

OPINION

EDITORIAL

Broadmeadow plan needs funding

THE ambitious government plans to establish a major sports and entertainment precinct around Hunter Stadium and build 20,000 new homes in the surrounding suburbs are a welcome boost for the city.

For the first time, a NSW government has put down on paper a shopping list of projects long seen as a priority in Newcastle, not least of which are a new entertainment centre, upgrades to Hunter Stadium and light rail to Broadmeadow. The Broadmeadow "place strategy", published on Wednesday in concert with Newcastle council, is the first detailed planning document for a project launched by the former Coalition government seven years ago.

Planning Minister Paul Scully is to be congratulated for reviving the strategy, but now comes the hard work of finding the money - the strategy says more than \$3 billion - to do it all.

Newcastle's inner-city urban renewal

project, including the light rail, famously went ahead in ad hoc manner without a document like the one made public on Wednesday. Not everyone regards the tram and Honeysuckle as a success.

The Broadmeadow strategy sets out approximate funding timelines for myriad projects, from raising Lambton and Griffiths roads to cater for flood risks in 2050 to building a regional indoor aquatic centre.

One of its most welcome goals is to establish an entertainment precinct around the stadium and a new indoor arena next door.

Hunter Stadium stacks up reasonably well as a regional arena hosting national league sport and international concerts, but it is not supported by the bars, restaurants, hotels and residential areas that surround big stadiums in other parts of the world. Crowds arrive in cars, watch the game, then leave.

Knights and Jets fans, concert-goers, tourists and future Newcastle National

Basketball League club supporters will appreciate a lively neighbourhood to enjoy before and after events.

Of perhaps more pressing need are the apartments the area could provide for thousands of people in a city struggling with rising house prices and a tight rental market.

The new strategy needs some tweaks, including bringing forward the 20- to 30-year timeline for the light rail extension.

In 2020, the former government reluctantly released a summary of a business case for a light rail extension to John Hunter Hospital which suggested the city was too small and too addicted to cars to justify the project.

But that was before the population started to grow more rapidly. Depositing 40,000 people and new venues in the Broadmeadow area should give the Minns government reason to revisit the idea sooner, even if the line does not run to the hospital.

The government has jumped aboard

the "transport-oriented development" bandwagon, pushing through new housing density rules around 37 train stations.

Broadmeadow is not one of these, presumably because the new place strategy supersedes that program, but it will make no sense if the feds and their High Speed Rail Authority decide to run a Sydney bullet train to anywhere but Broadmeadow Station.

Imagine spending \$3 billion to bring in 40,000 people only to have a high-speed line bypass the city.

The 30-year vision will need to bring along the sports clubs and community organisations that now occupy the Hunter Park land, including Broadmeadow Magic, the show association, harness club, Newcastle Basketball and District Park tennis centre.

This promises to be a messy process unless genuine consultation, forward planning and buckets of money are in the mix.

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GREAT POTENTIAL Bureaucracy stifling crucial unexplored gas field

PEP11 too valuable to be treated like a political football

Tony Maiuto

TWENTY-SIX kilometres off the coast of Newcastle lies the most talked about and politicised gas field in Australia's history.

Petroleum Exploration Permit 11, or PEP11, is perhaps the most significant unexplored gas field Australia has at its doorstep, and it is being stifled by bureaucracy.

Even for those who know nothing about gas exploration, PEP11 will sound familiar, unfortunately for all the wrong reasons.

In 2022, then prime minister Scott Morrison made a political decision that would forever be known as the 'secret ministries'. This decision allowed Morrison to be secretly sworn in to a range of ministries unbeknown to his colleagues, including the ministry for resources. This plan would allow for the power to decide the fate of PEP11 to rest on his shoulders, rather than where it should have: with then resources minister Keith Pitt.

The plan was enacted, and Morrison, in a bold and desperate move to win votes along the east coast of Sydney, pandered to a small, vocal minority and denied PEP11 in a very public press conference on a Terrigal beach.

The PEP11 permit-holder appealed against this decision and the court found that Morrison was guilty of a number of questionable actions and, as a result, quashed the denial and ordered PEP11 to be reviewed and decided upon according to the law.

Morrison's government lost not only those seats he was trying to save, but the election.

Australia has arguably the world leader when it comes to assessing exploration permits, and this regulatory body, known as the National Offshore Petroleum Titles Administrator (NOPTA), was asked to once again review PEP11 and provide a recommendation to the now Labor government.

It has been established under FOI that NOPTA's original recommendation to the Morrison government was to approve the exploration permit. This is standard practice, and a number of permits are approved each year so Australia can continue to explore for crucial resources and keep the lights on.

NOPTA reviewed this permit for a second time and, while the recommendation of this



subsequent review is confidential, one can assume that a further recommendation of approval has been forwarded to the now ALP government.

Fast forward more than 12 months since the court ruling, and Australia finds itself held to ransom by a bureaucracy that refuses to act in the national interest.

The approval process requires that the NOPTA recommendation first go to the NSW Minister for Finance and Natural Resources, Courtney Houssos, for review and judgement. That outcome is then sent to federal Resources Minister Madeline King, who has the final say on approval or denial of this permit.

But here's the catch. In the middle of a cost-of-living crisis where energy prices are

astronomical, there is no timeframe for either state or federal ministers to provide a decision on the permit. As such, the permit sits in a sea of political and bureaucratic red tape while, in the sea, gas continues to seep out of the seabed where the exploration is to take place.

NSW does not produce any of its own gas, relying on Queensland to do its heavy lifting. This is despite having a potential natural gas resource on its doorstep.

The NSW government, rather than assist the process of gas supply to the state, recently passed a bill prohibiting any exploration infrastructure such as pipelines from being built within 5 kilometres of its shoreline.

The federal minister who has the ability and authority to require a timely decision

from its state counterpart, sits idly by while families struggle with soaring heating and cooling bills.

The question needs to be asked. Why is PEP11, which has the potential to supply our domestic gas markets for years to come, being treated like a political football, rather than the amazing natural resource that it could be?

I challenge the government to do what is right for Australia and show the leadership it was voted in to provide by putting bias and politics aside and administering a decision on PEP11 in accordance with the law and national interest.

Tony Maiuto is a shareholder in BPH, which owns 36 per cent rights to the exploration permit