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West End Community Association Inc.

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By Email: publicinterestjournalism.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Committee Secretariat,

This letter is a submission of the West End Community Association (WECA) on Federal Government Committee on Public Interest Journalism. We welcome the opportunity to make a submission on this important issue.

The inquiry to Public Interest Journalism is fundamental to democracy and civil society. The West End Community Association is a highly active community group that advocates for sustainable development in the inner south area of Brisbane that is undergoing significant urban redevelopment. Our relationship with the media is key to our effectiveness and it is also key that the media is open, available and effective.

WECA has represented the West End, Hill End, Highgate Hill and South Brisbane community since 2004 through activities that range from community events, media and legal representation, and petitions and submissions. The West End Community Association has a strong history and success in advocacy and mobilising our community when it matters most.

The suburb of West End is undergoing significant population growth and development. City Council projects an additional 25,000 residents. Through successive local area planning exercises the level of community interest and participation has been very high. The formal consultations attracted over 5,500 submissions from residents and West End Community Association (WECA) has actively represented these community interests. More information is available on www.westendcommunity.org and www.facebook.com/WECA4101. The thousands of hours of community led community consultation has led to the development of the vision statement for the West End community and a strong position from which we advocate for the community and our environment.

The vision stands for the creation of a **world-class liveable, inner city neighbourhood**. It is built on the values of diversity, participation, safety and sustainability. Our area is experiencing extremely high levels of development without the commensurate fundamental infrastructure in transport, education and green space.

WECA has been an active voice for the community for over 14 years. During the development of our Local Area Plan that stipulates our development planning allowances and specifications over 80% of the population was engaged with in surveys or face to face consultation and this set out the vision

and principles for our community. Repeatedly the LAP and then the development proposals in the area contravene good planning principles and the vision of the community for a truly urban medium density community with adequate infrastructure. Our recourse has been to do letters, petitions, direct action, campaigns and advocate for better planning and development outcomes. In order for us to be effective in highlighting the systemic issues of poor planning proposals the media is a critical element of this. The lack of a robust media is highly problematic and we recognise that this leads to poorer outcomes in the development of our area - and in our engagement with community associations in the whole of SE QLD and also some in Sydney and Melbourne. The issue of having weak public interest journalism is a well recognised issue. We need to get the multiple perspectives of the community that are affected but not involved in some key decisions put forward. We need journalists who are able to undertake systemic investigative journalism. We recognise that many of the poor outcomes of our cities are due to perverse decision making and influence of some stakeholders at the cost of the broader community. This dynamic is increased because there is no transparency - no joining up of the dots of what is going on, what impact it is having to the broader system either in time or place.

As a community our community association and culture of the community has created a high level of engagement and awareness of planning and development issues and impacts. Good media coverage can and does make a difference. We led a campaign during the development of the Kurilpa Master Plan development in 2013-4 for example. We were on top of the media cycle and were able to shift the reporting to our communication messages and get the media off the Council media roll out. We sustained this for 6 months of active campaigning and engagement with the community. Ultimately the newly elected state government who understood the systemic issues and also importantly had an aware and supportive community to take this action tore up the plan. The media was key in this otherwise the community would not have been able to run this campaign just with the social media that we have free access to. This is a story of success to some extent - it is not sustainable for a community to do this level of campaigning. We had to provide all of the stories and background all done - including us doing all of the leg work to get key experts across the issue and that they were collaborating with each other. Good quality journalism has a role in putting together the expertise and presenting this public. As the journalists are not resourced to do this kind of work and many don't have sufficient specialisation in planning and development issues we did the work for them. We wrote the media stories - of course they had to review them and put the story out however we framed the story. This shows that the media is not resourced to do the public interest work and if the public isn't resourced then it doesn't happen.

The other point about this is that the community can have a strategy to pull the story together and get it out there when the story is hot and in demand that the stories get out. This is a part of the media story however the more systemic issues are not getting taken up. Dr Cameron Murray has done excellent work about systemic grey corruption in Australia. We see the actions and impacts of this on a regular basis. It is driving the perverse outcomes that are having very poor outcomes on our cities and ultimately our productivity and health and well being. These are long term opportunities that are being squandered in Australia and risks that we are creating that we shouldn't. In many cases the damage is being made and it is too late with the concrete is poured etc for it to be reversed for many decades. We need systemic and effective journalism to be able to tell these issues and the meaning for Australians. Otherwise the grey corruption of specific corporate interests are running rough shod over the potential of our society here and now and into the future. Effective public interest media is critical in disrupting the patterns of corruption and relationships that create unfair advantages and disadvantages. As an active community who really engage with what is going on and who is doing it and how it is being done we cannot emphasise this enough. Good media can

and does make a huge difference. We see far too few examples of this due to a watering down of its impact. We are very disturbed by undermining of the public broadcaster as an example of this issue getting any worse than it already is.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this submission to the Inquiry.

Please do not hesitate to contact me to discuss any of these issues or options. We look forward to a rigorous process of inquiry to public interest journalism for the long term sustainability and health of our democratic society and members of the community.

Sincerely,

Dr Erin Evans,
President, WECA