



Legislative Assembly for the
Australian Capital Territory

Standing Committee on Environment,
Planning, Transport and City Services

Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into Petition 002-25: Hawker Village shops redevelopment

Submission number: 056

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Communication Link: Woolworths Hawker Community Engagement

Introduction

As described in its report *Woolworths Hawker community engagement: Consultation and engagement process*, the consultation process undertaken by Communication Link (CL) was a methodologically flawed process, with – for example - no mechanism, such as use of a standardised form, to collect community views in a format that would allow meaningful statistical analysis.¹

In purporting to make significant statistical findings, CL's report was therefore fundamentally misleading. CL's report also failed to address relevant issues, such as the likely impacts that a full-line supermarket would have on surrounding businesses and residents, and appears highly biased in its presentation.

Recent community disquiet suggests Woolworths' plan for Hawker was not well understood during the consultation period.

There is a clear need for a fresh and meaningful consultation process to be conducted immediately, particularly as Woolworths has now released some detail of its plans for a full-line supermarket, and associated details, at Hawker.

Issues

CL's consultation process was severely flawed. For instance, there were three distinct elements to CL's consultation process – drop-ins at Hawker Place, a workshop and online submissions/comments (pages 8-11) – none of which collected participants' views in a consistent format enabling statistical analysis.

- Detailed comments on this and other issues can be provided by way of an annotated copy of CL's report.

It is not clear in what level of detail, and how consistently, CL outlined Woolworths plans for a full-line supermarket, and the alternatives (including retention of the current Woolworths Metro at Hawker and expansion of the current Woolworths Metro, short of a full-line supermarket) to consultation participants. It is noteworthy that even in its report, CL does not use consistent terminology in describing Woolworths' plans ("full-line", "full-size" and "full-scale" are used of the planned supermarket; the term "full-proposal" is also used, presumably to describe the totality of Woolworths' plan for Hawker Place, as distinct from just its plan for its supermarket).

There was limited material on-line about Woolworths' plans for Hawker at the time of 'consultation', and the question needs to be asked what so-called "supportive" consultation participants thought they were supporting.

It is not clear to what extent consultation participants were 'guided' towards supporting the 'full' option, whatever that may mean. Given other evidence of bias in CL's report (see below), it seems likely that 'guiding' took place.

¹ The report can be found at: https://woolworthshawker.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Woolworths-Hawker_consultation-and-engagement-report_FINAL_14092023_PUBLICATION.pdf

All page references are to CL's report.

Evidence of bias – In its report, CL presents Woolworths plans for Hawker in highly positive terms that are more propaganda than reality, while at the same time seeking to pigeon hole opponents as elderly reactionaries.

For instance, in planning for a full-line supermarket (and associated developments) at Hawker, Woolworths is portrayed as:

“considering a transformative project aimed at revitalising the Hawker Place shopping precinct and enhancing the related urban environment.” (page 3)

- As is only appropriate for a company acting on behalf of shareholders, Woolworths real aim will be to increase profits. The potential for improvements at Hawker Place is a by-product of that desire that needs to be worked through between Woolworths and the community.

On the other hand, opposition to Woolworths plans is effectively undermined by statements like:

“There was also recognition [a phrase connoting objective fact rather than opinion] that previous development proposals had been stalled by people who did not share the same views as those supporting a change. Feedback expressed by several community members noted that they did not want to see this happen again...” (page 13)

And:

“Community feedback focused on the removal of the existing on-grade carpark with differing views on whether an underground carpark would be acceptable. **While there was a vocal minority who expressed a desire to retain the current open air car park**, there was a larger number of comments received from people who supported utilising the space for businesses and moving parking underground or who did not mention any objection to a basement carpark but did mention parking facilities they would like included in the design.” (page 16; my bolding)

Quite apart from CL’s clearly coloured terminology, it would be interesting to see whether any meaningful statistics underpinned these statements.

CL’s bias towards’ Woolworths plans is even more firmly on display in the fact sheet on Woolworths’ Hawker project available on its website.² There it states:

“The location has a history of **change resistance** with the ACT Government previously facing a lot of community backlash over Government plans.” (my bolding; the clear implication is that change is invariably good)

Misleading use of statistics – given the varied way ‘data’ was collected, as implied above, CL’s statistical findings should be ignored. Having said that, it is noteworthy that CL’s report presents its purported statistical findings in an unduly favorable way to Woolworths plan – a sure sign of bias.

For example, in *Key Points* it is stated that:

“Feedback also indicated general support for Woolworths’ proposal to expand the precinct onto the existing open-air carpark and introduce complementary stores.” (page 3)

And the first sentence of the Overall Sentiment section of the report reads:

² <https://communicationlink.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Case-study-Woolworths-Hawker.pdf>

“The majority of views (56%) expressed by the community were supportive of part or all of the proposed development.” (page 12)

In fact, drawing from CL’s own Venn diagram on page 12 of the report, it would be equally, if not more, valid to say:

“Only 35% of community sentiment was supportive of Woolworths’ ‘full proposal’”

- Of course there are still issues as to what those deemed “supportive” by CL actually thought they were supporting, and the degree to which they were guided in their opinions by CL.

Failure to address relevant issues – When assessed against the ACT Government’s own *Good Consultation Guidelines*, CL’s consultation process and report are sadly deficient, notably falling down against the principles of being “Balanced”, “Inclusive”, “Meaningful”, “Timely”, “Transparent” and “Understandable”.³

A number of failings in CL’s report have been recently highlighted by the concerns expressed over Woolworths’ plans by Deane Russell with respect to the Belconnen Way Hotel and Apartments.

It is also notable that CL’s report does not seriously engage with likely traffic, noise and amenity impact on local residents.

- While the *Good Consultation Guidelines* were published three months after CL’s report, it seems only reasonable to assess CL’s performance against the Guidelines. That is not to say that the Guidelines are perfect – the lack of attention given in the Guidelines to collecting consultation participants’ views in a form that allows meaningful (and verifiable) statistical analysis is likely to lead to ongoing problems.

Conclusion

Given the issues with CL’s consultation process and report, I repeat the comment above that a fresh and meaningful consultation process is required around Woolworths’ plans for Hawker Place immediately.

Robert Hogan
16 April 2024

³ [file:///C:/Users/harve/New%20Documents/My%20PC%20\(DESKTOP-8GGLU14\)/Downloads/2023-779%20\(1\).PDF](file:///C:/Users/harve/New%20Documents/My%20PC%20(DESKTOP-8GGLU14)/Downloads/2023-779%20(1).PDF)