

**The Newcastle Inner City Residents Alliance (NICRA)**  
**Submission to**  
**NSW Department of Planning and Environment**  
**In response to the *Draft Hunter Regional Plan* and**  
***Draft Plan for Growing Hunter City.***

**24 March 2016**

**Introduction**

**The Newcastle Inner City Residents Alliance** - NICRA - applauds the NSW Government for attempting to create a contemporary vision for planning and development in the state's second largest and second oldest city, Newcastle, and its surrounding urban communities. NICRA would like to thank the Department of Planning for inviting NICRA members to attend the presentation at the Newcastle Regional Office of the NSW Department in November 2015 and for providing a further presentation to NICRA members on 1 February 2016.

NICRA is very pleased to participate in the community consultation process by responding to the *Draft Hunter Regional Plan* and the *Draft Plan for Growing Hunter City*.

NICRA considers that both documents are problematic for the following reasons. They offer:

1. a very limited range of infrastructure options;
2. no guiding principles for good planning in Greater Newcastle;
3. no key infrastructure strategies.

It would greatly assist NICRA, and other greater Newcastle residents and businesses, to better understand what the overall planning process is and where this particular community consultation comes into the process. For example, will NICRA have a further opportunity to comment on this document as it evolves, before final approval?

At the presentation of both documents by the Planning Department to a NICRA General Meeting on 1 February 2016, it was revealed that the missing planning

elements will not be known until after the draft document are approved when the other government agencies add their components.

When will the final *Plan for Growing Hunter City* document be available to comment?

### **Missing Infrastructure Plans**

It appears the Department of Planning is putting the cart before the horse in seeking public comment on this document when other infrastructure information should also be considered.

NICRA members were told that further information will be added later by the relevant NSW government departments and agencies. To many people this delay appears inappropriate when seeking community feedback at this stage in the development of this important planning document. The omissions include reference to:

1. Public Transport Infrastructure Strategy
2. Education and Health Infrastructure Strategy
3. Tourism strategy
4. Arts and Cultural Infrastructure Strategy
5. Heritage and Historic Sites Strategy
6. Sports Infrastructure Strategy
7. Indigenous Culture Strategy
8. Provision of Parks and Wildlife Sanctuaries

Key issues for NICRA:

#### **1. What's in a Name? – '*Growing Hunter City*'**

NICRA strongly opposes the name 'Hunter City'. Newcastle is Australia's second oldest city. Why erase the name? Using a name like 'Hunter City' for Newcastle is like renaming Sydney as 'Cumberland City'. The name 'Hunter City' is simply a nonsense. The obvious name is 'Greater Newcastle'.

In view of the proposed amalgamation of the local government areas of Newcastle City and Port Stephens, the name 'Greater Newcastle' is even more apposite for 'Growing Newcastle into Greater Newcastle'.

#### **2. *Revitalise Newcastle***

NICRA members were advised that the *Draft Growing Hunter City* planning document builds on the existing *Revitalise Newcastle* strategic planning document. *Revitalise Newcastle* generally refers to development in the old city, stretching along

the long Hunter Street corridor. This strategy focuses on three “nodes” or hubs for development – East End, Civic and West End.

However, the overall *Revitalise Newcastle* document is not complete nor has it been released. While aspects of it are known, including the use of light rail, the proposed light rail route and the revised GPT/UrbanGrowth NSW plan for the heritage *Newcastle East End* project, little else is known about this major urban renewal development plan.

### **3. Transparency, Probity and Governance**

(i) The proposed Hunter Regional Plan Co-ordinating and Monitoring Committee, makes no provision for holding meetings in public or developing processes for transparency and accountability in decision making.

(ii) There is insufficient detail in either document about important bureaucratic mechanisms and safeguards to deal with governance issues. They include Conflict of Interest and improper developer influence. They are serious ongoing issues in NSW. They must be addressed to ensure that fair, open and transparent planning decisions are made in the interests of the broader community.

(iii) The Committee has no representation from Education and Health departments.

(iv) Most of the statistical work that the Committee plans to do, is already carried out by the Hunter Research Foundation.

### **4. Coal Seam Gas Exploration**

In the *Draft Hunter Regional Plan*, NICRA was astonished to find on pages 22 and 23, figures 22 and 23, that gas and petroleum exploration and production lease applications were to continue in the Greater Newcastle City area. NICRA strongly recommends that the Greater Newcastle City area be removed from lease applications.

There has been no community consultation about CSG exploration or drilling in Newcastle or Greater Newcastle, yet it appears to be a significant planning item in the draft *Hunter* and *Growing Hunter City* planning documents.

Coal Seam Gas (CSG) exploration and drilling should not be allowed in Newcastle suburbs or those in Greater Newcastle as this form of mining activity is highly intrusive and inappropriate in residential contexts.

CSG mining has a poor record when it comes to protecting the environment. Evidence suggests that CSG exploration and drilling has a very large and often harmful impact on the lives of affected residents by nearby drilling. If allowed, this industry in the suburbs will seriously degrade urban public amenity and destroy the lifestyle and amenity of many residents.

The environmental impact of CSG exploration and drilling is relatively unknown as there has been insufficient research into this subject yet there is wide-spread evidence suggesting CSG exploration and drilling is very harmful to the environment.

This planning proposal should be rejected outright.

## **5. Very Fast Train Service between Sydney and Newcastle**

NICRA identifies a fast, efficient train service between the state's two largest cities, Sydney and Newcastle, as essential. While funds may not be available at present, this should nevertheless be a major long-term plan because it will have a profoundly beneficial impact on business, employment, educational, health and tourism opportunities in Newcastle and the lower Hunter region.

Land required for a future Very Fast Train rail corridor should be identified now and quarantined for this purpose. This should be a long-term infrastructure objective of all NSW governments, and the NSW Transport and Planning Departments.

## **6. Redevelopment of Newcastle Art Gallery**

Neither document considers the re-development of Newcastle's leading cultural institution, the Newcastle Art Gallery.

- (i) The Gallery is a major public art museum and a significant cultural asset for the city, the Hunter and State of NSW.
- (ii) The Gallery was founded in 1957 and has a significant permanent art collection carefully built up over almost six decades. Today it is second in importance to the State's permanent art collection held by the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney.
- (iii) The Gallery should be a focal point for a Hunter tourism, culture and Greater Newcastle education strategies.

The Art Gallery traditionally attracts visitors from a broad spectrum of society, spanning artists, art students, art teachers and lecturers (K-tertiary), art lovers and collectors, specialists, tourists - local, regional and national, families and Indigenous people. Disadvantaged community members, including people with physical and medical disabilities also access this important collection. Many of these visitors stay on in the city and spend money at Newcastle businesses.

The Gallery also offers valuable education programs and resources for school students from Kindergarten to Year 12 and tertiary level, and for teachers and lecturers, saving many school students, teachers and parents from having to travel to Sydney to experience great art first hand.

## **7. New Primary School in Newcastle East.**

The dramatic population growth in the Newcastle East area since 2007 has created an urgent need for a new primary school. NICRA recommends that the Newcastle Railway Station be adaptively reused for a new primary school for 300 pupils.