Presentation for third round

Jane Marceau, Community Representative on the Bays Precinct Taskforce

- Community preferences for what happens in the Bays Precinct have been very consistent over the years from 2006 when I and many others here first got involved in the fight against the cement terminal, when we held the first community workshop in August and then persuaded Morris lemma to set up the Taskforce. Much of what is happening now is thanks to us. We have incidentally been through four Premiers in the period! And somewhat more planning ministers, which suggests that we are not going to go away regardless of what happens in this round.

- This community has a lot of strength and intelligence which could and should be put to very good use by successive governments, as Chris Eccles, Secretary of the Department of Premier and Cabinet, said last year at a conference on public sector governance. Chris Eccles put forward some very interesting ideas on the best way to achieve good public policy. He recommended a process he calls the ‘co-production’ of policy, a ‘citizen-centred’ approach. I also commend him on his rejection of the view that citizen involvement in policy-making creates unrealistic expectations and his explicit statement that stakeholder engagement is NOT about managing expectations. It would be very sensible on the government’s part to follow his lead and ensure that we the community continue to be actively involved both in the development of ideas for the Bays Precinct and in their implementation – co-production of policy and implementation.

- We the community have always tried to be pro-active and not be NIMBYist despite the reputation that people in Balmain seem to have. That capacity to think beyond our own immediate interests in the Bays Precinct has been what has got us listened to (as seen, for instance, in the death of the stupid cement terminal proposal). We will need to continue that tradition of thinking in the public interest in all cases, especially where we see that interest is not being well served. That is what lies behind, for instance, our concern about the length of leases in the Bays.
• We have always tried to reason things out and make logical and coherent proposals. I think we must continue to do this and I have every confidence that we will do that in the next few hours. I ask you specifically to make sure that you are clear about what is being asked and that your solutions take account of the interests and sometimes diverse views, such as those on working harbour, of our many neighbours.

• The Taskforce report is now being written and we are adding comment to an early draft. Now is the final time then for you to tell us what you want.

• As a community we have already come together to develop a serious set of planning principles that should regulate the future development of the Bays. We have almost complete unanimity on these in the community, as tested many times, over many years and very recently. We will be sure to include these in the report.

• We have also together developed a series of both broad ranging and detailed suggestions for the Bays Precinct as a whole and made it clear that we value these lands extremely highly. It is almost entirely the community that over the years has led this process and seen the value of our Precinct and its sub-precincts. We are actually as far as I can see probably the ONLY people who have perceived the value that all can gain from the renewal of this Precinct and until very recently the only ones who made the effort to come together in our own time and at our own cost over a long period to think the issues through. I think we should congratulate ourselves on these achievements! The agencies have of course been doing what they judge to be appropriate and what their mandates tell them which is proper and understandable – the failure here has been on the part of successive governments - but they have, by the same token, worked in silos and failed in coordinating major decisions or consulting the community in a serious way. That is why we must insist on an INTEGRATED approach to the Bays, now and into the future.

• It is now critical that we build on the strengths I mentioned above logic, clear argument and concern for the public interest broadly conceived. Although I am sure that much is going on behind the scenes, in the
Taskforce process we are the first ones that have to think as groups of stakeholders about priorities and the potential tradeoffs that might be associated with some of our ideas, especially for the short and even the medium term. These ideas have not yet been discussed by the Taskforce as the consultations have not yet been completed. These include the economic communities as well as the residential ones and we must not forget that.

- To do this we need a spirit of cooperation and collaboration on our part but also on the part of the powerful, the government(s) which will make the decisions. I know from my own experience over the years that the agencies have had great difficulty in working seriously with us. As well as being your community rep on the Taskforce, I also sit on the Ports Community Liaison Group (the CLG) and I have not forgotten that last year, to quote just one example, Ports advertised for tenders for the whole of Glebe Island without the CLG being informed even though we had met the week before. It was also left to the CLG to identify the fact that Ports had not used any of the CRG Principles when planning the CPT and that no arrangements were envisaged for community access either to the terminal or the foreshore before CLG intervention. This was particularly ironic given that Ports’ own strategic plan for Glebe Island and White Bay drawn up in 2000 and supposedly still in operation recommends a setback of buildings at least 20 metres from the foreshore ...(text pages before Figures 10 and 12).

- With such incidents in mind, we need to work specifically towards building arrangements that develop trust and cooperation between stakeholders as well as providing a legal framework for decision-making in the Bays over the long term. Again Chris Eccles got it right – proper, non-superficial community consultation is the key to good policy and to ‘restoring trust in government’, as the session of the conference he addressed in 2011 was called.

- BUT, and this is the good news, I think that perhaps the worst of the silo period is past. In my view there has been some progress and the different agencies may be beginning to see the Bays Precinct as a whole and to talk to each other about potential plans and changes, including more and better public access to the scarce Harbour foreshore. But we
need a mechanism which overrides a quick return to reliance on operational routines – consultation and transparency are hard to achieve and there is no easy solution.

- We need to think about a number of the more difficult issues especially. There is currently some danger that the community will get nothing or very little out of this exercise; a danger that Blackwattle and Rozelle Bays will be lost to passive water sports etc; a danger that maritime activities will morph into function centres through the process of modifications to the original DAs etc. It is also difficult for community members to make meaningful, relative judgements about different uses/developments when we are locked out of fundamental information under the rubric of 'commercial in confidence', for example – the story of pre-lease and leasing arrangements in these bays is an example of bad public policy. We need to be sure that there is a very considerable improvement in transparency and exchange of information

- We need to make recommendations both about the whole of the Bays and their future and about individual sub-precincts. There will not always be agreement but we need to find a way around this. Similarly, we need to include the interests of both residents and businesses

- Finally, we need to recognise that we will not get all we want now, possibly not for some time. We will need to make at least temporary tradeoffs in order to move forward.

- And remember that we need that vision thing for the Bays as whole as well as the nitty gritty of sites in each location.

- Overall, we need to make sure that the Taskforce has heard our views and recognises the force of our logic. This is what this round of meetings is about.

- To assist discussion I have prepared a short document which contains some factual information put together by members of the community and that constitutes important background to the reasons we are asking for such things as open space. It does not discuss leases etc. This document is now on the tables. Some of you are familiar with the data as you were the source of the information but others may not be and may want to refer to it as you discuss options for the future of the diverse sub-precincts.