

SE News
HD **Let us see port report**
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LP
opinion OUR SAY

THE Newcastle Herald's electronic database shows I've written about 150 articles in 15 years about the on-again, off-again plans to build a container terminal on the former BHP steelworks **site** at Mayfield.

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Increasingly, as the odds against the terminal have lengthened, my reporting has centred on the efforts of former BHP public affairs officer Greg Cameron, who was part of the terminal team from the start and who remains its most outspoken advocate despite the official indifference, if not outright opposition, to the idea.

I've spent countless hours on the phone with Cameron because that's what journalists do - they talk to people - but also because he seems to be the only person sticking up for Newcastle's end in a range of port-related decisions that have favoured Port Botany and Port Kembla over the Hunter.

Though a lot of what's happened is effectively ancient history, it has come to public attention in recent weeks with the Independent Commission Against Corruption hearings that have included evidence about the 2011 election and the way that former Labor Newcastle MP Jodi McKay was undermined by forces within her own party.

As the ICAC hearings heard recently, the Herald received leaked excerpts of a NSW Treasury briefing paper that argued against a container terminal at Mayfield.

Cameron says - and I agree - that this 22-page paper should be made public in its entirety, because it's worth knowing why The Treasury was apparently working against the government policy of the day, the "three ports" policy that had Newcastle as the next container terminal after Port Botany.

At the time, Herald investigations traced the "Jodi's trucks" posters to a printer in western Sydney, and it's fair to say that the revelations at ICAC - that Buildev and Nathan Tinkler were behind their printing - came as little surprise.

At the same time, I was not surprised when Buildev's plan for a coal-loader on the **site** came to nought, even though the Carrington coal terminal has long operated from the next-door **site**, and a second loader on this side of the river might even be less environmentally disruptive than the T4 proposal still planned for the other side of the Hunter River's south arm on Kooragang **Island**.

As author and journalist Paddy Manning reported in his book on Tinkler, Boganaire, Nick Greiner, the influential Liberal Party figure and head of Infrastructure NSW, described the Mayfield coal-loader as "bloody-minded nonsense".

Three years later, the **site** remains undeveloped, the most important deep-water industrial frontage on the east coast of Australia.

And when South Australia's Whyalla steelworks closes - as it logically must, sooner or later - it is likely to become even more valuable, because iron and steel **company** Arrium (formerly OneSteel) may well opt to shut its former BHP rolling mills, effectively doubling the amount of harbour land open for redevelopment.

To go back to Cameron again, his plan for the land is conceptually simple, if somewhat breathtaking in its scope.

Move the Botany container terminals in their entirety to Newcastle. Extend Sydney Airport across the former container terminal **site**, removing the need to build a second airport at Badgerys Creek.

Build a new rail freight line from the steelworks **site** to western Sydney, connecting with a new inland container trucking terminal at Eastern Creek.

Massive tracts of industrial and transport-related land in inner western Sydney could be **sold** for high-priced housing, and the industries moved to cheaper land at Eastern Creek, taking millions of truck journeys a year out of southern Sydney streets.

The government has confirmed it leased Botany with a clause that prevented Newcastle from competing against it with a container terminal.

And the Newcastle lease is believed to contain a similar undertaking.

But if it was in both parties' interests to do a deal, is there anything to stop them talking about the possibilities?

As the **Chinese** - who control half of the Newcastle port - are wont to say, we live in interesting times . . .

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