

SPEECH NOTES: Parks and Playgrounds Movement Inc
Newcastle 31 October 2004.

In its broadest sense public policy means the way that governments, institutions and communities develop statutes, regulations, institutional authority, policy initiatives, political policies and government decision-making, administrative process, and political reform agendas. All of these help shape, form, reform, apply or deny and regulate the relationships between government and the governed.

You don't hear about public policy any more.

Its demise as a term, and as an area of interest and discourse in politics, the community and media, can be dated precisely from 1979.

This was the year that two fundamental influences on our life and times emerged and began their destructive work -- Margaret Thatcher in the UK and Allatolah Khomeini in Iran.

The policies of these two have shaped our life and times in profound ways, not least through, respectively, the doctrine of smaller and smaller government intervention in a free market system, and the doctrine of one fundamental truth for all -- which has led inevitably to policy responses for pre-emptive war, a confused and counter productive "war on terrorism", and probably very soon the Orwellian nightmare of perpetual war against constantly changing or alternate, mysteriously unspecified enemies.

These two policy-shapers have not only changed our ideas of what public policy is and how it might work, but they have prepared the way admirably for George Bush to lay claim on Tuesday to the wealth of the earth -- for his friends; or alternatively, to plan its destruction.

Thank goodness we have lesser things to worry about here in NSW.

Things like how we live -- even survive -- in a time of climate change, water shortages, population growth, expanding cities and urban areas, taxes that are kept low enough to ensure that there is never enough money to fix things, and extensive social instability (drugs, fear of unknown terrorists, fear of job insecurity etc).

It is interesting, however, that in NSW at the moment there is a little comprehended strategic exercise in public policy making that is attempting to set in place policies and administrative structures to come to terms with some of the big issues that confront us.

The astounding thing to me is that public comprehension of this development is makeshift, ad hoc, and essentially slow-minded. The media has assist this process, as it does these days, by dumbing down the issues so that we can "understand" them, or understand sufficient of them not to question too much.

The so called summit on drug and alcohol abuse and the initiatives that have followed may be a case in point. The strengthening of anti-smoking restrictions and the wholesale re-arrangement of the public hospital administration may well be revealed in time as an attempt to grapple more effectively with a preventative approach to health delivery. But there is very little discussion or understanding of it in those terms; the government does not talk about in those terms perhaps for fear of sectoral or political back-lash, and the media goes along for the ride, blindfolded by intellectual laziness.

We are in the midst of some huge shifts in the way we conserve water and manage consumption. The Government's water deal with agricultural and other users in Western NSW cost about \$300million and most of us still don't know what it is all about and whether it is good or bad.

I don't know either; I don't know whether it is adequate, foolish, efficacious or simply what was possible at the time.

The important thing for me, in the context of how public policy works, if it works at all, is that the reform of water management in western NSW was addressed with remarkably little public understanding or debate in the cities, which are the taxation and electoral base of governments.

Recently, the Government started in on urban water management issues. Wyong Council and even the Carr government is giving consideration to desalination plants to alleviate some very pressing water shortages. The Hunter is now selling water to Wyong to help make up a shortfall there.

I don't know whether these are good solutions or not. I do know a water engineer in Wyong who takes the view that it would be better to give every household in Gosford/Wyong a front loading washing machine than to build a new dam. The washers would cost say \$200 million and save as much water as a new dam could store. A new dam would cost maybe \$500 million. It sounds too simple a solution to me, but who knows. It is certainly difficult to comprehend it as an acceptable political solution in the current environment.

I urge you to follow the development of policies and interventions in the great water management issue in NSW. Don't be too misled by the daily to-ing and fro-ing on the matter – but watch for the trends and where they may lead us.

The key political figure in this is Craig Knowles, Minister for Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources—a far-reaching and ambitious agenda in one portfolio that is not dissimilar to some of the broad reformist Ministries set up by the Whitlam Government before it went down in 1975 (a mere four years before the arrival of the fundamentalists to whom I have referred).

Catchment management, directing urban growth, infrastructure planning, coastal development, sustainable communities, how to stop – or is to encourage – the Illawarra, Sydney and Hunter becoming one conurbation, developer rip-offs, community aspirations -- what a mix – what a job!

And what a difficult task for the people who have to do it: bureaucracies that have been gutted over a decade and a half, professionals almost forcibly alienated from ideals of public service, management for results (but results more suited to administrative efficiency and the convenience of approval authorities like local councils rather than for the communities that they once served); and communities that are too busy with the pressures of daily living (including the an induced fear of terrorism) to think too much about how they will be affected by changes, how they will be governed.

And yet ... and yet... despite all this a new raft of public policy in urban management is being developed to bring some direction to the management and perhaps even resolution of some quite massive and fundamental structural issues which will define how we live in the future.

And the pace at which this is proceeding is frankly astounding. It was only in May that Minister Knowles released his Ministerial Directions Paper for the re-vamped Metropolitan Strategy, a strategy which will provide a framework for the management of growth and sustainability in the Greater Metropolitan Area over the next 30 years.

At the end of November the public consultation process will be complete. The Strategy itself is due to be wrapped up the bureaucrats by the end of the year, using many existing plans and strategies, tweaking them and hoping for the best.

In other words the process will have taken six months. Compare that time table and the complexity and competitiveness of the issues involved in the Sydney Metro Strategy to the development of the Hunter Environmental Plan No 1 which was gazetted in 1982. That plan had its genesis in the Hunter Regional Planning Committee which began in 1977 to study the region and consider its future development. It took five years later, many reports and much consultation before the Hunter got its plan.

The haste with which the Metro Strategy is being prepared may well contribute to its being imperfect or even a dud. But the driving commitment from the centre (i.e Minister) for results across a very wide strategic agenda is, I believe, an unusual and intriguing example that "public policy" may still be alive and well.

And it is in this context that I would like to turn to the Wallarah Peninsula and to up-date you on what is happening. The Wallarah Peninsula has been identified for the past two decades as the core of the Inter-City Environmental Zone between Lake Macquarie and Wyong. In fact it was first proposed as a State Park to the State Government in 1969.

Our campaign to protect the Wallarah by giving legislative force to its role as the cornerstone of the Inter-City Environmental Zone relies heavily on public policy components.

1. what the Wallarah is

- 2. development threats**
- 3. 10 year preparation**
- 4. community opinion**
- 5. zoning – LMCC 2004/ DUAP support**
- 6. heritage – 92-3 suters**
 - 95 conserv. Strategy Hill**
 - 99-00 workshops.**
 - LEP 2004 HCA**
 - 2003-4 Icons project**
 - IHO/State listing**
 - Dept of Ageing grant**
- 7. environment – National Park**
- 8. rehabilitation plan**
- 9. Economic sustainability**
 - Tourism strategy Fed grant**
 - Film location**
- 10. Sense of community**

MILESTONES:

- 1. Monday - LM Planning committee of CEN
Campaign re metro strategy**
- 2. Tuesday – lobby for IHO**
- 3. 9 November – Coastal Conference
Knowles opens.**
- 4. Mid-late November – LMCC assessment
completed**
- 5. 20 November – Back to the Bay Heritage
Festival opens – Film
Festival**
- 6. 21 November – Back to the Bay Heritage
Festival**
- 7. December – tba/ DA to LMCC.**

PUBLIC POLICY:

When for 25 years the Government has had as a strategic planning objective the creation of an Inter-City Environmental Zone, we believe it should put its money where its mouth is and act to realise that objective as part of the Metro Strategy implementation.