowledgement by their staff members, of my letters sent to Premier Baird (17 February 2014, 19 December 2014) or Minister Grant (25 March 2015) concerning this vital and iconic infrastructure project. I hope and pray that this submission is at least read and considered when the final plans for the region are announced.

cc Scot MacDonald MLC



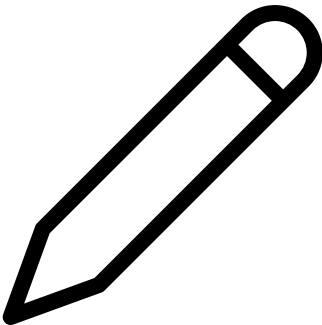
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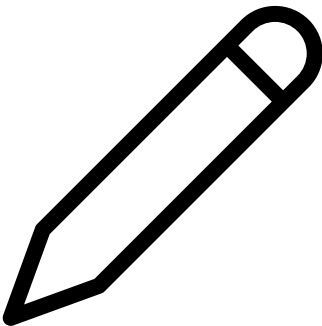
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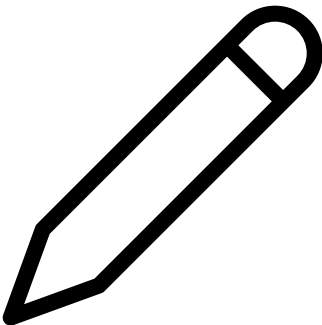
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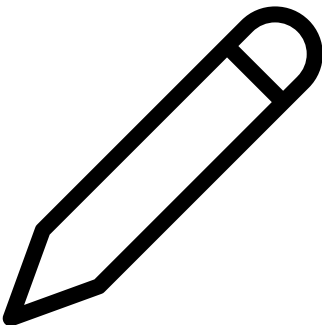
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