

## **Property Council, pull your head in**

BRIAN CORR: Demand better construction standards instead of influencing

Brian Corr, Mercury, The Mercury, September 16, 2019

WHY doesn't the Property Council just say it up front — take planning decisions away from local governments! Surely Hobart City Council will be happy with just roads, rates, and rubbish. And we don't need a minister for housing! The Property Council can issue Media Releases.

Like the media release they sent out last week, stating: "The Tasmanian Division achieved an important advocacy win with Hobart City Council deciding against an absolute limit on building heights ... The Tasmanian Division successfully secured this outcome with Hobart City Council entering a partnership with the State Government to produce a Precinct Plan prior to making a final decision."

So now we know. It all happened behind the scenes. And now we have the Property Council executive director stating, "The elector poll is a complete anachronism that defies good governance and is a regulatory relic that runs contrary to broad community interest ("Throw out pointless elector polls," Talking Point, September 11).

So, Hobart's electors shouldn't be consulted on one of the biggest issues ever for our city — the protection of heritage, view-lines and streetscapes (using a number of absolute maximum heights as one mechanism).

The Property Council will be well aware that public concern has not wavered over the past two years. We've had a petition with more than 7600 signatures and three packed public meetings, all supporting a low-rise city with more protections on heritage buildings, view-lines, and streetscapes. Also, a Mercury poll and another poll by local young architects, showed that the majority of residents do not want high-rise towers.

In the Elector Poll, the Principal Question was: Should the Council support the building height limits and other recommendations made by its planning officers? Not a difficult question. 12145 City of Hobart electors voted "Yes" to this question — that's more than 77 per cent.

Add to this 1805 electors, not included in the 12145, who want the building height limit in Height Area 1 to be lower than 60 metres. That's a clear message to Council from 13950 City of Hobart electors — 88 per cent of those who voted.

The Electoral Commissioner clearly stated that voter turnout was significant. We believe the Commissioner. Yet the Property Council says the poll was "ultimately pointless". Looking back, the real issue is that six elected members of Hobart City Council voted against the electors' wishes without giving a single reason. In fact, not even one of the six said a word in the council chamber — a massive slap in the face for 13,950 electors. And it's worth noting that, in last October's council elections, the number of votes for the six ranged from 461 to 1547.

The Property Council is all-Australian, well-funded and powerful, "the leading advocate for Australia's biggest industry and biggest employer — property" (their website). Maybe they should advocate for better standards, better materials and better inspections! We don't want problems like Opal Towers in Tasmania. Or is it all about developers' profits? It's not

surprising that their mission statement “To Champion a Strong Property Industry” is entirely self-seeking with no regard for cities, communities or heritage.

A 2012 report by the University of NSW City Futures Research Centre found that 85 per cent of strata title owners in NSW said there were defects in the construction of their building.

So, who should be making the decisions in Hobart? The Property Council or the people?

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