CPR Inc Public Accounts Committee - Media coverage log 20 Oct 2009

CPR Inc referenced some comments made through the media in its additional submission of evidence to the Public Accounts Committee on 19 October 2009.

We wish for the committee to accept as further evidence this log of media coverage, specifically clarifying that Chris Peters of the ACT Chamber of Commerce made comments to the media on 28 May 2008 (not 27 May 2008 as previously stated).

20 May 2008 – Canberra Times Editorial: $2b project should not be delayed

27 May 2008 – WIN Television news: Joint press conference on downsizing

27 May 2008 – ABC Television news: Joint press conference on downsizing

28 May 2008 – WIN Television news: Business community speaks out

28 July 2008 – WIN Television news: PAC Inquiry request of Auditor-General

13 October 2009 – Canberra Times: Fears on planning overhaul; Stanhope's 'super agency' must avoid conflict: expert

13 October 2009 – Canberra Times Editorial: The duty to guard our city's heritage

The Canberra Times
canberratimes.com.au

$2b project should not be delayed

EDITORIAL
20/05/2008 11:51:00 AM

A $2billion development in Hume comprising a data and communications facility (supported by a 210-megawatt power station) delivering 300-400 full-time jobs might be considered a welcome addition to Canberra's economic landscape but not by those people who live in the Tuggeranong suburbs of Macarthur and Fadden.

Some houses in this area are about a kilometre (or less) from the proposed site of the gas-fired power station (with its 35m tall exhaust stacks) and data centre to be known as Canberra Technology City, and residents claim they will be subject to unacceptable levels of noise and pollution.

Indeed, some argue the proximity of the power station to dwellings could force down real estate values in the area by as much as $100,000 a house.

While generally supportive of the data centre, the residents want a greater analysis of the pollution issues, and if this reveals unacceptable risks, then they want the development shifted away from its proposed site and closer to Hume, which is zoned for light-industrial developments.

They have the support of the ACT Liberal Party, too, with MLA Steve Pratt having said, "if push comes to shove, I will chain myself to a bulldozer to stop this going ahead".

ActewAGL, which will run the power station and oversee its construction, has already conducted an acoustic analysis of the noise likely to reach houses in the two nearby suburbs. It claims noise levels on two of the streets closest to the site, which is adjacent to the Mugga Lane tip, will be no louder than 35 decibels during the day and 7dB at night, and, if needs be, this could be ameliorated with the installation of noise barriers.

An assessment of likely air pollutants from the power station when all generators are running continuously (which is expected to be only 20 per cent of the time) has concluded that the concentration of nitrogen oxide emissions at ground level will be within maximum allowable levels set by the NSW Environment Protection Authority.

There will be other environmental impacts, of course, including the construction of a high-pressure natural gas pipeline and overhead high-voltage power lines to the site, the building of the centre itself, and the consumption of about 600 megalitres of water by the steam turbines every year.

Residents are unmoved by the apparently sound environment impact studies, and perhaps their skepticism (and cynicism) is understandable given ActewAGL chief executive officer John Mackay's determination to do "whatever it takes" to see the power station is built on the Government's preferred site.

Those with longer memories will recall ActewAGL has long toyed with the idea of building a gas-fired power in Canberra to boost energy self-sufficiency in the ACT.

The new data centre, with its requirement for secure, uninterrupted electricity supply, is the perfect vehicle to achieve this, and the spare capacity can be sold to the national grid at times of peak load.

Not only is gas regarded as the cleanest of all fossil fuels for generating electricity (and the Tuggeranong plant will use the latest technology to ensure the lowest possible nitrogen oxide emissions), the utility has an elegant solution to the question of supply: it will buy its own gas.

There is nothing under the Territory Plan that rules out the Mugga Lane site being chosen for this purpose, and indeed its relative isolation (security being a big consideration of any data centre) was probably as much a factor as its proximity to gas pipelines and transmission lines.

Opponents claim the power station does not comply with ACT noise zoning standards, and that pollution measures only just meet EPA standards. At a weekend public meeting, ActewAGL promised to make public two new air and noise pollution studies, but regardless of what these might reveal, opposition is likely to continue, if only because many people regard it as inappropriate to site a plant this large a size within a kilometre of a residential area.

That the Kingston power house, a dirty coal-fired power station, was tolerated for years by nearby residents without complaint might lead some to conclude that Macarthur and Fadden residents are being a bit precious, or that their situation is unique.

In fact, there are at least two other gas-fired power stations, one at Laverton in Victoria and the other at Pelican Point in South Australia, which are relatively close to residential areas.

Growing concerns about carbon dioxide emissions from current coal-fired power stations means many more small gas-fired generators are likely to be built around Australian cities in the decades to come though probably not as close to houses as the old Kingston power station.

The benefits to Canberra of the data centre and power station are undeniable, and though Tuggeranong residents are right to insist their concerns be heard, they, and their backers, should not be allowed to delay the project.

27 May 2008 WIN Television news

Full media clip may be viewed here:

http://tinyurl.com/WIN270508

Coverage of joint press conference between Chief Minister Jon Stanhope, Andrew Campbell (TRE), Michael Costello (ActewAGL, formerly ACTEW) and Brooke O'Mahoney (ActewAGL)

Transcript (in part):

Geraldine Nordfeldt (reporter): "ActewAGL has had a last minute change of heart, after receiving more than 400 complaints the controversial Macarthur data centre is being downsized"

Michael Costello: "We have listened as hard as we can we've put foeward a scaled down proposal which we think is way under any conceivable er levels of er problems"

Jon Stanhope: "I think its a tremendous outcome it's tremendous I believe for the community their views have been listened to that the company has responded

"There is no room in the Labor party's view in my Government's view for politicians to be involved in those fundamental decisions in relation to land use"

27 May 2008 ABC Television news

Full media clip may be viewed here:

http://tinyurl.com/ABC270508

Coverage of joint press conference between Chief Minister Jon Stanhope, Andrew Campbell (TRE), Michael Costello (ActewAGL, formerly ACTEW) and Brooke O'Mahoney (ActewAGL)

Transcript (in part):

Virginia Haussegger (anchor): "Residents' protests appear to have paid off, the gas-fired power station proposed for Tuggeranong has been dramatically scaled back after meeting staunch opposition from local people. The consortium behind the $2 billion plant says it doesn't want to upset Canberra residents"

Michael Costello: "We listened, we listened extremely carefully and we've paid attention and we've responded."

Jon Stanhope: "That's an amazing er concession by the company on the base of it listening to this community about what this community er thinks."

Julie Doyle (reporter): "The Chief Minister says he didn't influence the decision, but the opposition thinks otherwise."

28 May 2008 WIN Television news

Full media clip may be viewed here:

http://tinyurl.com/WIN280508

Business community response; Chris Peters (ACT Chamber of Commerce) blaming 'NIMBYs' for loss of essential second power source for all of Canberra and Chris Faulks (Canberra Business Council) about ACT being open for business

Transcript (in part):

Geraldine: "The timing of ACTEW's change of heart has also been questioned"

Dr Deb Foskey: "Certainly this announcement indicates it's an election year and the concerns of the residents have been taken on board"

Geraldine Nordfeldt (reporter): While the back-down has been billed as a win for people power, the business community says the residents in Tuggeranong have cost the rest of Canberra the chance to benefit from a power station"

Chris Peters (ACT Chamber of Commerce): "A standby power supply to assist Canberrans in blackout times will not be available and that affects all of us and I'm concerned that a small group of people with a not in my back yard issue have had an impact on the whole of Canberra"

28 July 2008 WIN Television news

Full media clip may bew viewed here:

http://tinyurl.com/WIN280708

Public Accounts Committee request for Inquiry by Auditor-General

Transcript (in part):

Jon Stanhope: "To look back and say well this is a cynical exercise because we didn't like the outcome in this particular case denies the fact that we're looking to improve we're wanting to engage with the people of Canberra on this fundamental issue of how we consult"

Zed Seselja: "It's a long list of failed consultations and examples of where a government didn't listen to the community and in fact in some of those cases misled the community about their intentions"

Geraldine Nordfeldt (reporter): "Meantime the Public Accounts Committee has written to the Auditor-General asking her to investigate the process behind the decision to locate a power station and data centre in Macarthur

"Dr Foskey says despite the FOI Act crucial documents have not been made available"

Dr Deb Foskey: "The Legislative Assembly and its members couldn't get the full information from the Government, the Auditor-General should be able to and that's why the public accounts has written to her"

Geraldine Nordfeldt (reporter): "The Chief Minister says an Inquiry is not necessary"

Jon Stanhope: "We will fully support any Inquiry that the Auditor-General wishes to undertake in relation to this particular issue but we don't see an issue there at all"

13 October 2009 Canberra Times: Fears on planning overhaul

Stanhope's 'super agency' must avoid conflict: expert

By John Thistleton
Business Editor

Planners have warned the ACT Government that its proposed "super department" to speed up development could prove a recipe for conflict in the capital.

Chief Minister Jon Stanhope announced yesterday he would establish a land and property services department to replace the Land Development Agency, which sells and develops land on behalf of the government.

The Planning Institute of Australia's ACT chapter warned that elevating a new department could put pressure on the ACT Planning and Land Authority to toe the line, and could be a recipe for conflict.

Mr Stanhope has appointed David Dawes as acting chief executive of the new body.

Mr Stanhope recruited Mr Dawes in 2007 from the Master Builders Association to expedite land releases for more affordable housing.

Mr Dawes, who has also worked in the real estate and service station industries, will oversee the merger of the Department of Territory and Municipal Services' property group and the Chief Minister's Department's strategic project facilitation group.

The Master Builders Association and ACT Property Council, both strident critics of the Land Development Agency's slow land releases, embraced Mr Dawes's appointment.

Mr Dawes will also oversee some activities of a taskforce to speed up school and social housing projects funded by the Federal Government's economic stimulus plan.

Mr Stanhope said the success of the stimulus suggested it could be applied more widely to facilitate development activity in Canberra.

But the planning institute's ACT president, Richard Johnston, said the Government's previous decision to take forward land releases from ACTPLA had been a bad move.

He asked how this latest change would affect the planning authority.

"[There] would be a temptation within a new department, with a broader range of functions and a particular objective to get land releases as quickly as possible, to try . . . to bypass the planning process if it perceives it is holding up what it is trying to do. Having the status of a department could give it that little bit more strength to put pressure on the

'I would imagine there would be a temptation within a new department with a broader range of functions and a particular objective to get land releases as quickly as possible.'

Planning Institute of Australia's ACT president Richard Johnston

planning authority to perhaps not do the most diligent job . . ." ACTPLA's chief planning executive, Neil Savery, was unavailable for comment.

Mr Stanhope said ACTPLA's role would not changed under the new arrangements. He said the Government had released land too slowly and it was time to review the annual target of 3200 blocks.

While the integrity of the planning regime needed protecting, at the same time the Government had to get on with building and growing the city, he said.

The Government formed an industry monitoring group in February to clear a backlog of development applications, and the latest policy is believed to come from within that group, which includes private sector representatives.

ACT Property Council executive director Catherine Carter said aligning property services in a central agency was an excellent move, as the industry wanted a one-stop shop.

She said the Commonwealth's ultimatum of using development opportunities or losing them applied to the private sector as well.

Master Builders Association executive director John Miller said the Government had progressively improved efficiency in planning and development. "Mr Dawes has a clear understanding of the commercial realities which confront the building industry and the manner in which the bureaucratic processes impact those realities," he said.

ACT Greens planning spokeswoman Caroline Le Couteur said if the Government was trying to flog land faster, it should not bother.

Mr Dawes worked on the proposed $2 billion gas-fired power station and data centre which was scaled down and moved after a resident backlash.

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13 October 2009 CT Editorial: The duty to guard our city's heritage

The Canberra Times
TO SERVE THE NATIONAL CITY AND THROUGH IT THE NATION

The duty to guard our city's heritage

Even before he appointed Andrew Barr as Planning Minister, replacing Simon Corbell in the portfolio, Chief Minister Jon Stanhope had developed a close interest in housing, land and planning issues in the ACT. In that year, Mr Stanhope recruited the chief executive of the Master Builders Association of the ACT, David Dawes – a long-time critic of the Land Development Agency – to oversee the Government's affordable housing strategy. Not long after Mr Corbell left the portfolio, Mr Stanhope appointed the association's former national president, John Haskins, as chairman of the Land Development Agency board, with a brief to overhaul Canberra's land release system. And yesterday, Mr Stanhope gave the clearest sign yet of his ambitions to remodel Canberra's planning approvals system when he confirmed he would create a new land and planning department. The new department will combine the functions of the Land and Development Agency with the strategic planning unit in the Chief Minister's Department, as well as parts of the Department of Territory and Municipal Services. Mr Dawes will be appointed as its acting chief executive.

The implications of this proposal for the ACT Planning and Land Authority – the statutory body charged with assessing commercial and residential developments in Canberra and with advising the Government on land, planning and building policy – are unclear at this time. However, given the tenor of Mr Stanhope's comments yesterday, it's unlikely ACTPLA will retain its overarching responsibility for approving developments. Mr Stanhope said he wanted a new culture in planning and approvals in the ACT; one which avoided "gratuitous and unnecessary delays", which understood the need for "clients" to be responded to, and which recognised that "time is money".

If this sounds as though Mr Stanhope has become a captive of the development lobby, it's important to remember that ACTPLA has been widely criticised in recent years for taking too long to approve commercial development applications. It has also been accused of bloody-mindedness towards those who questioned its decisions or complained about delays. Some believe ACTPLA's deficiencies are caused by under-resourcing, but the problems appear to be more deep-seated.

As the Minister for Business and Economic Development (among other portfolio responsibilities), Mr Stanhope has doubtless fielded many complaints from aggrieved builders and developers about these delays. He has no doubt been subjected to serious lobbying for change by organisations like the Master Builders Association and the ACT Property Council, and by Mr Dawes, who is a deputy chief executive within the Chief Minister's Department.

While Mr Stanhope may have a strong economic argument for overhauling planning processes in the ACT, he must ensure his proposal does not lead inadvertently to Canberra's architectural and land heritage being compromised or watered down by commercial pressures. The Chief Minister alluded to this responsibility yesterday, saying Canberra was the "pre-eminent planned city of the world" and that he would not put this legacy at risk. Maintaining the balance between public and private planning interests is always a difficult task for governments. Canberra has more to lose than most cities if the gates to development are opened too wide, and Mr Stanhope must not lose sight of this.