

Container terminal a 100-year opportunity

Don't let politicians make the city miss the tide, writes **Greg Cameron**.

THE Newcastle BHP Steelworks closure program between 1996 and 1999 involved an unprecedented three-way partnership between local councils, local unions and the local business community.

A group called The Common Purpose Group was formed and its report was called, appropriately enough, *Plan for Jobs*.

That same unity of purpose is required again if the region, and all of northern NSW, is to reclaim its opportunity for a container terminal on the former steelworks site.

Twelve years ago, University of Newcastle researchers led the community collaboration.

Headed by Professor Roy Green, then director of the university's Employment Studies Centre, rigorous methods for community-managed economic growth were adopted.

There were three components.

The first was the nurturing of individuals to establish their own business or to expand existing businesses. Dr Ernesto Sirolli, whose ideas formed the basis for the state government's Business Enterprise Centre program, was engaged to advise the group.

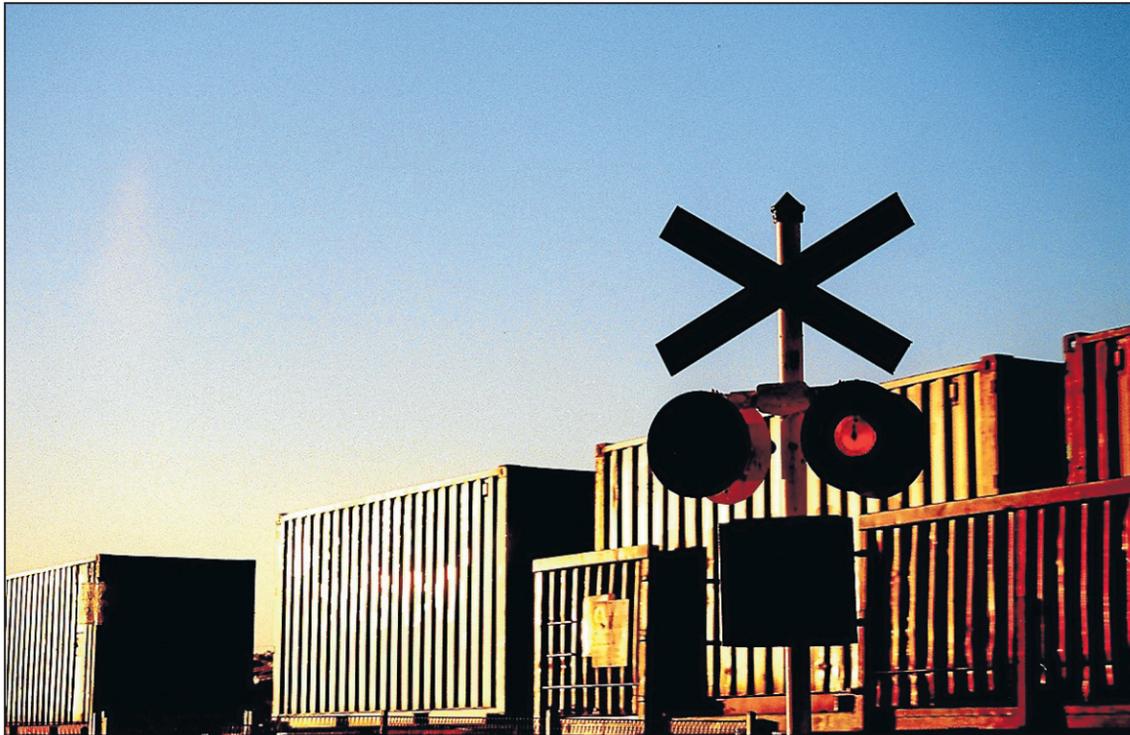
Under Dr Sirolli's program, teams of civic leaders were formed to support a full-time facilitator who in turn provided mentoring for individuals, for free and for as long as it took to succeed.

The second was the use of industry cluster research to identify supply chain linkages and develop mutual growth strategies between firms (which has since been pursued, to some extent, in the Hunter).

The third was the identification of new infrastructure opportunities that would create jobs either in their own right, or by removing impediments to businesses expanding.

By giving the community a small ownership in the capital investment projects, dividends were applied towards funding the whole program.

As the enterprise facilitation and cluster development projects led to new capital investments, including infrastructure, the program became self-funding and self-sustaining.



OBVIOUS: The freight benefits of a container terminal on the Steelworks site would extend around Australia.

A not-for-profit trading company – Hunter At Work – was established within the University of Newcastle. It was managed by a board comprising representatives of councils, unions, the business community and the university. It was dissolved in 2000.

But one of its legacies is a regional transport plan that includes using the former steelworks site for a container terminal.

That plan, devised by Hunter transport planner Mr Len Regan, was a prime example of what Hunter At Work was all about.

Mr Regan's plan included major initiatives for urban redevelopment in both Newcastle and Lake Macquarie, using government-owned degraded land along the existing rail corridor, after the heavy line was removed and replaced with a modern network of fast, efficient light rail.

However, the state government did not want the heavy rail bypass of Newcastle, which became known as the Fassifern-Hexham link.

In February 2011, the NSW government finally declared the plan to use the existing rail line to

be commercially unviable.

The state and federal governments' joint announcement this week of improvements to rail freight access between Sydney and Newcastle excluded the critical Fassifern-Hexham link.

The cost of this 23-kilometre line is now about \$200 million. With the Sydney-end improvements, a rail-based container terminal in Newcastle will have better access to Sydney from the north than Port Botany has from the south.

A third infrastructure project was urban water supply – using the roof of every building as a water catchment.

The rainwater tank project brings together superannuation funds to provide low interest finance to households; local councils to secure a voluntary loan to a property owner as a local council rate; and every household in Australia using their own rain water as their lowest cost source of water supply.

Twelve years after Hunter At Work was conceived, all of its elements are still alive.

Crunch time has come over the container terminal decision.

With a united effort, the Hunter community can overcome the self-interest of big government and big business by agitating the state government for a fair and rigorous examination of the true potential of the steelworks site.

The extraordinary opportunity to use Australia's best port site comes along about once every 100 years. It deserves proper evaluation.

How many jobs will result from providing northern NSW and southern Queensland with direct rail access to a low cost export port? What are the economic and social implications of removing freight from Newcastle's rail system and replacing it with world-class light rail, paid for by converting degraded government-owned land along the rail corridor into valuable real estate? If it is good enough for the NSW government to offer Port Botany to the private sector for long term lease, why not Newcastle?

Greg Cameron is a former manager of external affairs at BHP, Newcastle.

Hard to know what readers need to know

PUBLIC interest journalism is a confusing concept.

You might think it means journalists writing about things they consider to be in the public's interest to know.

On the other hand, maybe it could just mean journalists providing what they assume or accept that the public wants.

Personally, I always thought it was mostly the first, with a bit of the second from time to time.

The real fun in journalism is finding out things that many readers might not know or might not have thought about, and presenting it to them in a way that we hope might both interest them and leave them better informed.

But often enough, whether we like it or not, journalists have to put aside their own opinions about what's worthwhile and write what they know a lot of readers will be keen on.



I would hate to be camping outside the door of that kid just back from Bali after his well-publicised brush with Indonesian law.

But much as I recoil from the idea – and much as I doubt the social value in grabbing quotes from his stressed-out family – I have to admit that you, newspaper readers, will be drawn to a story that offers insights into that family's ordeal.

A newspaper that chose to ignore that story would be letting its rivals steal a march on a big-selling story. That's a bad business decision.

The trouble is, of course, that worrying all the time about what the public wants before you write anything creates its own sort of trap.

If you've been paying any attention to the Leveson Inquiry in the UK into Rupert Murdoch's *News of the World* and its journalistic practices, you might have seen the recent evidence from former deputy features editor Paul McMullan.

You could almost feel sorry for this bloke, dumped in the muck by his bosses who are scrambling to deny they ever knew anything about the paper's phone-tapping and privacy-invasive practices.

Except some of his comments were just too hard to stomach.

Mr McMullan told the inquiry that the public interest amounted to the number of copies of the newspaper sold. Circulation, he said, defined the public interest.

Defending the invasion of privacy that reporters practised, he said: "You have to appeal to what the reader wants. I was simply serving their need."

When it came to journalists hacking into people's phones – for example, that belonging to murdered teenager Milly Dowler – Mr McMullan excused the practice.

"The hacking of Milly Dowler's phone was not a bad thing for a well-meaning journalist, who is only trying to find the girl, to do. Our intentions were good, our intentions were honourable," he said.

Mr McMullan went further, declaring that "privacy is for paedos". "In 21 years of invading people's privacy I've never found anybody doing any good," Mr McMullan said.

No doubt if I intercepted enough people's emails I'd get some stories that would interest the public.

But I doubt you'd think it was in the public's interest for me to do so.

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Got it fig-ured out

THE Laman Street fig trees are finally set for the chop after Newcastle Labor councillors effectively conceded defeat yesterday in the long-running and costly dispute. Once again, fig-related news prompted a torrent of reader reaction.

"To prolong this situation any further is a waste of ratepayers' money and resources," the councillors said. Well d'oh! Bring 'em down!

dally-girl

Do you people know how many homeless people and children that money could have helped? It's a total waste of taxpayer money.

Debbie smith

Hopefully it's the end, for the trees, and for everyone on the council.

ckb

So the final tools used by council to get this past elected councillors – bleed the city dry of funds under delegated authority – has worked. I hope they all have offices facing the street so they have to look for years at what they have done.

Director of truth

Every major city on the planet is nurturing and treasuring their mature city trees. Here we have groups of people chanting "chop, chop, chop". It's embarrassing.

JD

Newcastle must never again permit a small group of activists to frustrate the legal operation of council and squander ratepayers' funds.

Mac

Newcastle City council has wasted so much money. This dispute could have gracefully and cheaply been put to rest if council went through with Barry O'Farrell and Tim Owen's proposal. Here's hoping they don't leave arse prints on the front of the council doors when they slam shut in September.

Hill Resident

It ain't over yet, folks.

Da Yuehan

Just leave the bloody figs alone.

Green Froggy

ONLINE poll



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