

# SYDNEY'S 'TOASTER' BUILDING – AN INTRUDER IN DISTINGUISHED COMPANY

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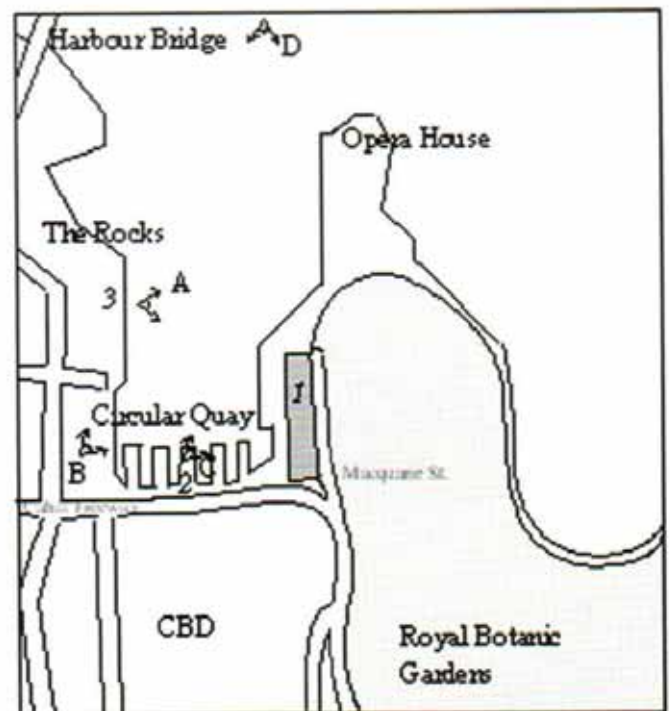
## ABSTRACT

A city's skyline is defined by structures that often acquire the status of icons and landmarks. While these icons generally provide a sense of place to the community helping it to identify with the built environment, certain additions to the skyline may be unpopular and may take away from this sense of place and belonging. Most Sydneysiders believed that the 'Toaster' would visually "intrude" into the city's skyline, partially block out public access to some cherished views and interfere with the visual space of the familiar icons that form the city's skyline. Having followed proper and appropriate development approval process, however, the developer could successfully withstand a lengthy community protest and negative media campaign aimed at blocking the development. However, the community opinion created its own pressures in the shape of options and imperatives for the various actors involved in the planning and development control process and brought to light various short-comings of the planning system that allowed an unpopular development to proceed.

The following paper touches upon some of the major issues related to this saga and presents facts in a case-study fashion. It is hoped the case-study will shed light on the nature of the community's response that is generated against negatively perceived development and the potential impact of community sentiment on the planning process. It is also hoped to learn some useful lessons from the Sydney experience so that we may better utilize the community sentiment as a resource in shaping our cities for the better.

## INTRODUCTION

This paper sets out to describe the East Circular Quay development controversy that remained a hot topic for discussion and public anger for most of the last decade. For Sydneysiders the topic kept on resurfacing in the media and from time to time the community was mobilized to express their concerns. The importance of the site's location could not be exaggerated. East Circular Quay, lies not only within the CBD, it is located at the very heart of Sydney, surrounded by the city's (and indeed national) icons such as the Sydney Harbour Bridge and the Opera House and the Royal Botanic Gardens (Map - 1).



Map - 1: Location Plan

Not on Scale



It is easy to understand, therefore, the widespread concern and intense passion the development aroused within the urban community.

Sydneysiders were quick to dub the building that eventuated from the controversial development a 'toaster' and 'an eyesore' and personified the building as 'a bad conversationalist' because it is neither restrained nor polite to "ensure that the Opera House maintained its star role by dominating the conversation"[1]. Add to this a general feeling of mistrust of the planning system and some suspicion that the city planning authorities may have been caught napping, and you have the ingredients for a fiery media campaign.

This paper takes a quick look at some aspects of the controversy and tries to draw some conclusions from the experience. The controversy has had many twists and turns and there are numerous aspects and interpretations of the events and facts. This paper, by no means, attempts at providing a comprehensive analysis.

## 1 - THE CONTEXT

**HISTORY OF THE SITE:** The actual controversial development of Bennelong Apartments, dubbed the 'Toaster', is sited on the eastern flank of the Circular Quay. It is situated within a stone's throw of the Rocks area, the site of the very first buildings of the white settlers in Australia; nowadays a popular shopping area for the tourists.

The name of the area to the east of Circular Quay and of this particular development eventually marks the fact that a hut was constructed there for Bennelong, an Aborigine befriended by Governor Philip. This hut is believed to be the first European building erected on the site where cattle from the 'First Fleet' had landed two years earlier.

The site acquired a high status when Governor Macquarie set out to incorporate this area into the "Governor's domain" and between 1813 and 1816 his wife Elizabeth supervised the landscaping of the foreshores up to Bennelong Point. Amenities were included in the area for the use of 'proper' people. A fort, more symbolic than functional, was also added to the area by 1821.

In the years to follow, i.e. during 1830's, the commercial importance of the location led to the construction of the Government House and the 'Semi Circular Quay'. During the 1840's, East Circular Quay roadway was also completed. But due to the colonial economy's recession, development activities in the area did not quite take off for the next ninety years or so and wool stores and warehouses remained predominant in the area of East Circular Quay.

By the turn of the century, Circular Quay was mostly handling commuter ferries rather than ships. A tram depot replaced the old fort at the site in 1902. In 1909 there was renewed concern with the state of the area as the wool establishments moved their headquarters out of the area, leaving behind the warehouse functions.

By the 1950's and 1960's the area's role as a transport node for the city was firmly established with the Circular Quay train station completed in 1936 and the Cahill Expressway opened. This saw the replacement of the old wool warehouses by a new generation of buildings as part of an 'explosive' growth in building activity in the area.

In 1959 the tram depot was demolished to make way for the world famous Sydney Opera House which was opened in 1973.

**HEIGHT RESTRICTIONS:** The city's first steel-frame skyscraper, the Culwalla Chambers, set the height restriction of 45m. for Sydney, back in 1912, which remained unchanged until 1957. The removal of height restrictions in 1957 allowed and encouraged the Sydney skyline to grow upwards. The Sydney skyline could boast of the 136m high, 45-storey, Park Regis Apartments and the 170m high Australia Square Tower, back in 1968. By 1977, however, MLC Centre set the height limit and at present the highest building is the 300m AMP Centrepoint Tower.

The obsession with height of buildings was reflected in the fact that developers would often resort to attaching spires, etc., to gain further height for their buildings. The AWA Tower, for example, has a height of 55m with an additional 9m plant room top structure and a 46m 'eiffel tower mast'[2].



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It was against this background that “the City introduced a Height Control Plan (BL23) in 1967. Under this plan, heights varied across the city, but for East Circular Quay there were no restrictions at all”[3]. This fact was to later add to the controversy surrounding the design proposals for the Bennelong Apartments development.

**SLACK DEVELOPMENT CONTROLS:** The rush of the redevelopment activity during the 1960’s spurred to a degree by slackened development controls, such as relaxed height restrictions, which also saw the loss of many old buildings in the CBD area of Sydney. A growing community concern at the loss of built heritage led to an organized community resistance and an eventual outcome in Woolloomooloo, perceived as a victory of the working class community over the middle class developers. The ‘green bans’<sup>1</sup> [4] (work bans on construction sites) of the late 1960’s woke up the city administrators and planners to the reality of community’s concerns against the loss of built heritage. Although the ‘green bans’ never grew into an established political movement, it taught the community to express their opinion and be heard. The ‘green bans’ also contributed to the imposition of height restrictions over the city in 1967.

As height limits were put in place in different parts of the city, one would have expected vigilance from planners and proper preventive development control put in place for sites of commercial and heritage significance such as the Circular Quay area. Despite the history, however, as no height controls were specified for the East Circular Quay, developers could get approval for development applications for heights of around 70 metres at Bennelong Point.

## 2 - DEVELOPMENT CONSENT AUTHORITY

In Australia, local government is a creature of the State Government and does not have constitutional powers other than those granted to it by the State. Where the Council does not comply with the State Government policies, the Minister has the right to appoint a Planning Commission to take over the Council’s function.

The consent authority responsible for this site has changed a number of times. Sydney City Council has had a turbulent history, with the Council dissolved and replaced by Planning Commissioners appointed by the State Minister between 1977 to 1989. This meant that local government comprising of elected local Councilors and headed by the Lord Mayor of Sydney did not have the final say in approving or rejecting a development proposal during this period. The consent authority was shifted to Planning Commissioners appointed by the State Minister for Planning. In 1989 the authority was transferred again to the newly formed Central Sydney Planning Commission (CSPC). All the three original Development Applications (DAs) submitted for the various portions of the site between 1986 and 1988 were approved by Planning Commissioners and not by the Council.

Since 1989 the CSPC has been operating as the consent authority for regional or State significant development. The CSPC includes the Council Mayor as well as the State Minister’s staff.

The Central Sydney Planning Committee was charged with assessing development applications for sites and projects of regional significance. Soon after its setting up, the Planning Commission

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<sup>1</sup> The term ‘green bans’ has its roots in workers’ strike calls to show solidarity with the working class residents of Woolloomooloo whose homes were threatened with demolition due to planned up-market redevelopment. The workers of the building and construction industry were urged not to demolish other fellow workers’ homes and prevent the developers from proceeding with their plans. Initially referred to as ‘black bans’, they were seen as the workers’ struggle in a ‘class war’ against the capitalists (investors/ developers). With time as this struggle received broader community support, its objective broadened to include environmental protection and conservation of Sydney’s cultural and natural heritage. By this time the term ‘green bans’ came to be used to refer to community protest actions aimed at protecting the natural and cultural heritage of Sydney from the pressures of over-development. The ‘green bans’ not only serve as a milestone in Sydney’s planning history in terms of community empowerment and its role in heritage conservation, it also marks a milestone in the integration of community consultation in the planning process being the first instance when an Advocacy Planner was employed by the government.



set about to establish urban design guidelines for the East Circular Quay site as it was already generating a growing community interest.

### 3 - THE EVENTS

**DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS BY CML:** An insurance company, Colonial Mutual Life (CML) set about consolidating its holdings along the site and by 1989 it had acquired all five properties on the strip of land running north-south, bounded by the promenade of East Circular Quay and Macquarie Street. Between 1986 and 1988 CML had obtained consent for its development applications for each of the three sites in its possession from the two successive State Ministers for Planning. Development applications for the site were approved with an allowable height of 68.4 metres while the site to the south of the strip (known as the Mirvac site) was approved a height of 71.1 metres.

In 1989, CML produced a design proposal for the entire site which grossly violated the design guidelines. The proposal consisted of a 30-storey block reaching a height of 85m and had excessive floor area. This design was, however, not submitted for approval.

In 1991, CML lodged a development application (DA) for Bennelong Centre, having a 17-storey office block with retail ground floor, having a total height of 71.7 m. This proposed development stretched northward out from the high skyline of the CBD and reached out towards the Opera House.

In so doing, it threatened to cut off visual access to the Royal Botanic Gardens from the ferry wharves, and the train station of the Circular Quay and promenade around it, as well as from the Rocks area.

Around this time the newly formed Central Sydney Planning Commission (CSPC) which had assumed the role of the consent authority started promoting design guidelines for the site. It proposed a sloping height restriction starting from 57m at the Opera House end rising up to 71.7m at the far end. It thus found the development application in violation of the guidelines.

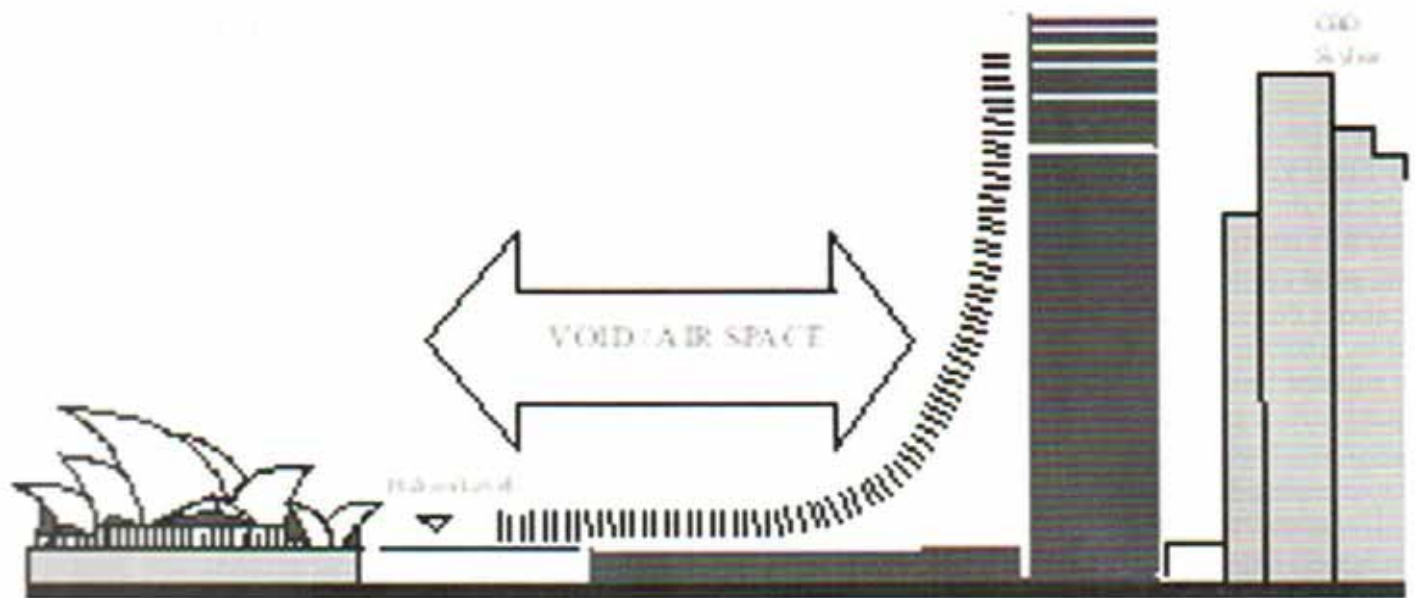
This created a unique situation. The developer was under pressure as the original DA approvals for a portion of the site were likely to lapse if construction was not initiated within 5 years of approval. The CSPC was under pressure to develop design guidelines that could do justice to the site and could be acceptable to the community as well as the developer.

At this juncture, around the end of 1991, the Mayor and the State Minister intervened and announced an 'ideas quest' to review the design guidelines for the site. By early 1992 over 200 submissions were received and revised design guidelines were formulated by August 1992. The sloping height restrictions were replaced by a string of buildings of similar height and with an emphasis on improved physical access to the public around the site.

**THE QUEST FOR IDEAS:** A host of ideas and design suggestions were presented by Architects and members of the general community, at the ideas quest, that ranged from leaving the site vacant to allowing high towering buildings on the site. The majority of ideas and suggestions received during the ideas quest and that were picked up by the media could be roughly classified into two types. The first type were those which envisioned the development comprising of a low height structure of up to 3 storeys extending from the Opera House end and a tower rising up to about 85 metres at the far (southern) end (Figure 1). The focus of these design concepts was to provide sufficient air space and a clear skyline to the Opera House. The three-storey limit reflected the height of the Opera House's podium and that of the sandstone outcrop of the botanic garden. As a compensation for the lost potential to the developer due to limiting the development height at the northern end, it was suggested to allow a greater height at the southern end of the site. A high structure at this far end from the Opera House could be justified as it would merge into the main CBD which boasts of the tallest skyline in the city. This was a fair compromise providing the required deference to the Opera House and recognizing the developer's need to recover the rent gap.

Another suggestion included a series of buildings on the site. Again the idea showed a concern with building heights. It was suggested that the buildings





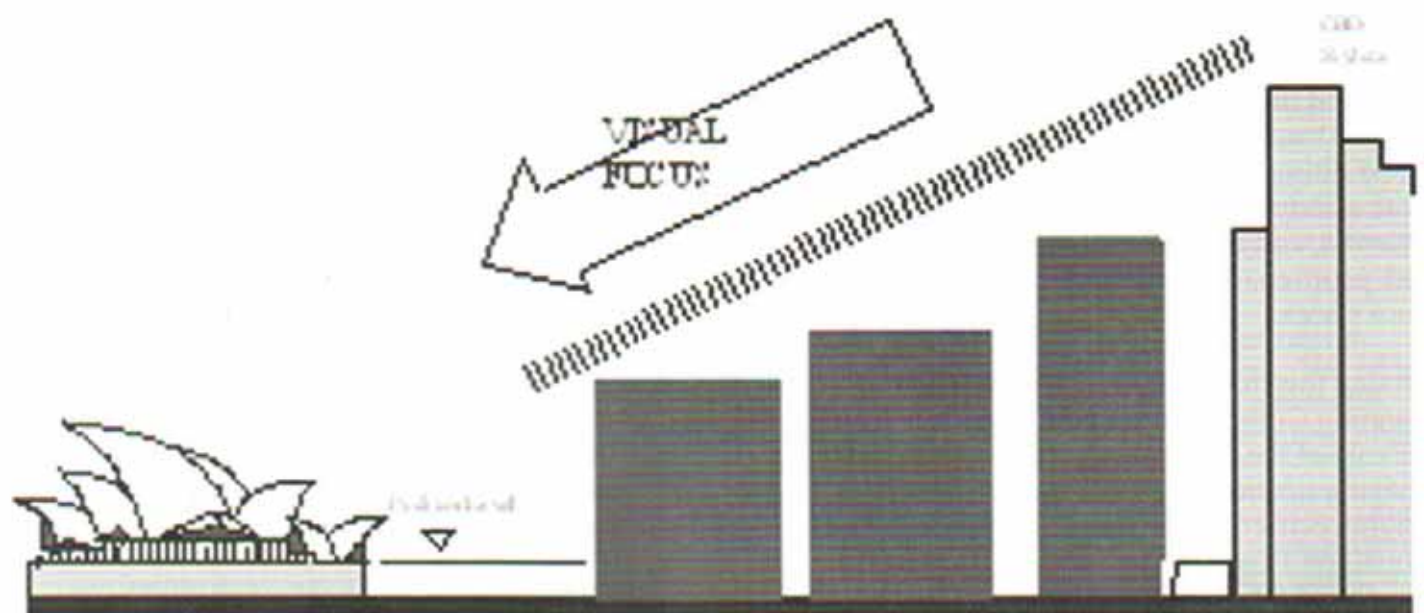
**Figure 1:** Design Guideline-A High Tower towards the Cahill Freeway/ CBD.

closest to the Opera House end (north) would be low. The building heights would gradually increase in steps in the south direction towards the CBD skyline (Figure 2). Some suggestions also included leaving a huge void in the building to serve as a visual window to the botanic gardens behind.

In 1992 an agreement was signed between the developers and the City Council, whereby the City

had a limited role of looking after the height of the buildings, colonnade design, and the details and finishes of public access areas.

**MOVING FORWARD:** In September 1994 the CSPC granted consent to the DA allowing a height of 45 metres. The proposal included a 12- to 15-storey structure with a hotel and residential units.



**Figure 2:** Design Guideline-A Sloping Height Cap Lowering towards the Opera House.



It also featured a large 'sky window' that punctured through the building to allow views through to the botanic gardens.

But the controversy was still far from over. The period that followed was concerned with refining the proposal. A building application (BA) was lodged in 1995 which included a hotel. A revised design was later submitted and approved in 1996 without the hotel. Yet again, the developer proposed to include a hotel later that year in a new pre-DA and along with it the developer (CML) lobbied for increased height allowance for the building. Around this time CML divested 95 percent of its interests in the site to the Hong Kong Shanghai Hotels Group Ltd., while retaining only 5 percent control.

In September 1977 the idea of a hotel was once more abandoned and the community's disgust made the newspaper headlines. The Sydney Morning Herald (11/9/97) carried an article titled "*Anger as Quay Developer Scraps Hotel for Flats*", which warned that turning the development into "just another block of flats" would kill any remnant of support the project may have had in the community.

**THE BUY-OUT OPTION:** Around the end of 1997, with construction on the site well underway, the Mayor requested a review of the built and unbuilt portions of the development. This was the time when buy-out option was most forcefully promoted by the community.

The community campaign brought forth the suggestion that the State government should buy out the site along with the development and demolish the structure. This idea gained significant momentum in the media. The cost of such a venture that would be agreeable to the developer (who by this stage was mostly represented by an overseas investor) was reported varying in the press to be between \$700m and \$830m. The State Minister showed an inclination to support such a move in principle but would not commit the government to such a payout. The Mayor pledged to contribute \$15m from city funds if the State would organize the rest of \$250m to buy out a part of the site.

There were other voices within the community

that found such a payout outrageous and argued that there were far more pressing demands for which such money could be used. A newspaper article appeared that listed the number of facilities such as primary schools and hospital beds that the amount could pay for.

Around this time in 1991, the Sydney City Council resolved to ask the State government for a land swap deal. Suggestions for a land swap deal had been surfacing during the media campaign. One such suggestion included the relocation of the controversial development from East Circular Quay across to the West Circular Quay. This involved the demolition of the International Ferry Terminal on the western side of the quay to accommodate the new development, thereby freeing up the Eastern Circular Quay site to be developed into a public open space.

**CREATIVE PLANNING TECHNIQUES:** Due to the keen interest taken by architects and planners, a range of creative planning techniques was brought into the discussion. An architect who worked on an earlier proposal for the site was quoted in the media as suggesting that the floorspace could be transferred to other sites in the city so as to allow the tower to be much lower in height and allow for an interesting design [5].

Another suggestion that was floated in the media during this time was for the council to sell the East Circular Quay roadway to the developer. The site of the controversial development is flanked by a promenade on the west which provides a pedestrian access from the Circular Quay station to the Opera House and the Royal Botanic Garden. On the east it is flanked by Macquarie Street that leads to the Opera House. This length of Macquarie Street has minimal utilization except for serving as a vehicular access to the Opera House itself as well as to its underground carpark. There have been suggestions that the width of the Macquarie street could be included in the site to allow a greater floor area so as to pre-empt the developers' motivation to resort to building too high.

A creative proposal was presented by the developer along these lines. It was felt, however, that it provided insufficient protection against the site's overdevelopment in the future. If it went through,



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“the airspace rights over the roadway would belong to the council for 60 years on payment of one dollar. But in 60 years’ time, again on payment of a dollar, the rights could go to the owners of the roadway. That risked later overdevelopment of at least part of the overall site”[6]. The proposal rang alarm bells and was rejected in favour of retaining in perpetuity airspace rights over the roadway by the council.

#### 4 - THE ACTORS

**PLANNERS CAUGHT NAPPING:** The growing importance of the location as a transport hub with the coming of the train station and as a tourist stop with the addition of the Opera House, was bound to create a significant land rent gap that remained unrealized due to the presence of warehouses. These forces were bound to lead to intense redevelopment and so it would be reasonable to expect the Planners to foresee the possibilities and put in place appropriate development controls before hand.

The fact that DAs were approved for development that did not respect the context of the site could be explained as the result of a pro-development mentality. But then clearly the planners seemed to have underestimated the community interest that the redevelopment on the site would generate. The thrust of the planner’s efforts revolved around responding to developers and the community’s demands rather than designing preventive development controls.

**THE ROLE OF CML:** Having acquired a property on the site, and sensing the gap in the land rent potential of the area, CML set about to assemble a consolidated block of land for a major development. It is reported to have cost CML the sum of \$300M to acquire the five properties stretching from the Moore Stairs northwards towards the Opera House. Clearly, CML wished to maximize the floor area and sought height relaxation. The first design proposal was clearly excessive in terms of floor space area violations. While the design was made public, it was never submitted for approval. It was most probably

intended to serve as a feeler to gauge the reaction of the authorities and test the limits to which the site could be exploited. If that was the case, the strategy may have backfired by alerting the community to the issues involved.

Once the DA was approved in 1994, CML continuously lobbied for increased height allowance. But it was also during this time that CML divested all but 5 percent of its interests in the development to an overseas developer.

**THE PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITY:** The Institute of Architects has publicly advocated the development and improvement of the area around the Opera House and the Circular Quay, from as far back as 1983. During the time the controversy raged over the East Circular Quay development, it maintained that development was the only option to achieve “an active edge” to the Quay. Among other things, it cited security of patrons of the Opera House making way to the Circular Quay station a major consideration.

The Architects’ community was clearly more interested in the developments around the East Circular Quay. They were more aware of the site’s potential as well as the unfolding developments. As such they offered many alternative options for consideration. The prestige associated with the site was only too well understood by the professionals. As one daily commented “International fame awaits the one who can win over the public, developers and city-fathers with the right design. The successful architect’s work will have the distinction of sitting side-by-side with Joren Utzon’s masterpiece, the Sydney Opera House”[7].

In responding to the architectural design proposal for the controversial site, the Institute voiced its concerns around the proportions of height with respect to the promenade and colonnade. The President of NSW Branch of the Institute of Architects was quoted as saying that the “proposed scheme .. appears too bulky, and this excessive bulk will detract from the desired aim of providing a place for the people and, in particular, will affect views to and from the Opera House”[8].



## CONCLUSION

**FACTS BEHIND THE CONTROVERSY:** The underlying fact in this controversy is that the approval process followed by the developer has been proper and appropriate. The CML had legitimately acquired the site and obtained consent to the DAs as far back as 1988. The CSPC had come into being later on and then tried to put in development controls in retrospect. Indeed it used the community pressure to its advantage and used it to good leverage. However, it is difficult to justify to developers that they should either abandon or demolish development that is legally sound. The question boils down to the costs of such an option. Clearly the developer is not at fault. If the planners have changed their mind and the community supports the move the costs should come out of the public purse. The costs involved not only include the cost of the land and the structure but also opportunity costs to the developers/ investors. Politicians then have to decide whether that is feasible and a practical option. Clearly not everyone sees aesthetics and a concern with the urban form as crucial as more essential services like education, health and social welfare.

**COMMUNITY RESPONSE:** While the professional community sounded the alarm at a relatively early stage, it took much longer for the community opinion to form and for a campaign to be mobilized. Throughout the entire controversy the community had mobilized 'Save the East Quay' support rallies and sustained a media campaign. There seems to have been, however, two surges in the level of community reaction in the prolonged controversy. The first surge coincided with the demolition of the existing structures on the site and the second surge followed the actual construction of the new development.

The demolition of the existing buildings provided vistas that did not exist before. It presented a temporary window in time of unobstructed visual access to the Royal Botanic Gardens from the Circular Quay. Such visual access may not have been a priority when the early structures were first erected on the East Circular Quay. But at this time a rare glimpse of vegetation from the quay, led to a community demand to maintain the visual access.

The proposed development was thus seen as a blocking out of the view that really did not exist before.

**THE ROLE OF THE POLITICS:** Throughout the controversy, the various levels of government have engaged in strategies of playing it safe and occasionally of point-scoring. The tussle between the Sydney City Council and the State government continued through 1977 to 1989. It may be argued that the outcome of the DAs may have been different if they were lodged with the Council. It is generally believed that in Australia the Council (local government) being the closest to the community is more sensitive and sympathetic to their concerns and demands.

A consent authority detached from the community can tend to become over-enthusiastic in approving development, in order to present an image of development. It may be argued that the State government is more inclined to support development as it sees Sydney as the growth engine for the overall State. On the other hand, the City government is more accessible by and accountable to the local residents

This fact may have allowed the Council to take up the community cause with clean hands when heading the CSPC later on. The CSPC especially seemed to emphasize that its hands were tied due to the decisions made previously by the State government.

While the State Minister expressed support in principle to the buy-out option, he was reluctant to commit any funds for the same. At one stage the Mayor announced the Council's willingness to contribute \$15M if the State or Federal government would contribute the remainder of the \$250M tab. This could very well be a token gesture more for political point-scoring.

With a change in government, the State Minister for Planning and the Mayor, both belonging to the Labour Party, attempted to involve the Liberal Federal Government by asking it to help in buying out the whole or part of the on-going development. The State Minister and the Council Mayor requested to meet with the Prime Minister to request the Federal Government to donate \$200M



out of the \$1 billion Heritage Fund. While the Prime Minister announced his willingness to meet with them he made it clear that this was a State and not a Federal government issue. With rival party governments in place at the State and Federal levels, the outcome of the initiative was a foregone conclusion.

**WINNERS AND LOSERS:** In this process have there been winners and losers? It is obvious that the community lost when we face the reality that the controversial development did go through. The 'Toaster' building is a snub to all those who opposed it for whatever reasons. But some members of the community have been able to move into these apartments. The community has got an art cinema house along with some quality retail outlets. The surroundings of the Opera House have become presumably safer due to businesses on the East Circular Quay. The city's economy has benefited from the development activity.

The conservationists were concerned mainly with the blocking out of visual access to the major attractions of the area, namely the Opera House and the Royal Botanic Gardens to the public accessing the site from the Circular Quay train and ferry station. They found the proposed development to be too high – obscuring the Botanic Gardens view, too wide – obscuring the Opera House view. They believe that the 'Toaster' has destroyed a splendid view that could have been made available to the public. Some maintain that the potential public view has been sold off as private views for the rich.

The negative sentiments were heightened mainly by the discovery of the dramatic view that was presented with the demolition of the Unilever Building in 1986. Had this temporal 'window' of visual access not been provided, the community reaction would have been far less. The concern may have been limited to providing sufficient 'breathing/ air space' to the Opera House.

One would assume that the developers were the winners because the development eventually went through. However, the lengthy controversy, the series of development applications, compromise design solutions and community reaction must

have taken a lot out of the win.

The real loser seems to be the CML, who reportedly absorbed a significant financial loss in selling over 95 percent of its rights to another party. Either the CML miscalculated the real estate potential of the amalgamated site or the cost of amalgamating the site or it had underestimated the community response.

The Professionals' community may feel that a great opportunity for creating something spectacular has been wasted by allowing a non-descript structure on to the site of sights.

**LESSONS LEARNED:** Does community reaction bear results? From this case, we can derive a range of conclusions. In essence, sustained community reaction could not prevent the controversial development from going ahead. However, it may have been responsible for a number of developments. The decision of CML to sell off 95 percent of its control over the assembled site could have largely been due to the threat it perceived of negative sentiments from its shareholders and clientele. The development may have become too controversial for the insurance company to risk its community credentials. It is reported that while it cost the CML around \$300M to assemble the site, it got rid of the site by selling it off to the Peninsula Group for \$200M. There are claims, however, that the reasons could have more to do with financial risks associated with the development.

**MAKING SENSE OF THE COMMUNITY:** It is difficult to predict how the community will react and behave to any development. A common problem with redevelopment projects involving significant demolition work over extended periods is that it creates conditions that are temporary and transient. These conditions often cause inconvenience but can sometimes provide rare opportunities in terms of noise relief due to lack of traffic or public access to splendid views. This is an issue that is tricky and difficult to anticipate or plan for in designing development control plans for the area.

The other issue relates to a late surge in passions within the community. As we saw in this case, it



was not until the actual construction work began and the project actually started taking shape in bricks and mortar that widespread community reaction materialized. Many people get motivated against a development only after its negative aspects become tangible. This highlights the fact that it is often difficult for the lay person to actually anticipate and visualize the impact of an imminent development while it is still on paper.

There is a need to overcome this drawback in community campaigns. This could be easily done by employing graphic techniques such as 3-D graphic simulation techniques and virtual reality. While it may be difficult for the community to sufficiently mobilize the required resources to do so, the professional community or the Planning agencies could take up this role. The 'ideas quest' that the Planning Commission organized could have benefited from the application of such technology. The organizers could easily have allocated the resources to produce easy to comprehend visuals of the community ideas as well as those of the developer's proposals. The resulting discussion could have been more meaningful.

**TOO LITTLE, TOO LATE:** A case for involving the community earlier in the process is clearly made. The 'Idea Quest' would have been much more meaningful if it had been timely. The

objective of the idea quest was to provide a basis for design guidelines which could lead to a project design that would have popular appeal. The idea quest, however, would have been more meaningful if it had been organized to facilitate the designing of development control for the site and before any DAs had been approved. Design guidelines as well as planning controls need to be in place before the process of development application assessment is initiated.

As the community becomes increasingly aware of its rights and power, governments increasingly tend to take heed of opinion polls while setting policy directions at cost to party ideology. While politicians are influenced by the community reaction, beyond a certain level financial realities over-ride these concerns. When the community thought of the buy-out option, it required the staggering amount of \$700M or \$830M. The magnitude of the sum involved, killed the option, but the carcass was nevertheless carried around for months by politicians mainly for political mileage. If a government would approve spending such a large amount on funds on aesthetic concerns, it would be criticized for diverting potential funding from more real social, health and environmental problems.

Again, this suggestion came forth very late after construction had commenced on site. The dilemma



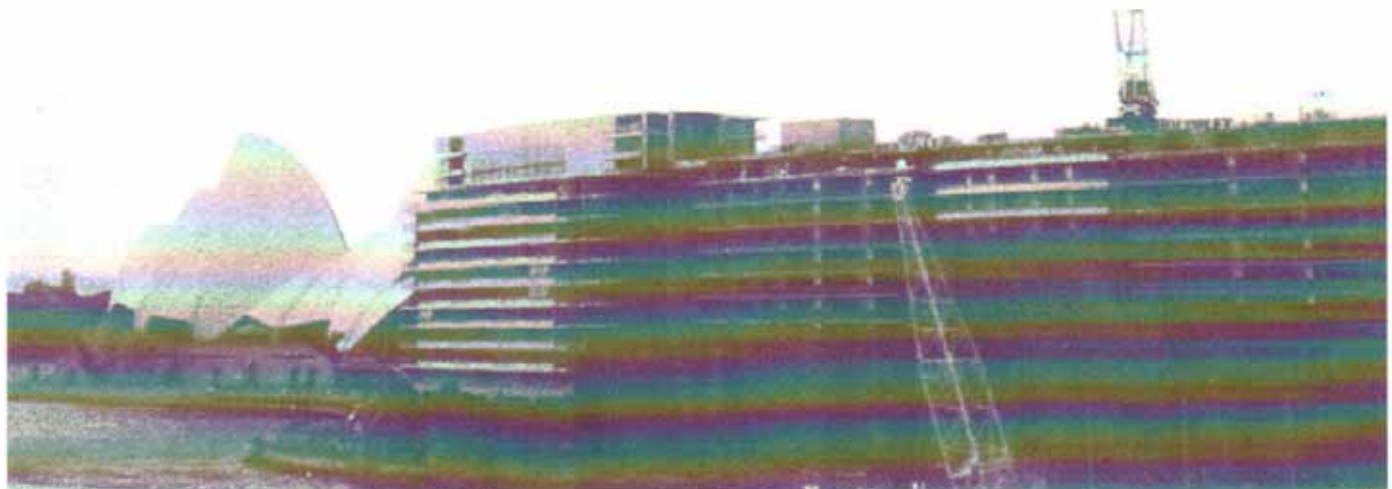
**The View of the Quay from the Sea:** This frontal view shows it all – from the left to the right, the Opera House, the Royal Botanic Gardens, the 'Toaster' and the CBD skyline. Unfortunately, this view of the Botanic Garden is restricted from the sea.



was that on the one hand, community support increased as more brick and mortar appeared, while on the other hand, the cost of compensation required to be paid out increased dramatically as more construction occurred.

**THE FUTURE:** Are we better prepared to deal with similar cases in the future? Planners need to be more vigilant when dealing with planning and development controls around landmarks and city icons. They need to make it their job to look at

any hidden potential of sites that are likely to come up for redevelopment. They need to constantly review and update planning guidelines to control the skyline as new developments pop up. It may be well worth the effort to inform the community of imminent development. Planning agencies could set up on their web-sites 3-D images and virtual reality simulations to better communicate with the community about developments that are likely to take place. It has to be a dynamic process. Otherwise they may be caught napping ■  
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**The 'Toaster' during construction:** Public resentment peaked as the full effect of the construction became concrete. With the 'Toaster' appearing on the scene, the view of the Opera House from anywhere around the station side is at least half obscured. It is totally obscured as one moves towards East Circular Quay (on which the 'Toaster' stands) on way to the Opera House itself.



**The 'Toaster' nearing completion:** As the 'Toaster' neared completion, there was still talk that the Federal Government may dip into the \$1 billion Heritage Fund to buy out the site and the building and clear the site.





**The Final Outcome:** This photo shows the Opera House and the 'Toaster' on East Circular Quay. While the view of the Royal Botanic Gardens is obscured by the "toaster" – the gaps between the buildings provides a compensatory glimpse.

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