

Short takes

This is the forum for those who want to make a point fast. Brief opinions may be phoned to (02) 4979 5980 between 10am and 1pm Monday to Friday or emailed to letters@theherald.com.au

Under the planned redevelopment of Laman Street, will consideration be given to relocating the 'Him and Her' statues from the foyer of the library to their original intended site outside the library where they could be properly viewed?

Ross Robinson, Merewether

Greater than the tragedy of losing the figs is the knowledge that the people have absolutely no say in a democracy. We are forced to vote for someone or other every few years who demonstrably will not represent the views of the community. Even in desperation, when people organise themselves or collect a great number of signatures on a petition, it is futile. What we have witnessed is the failure of democracy. Let's turn over a new leaf and end compulsory voting.

Rhett Morson, Cooks Hill

I have noticed lately that some atheists have publicly ridiculed religion, particularly Christianity. These non-believers are probably encouraged by their gurus such as Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens and Stephen Hawking. Of course they are entitled to their opinions, and so am I. However, I prefer to believe in facts rather than theories. And I don't have to prove that God exists, he has promised to do it for me.

Allan Elliott, Glendale

When I saw that Matthew Wade didn't open in the second T20 cricket match after his man-of-the-match efforts in the first I was puzzled. When I saw the most out-of-form batsman on Earth, Shaun Marsh, come to the crease I was incredulous. When I saw him get out two balls later I was furious at the selectors. If they don't care about the performance of the Australian T20 team why should the fans? I echoed their indifference and turned off the match.

Sean Farnham, Kurri Kurri

SMS your say

For the short, sweet and text-savvy, SMS your opinion to 0427 154 176. Please include your name, suburb and a landline.

Regarding Paul O'Rourke's opinion piece ("We cry more for baby seals than for unborn" *Herald* 6/2), I found there were many faults, but most notably the Reaganesque irony of men speculating on a choice their gender will never have to make.

Jessica Batty, Wickham

It's got me stumped! How much money has been wasted on the Laman Street figs and associated police and security resources when people as young as 11 are being turned away from crisis accommodation. Save our figs or save our kids?

Glenn Bennett, Hamilton

While spending a few days walking around Sydney's tourist attractions I was surprised to see so many "killer figs" wild and unrestrained. They were providing much-appreciated shade and shelter for all in an otherwise concrete jungle.

Sharon Ferris, Caves Beach

Aren't we lucky, Alan Johns (SMS Your Say 7/2), that we live in Australia in a democratic society where we have the right to stand up for what we believe in. RIP Laman Street figs!

Sue Jansson, Coal Point

The future begins now

AS I wandered among the curious people milling around to watch the felling of the fig trees, I listened to comments for and against.

But I marvelled at the excitement and awe caused by the beautiful architecture that was on show as the city library, art gallery and the Baptist tabernacle were now exposed. Hidden treasures now shining in the light.

There was a sense of anticipation about what would happen next and the prospect of seeing the barricades come down and the gardens in Civic Park flourishing with beautiful flowers once again.

Is this the beginning of the long-awaited revitalisation of the CBD? One would hope so.

Come on Newcastle, let's walk along Laman Street in the near future, without tripping over the tree roots, and come see what is inside these buildings.

Look forward to the planting of new trees, and to what could be.

Noelene Scully
Warners Bay

Not exactly a majority opinion

LAKE Macquarie City Council is conducting its ratepayer satisfaction survey.

Only 1000 residents, selected at random, will take part in the survey.

The council has residential and business ratepayers totalling more than 78,500, so slightly more than one per cent of those will be used by the council to tell itself how well it is performing.

I hope one question to be asked is: "Do you think council and its senior executive are competent financial managers?"

Or is the survey filled with motherhood questions designed to get the right answers for the council and executive staff to push the proposed massive rate rises, which I believe are designed to cover fiscal mismanagement?

I can only assume I am not one of those randomly selected to take part in the survey. Unfortunately, no one else I talk with on the western side of the lake seems to be among the chosen few either.

John Tucker
Bonnells Bay

System can be healthier yet

I AGREE that the boundary system (Australian Standard Geographical Classification - Remoteness Areas, or ASGC-RA) that determines where GP incentive payments are paid is imperfect ("Sick of waiting for GPs", *Herald* 7/2).

But it is a lot better than the one the Howard government had in place (RRMA), a system I fought for years to have replaced.

Message board

Your chance to say a brief "thanks" or contact people. Phone (02) 4979 5980 between 10am and 1pm Monday to Friday or email letters@theherald.com.au.



A more pressing matter

THE concern of Kurri Kurri's Cr James Ryan for potential flood victims in Branxton is not matched, it seems, by his concern for flood victims in Weston/Abermain.

Last week was the 22nd anniversary of the first flood intrusion and damage to homes along Fourth Street, Weston, and Elizabeth Street, Abermain.

The cause? Mining silt and nutrients from houses, which had raised the creek bed and reduced carrying capacity, and choking noxious trees and reeds.

There followed the formation of a flood committee in 1991, a flood study in 1992, then another eight studies over the years. But nothing has been done to correct the problems.

In 2007 (see picture above) there were 36 damaged homes and 13 life-threatening incidents in the midnight dark and turbulent creek. Bravery awards were given.

Move the muck, Cr Ryan. Come and look at the creek and help bring your concerns about flooding closer to your home.

Twenty-two years, nine flood studies. Why?

Col Maybury
Kurri Kurri

As I said in the *Herald's* story, while the ASGC-RA is an improvement, I will continue to argue that rather than relying on a boundary system, incentives should be based on need, and I will continue to argue for further change.

However, the *Herald's* suggestion that Scone falls into the same category is simply wrong. Newcastle is RA1 and Scone is RA2.

Port Macquarie is also RA2 and some are arguing that GPs will choose it over Scone.

Personally, I would choose Scone.

Joel Fitzgibbon
Federal Member for Hunter

Sea estimates don't hold water

I WAS one of the speakers at a public meeting at Belmont 16ft Sailing Club on January 31 called to comment on the science underlying Lake Macquarie City Council's sea-level rise policy.

The point at issue, raised by both Cr Wendy Harrison and Richard Devon (*Letters* 6/2), is the sea-level rise that can be expected to occur in the Newcastle-Lake Macquarie region by the year 2100.

For the purposes of new planning regulation, and

following a NSW government lead, Lake Macquarie City Council has adopted the estimate of 91 centimetres of rise.

This number is essentially based on the speculative computer models of the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which estimate only the worldwide average change in sea level.

Such estimates are no more relevant to coastal planning in the Newcastle region than is the worldwide average temperature for designing Newcastle houses.

Fortunately, 100 years of high-quality sea-level measurements have been made on the tide gauge at Fort Denison, Sydney Harbour, and these show that the long-term rise along the central NSW coast is about one millimetre per year, or 10 centimetres a century.

Recent analysis shows, however, that this rate has slackened over the past 40 years, and that the actual sea-level rise at Newcastle by 2100 is likely to be somewhere between five and 10 centimetres.

In consequence, no scientific justification exists for the council's inflated estimate of nine to 18 times these figures.

The new coastal planning requirements therefore address a phantom issue only.

Professor Bob Carter
James Cook University

Open-cut mining means open sores

IN response to NSW Minerals Council CEO Stephen Galilee ("Mining and farms must coexist" *Letters* 6/2), with an increasing world population, gems like the Liverpool Plains deep soil are necessary for man's survival.

Governments can insulate themselves against being sued by mining companies by insisting that in areas such as this, all mining must be done underground.

Say no to open-cut mining on the Liverpool Plains.

Andy Ferguson
Kurri Kurri

Parents left to carry the burden

LAST week we read about the distress caused to disabled students and their parents by the confusion over school transport systems and contracted services.

As a parent of a sight-impaired intellectually disabled 22-year-old young man, I am very disheartened with our governments past and present.

From kindergarten through to year 12 my son was provided with transport to and from school.

The moment he left school we were left to fend for ourselves.

These teenagers and young adults go on to attend day programs after leaving school. These programs run for fewer hours than a normal school day and most are only available four days a week.

These hours mean it is almost impossible for parents to hold down a full-time job if they need to transport their children to and from day programs. Even part-time work is hindered.

Extra funding for day program centres and transport for the older disabled people in our community is required, sooner rather than later for many families.

Kathryn Russ
Redhead

They must go

IN the wake of the debacle in which \$1.6 million was wasted on fig trees, the residents of Newcastle need to vote out the inept incumbents at the next council election, from the top down.

Kay Everett
Tarro

Letter of the week

This week the letter judged the best, most succinct and interesting will win a special *Herald* letter-writing pen. The winner will be announced on Saturday on this page.

Letters

Letters should be fewer than 200 words. Please include your full name, home address and daytime telephone number for verification. Letters may be edited and may also be republished in electronic form, by photocopying and other methods.

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