# Update on a sell-out – 21 September 2016

It’s not often that the jade beagle asks for an update so soon. But these are strange times.

So: an update on the privatisation with cap and penalty, some may say sell-out, of Newcastle port. The reason: a feature on Newcastle in the Australian.[[1]](#endnote-1)

The feature carried thirteen articles of which ten related to the port. Most extolled the necessity of port diversification, some noted the port’s privatisation, one commented on disappointment in Newcastle missing out on a (government) container terminal after 2003. Yes, thirteen years ago.

Another article discussed coal exports in the first two weeks of September; interesting given September 2016 was then only one week old.

Not one article mentioned the NSW state government’s secret deal to nobble port diversification by requiring Newcastle to fund compensation to Botany if it dares move containers. Even though since late July this ‘confidential’ arrangement made headlines.

Not one article mentioned: the activities of the former government towards the same ends of negating container operations at the port; the examination of this by the NSW corruption commission; the corruption finding against a (then) government member who sought to torpedo a container terminal. Even though these matters were blasted across all forms of media before the feature emerged.

No, despite these matters drawing lurid international headlines such as ‘corruption found in NSW ports’, the Australian didn’t apparently consider such matters to be newsworthy.[[2]](#endnote-2)

This type of ‘don’t talk about the war’ reporting may be usual for the infrastructure club. Who would expect a self-appraisal of the ‘inside story’ of NSW ports privatisations, crowned with story hero (then) Treasurer Baird exclaiming ‘you must be joking’ about how much the sales generated?[[3]](#endnote-3)

But the Australian, newspaper of the year?

So, this is of no national interest? Then how about the form:

* Reasonable big ideas twisted out of all-recognition;
* No potential to get them on track because of a default position of ‘its confidential’;
* Decisions that are practically irreversible;
* Seeming belief nobody will find out or care what has been done;
* Filibustering and chutzpah when the truth outs.

As someone said: you must be joking? The Newcastle sell-out is so seriously damaging to national and Commonwealth interests that it demands federal intervention.

The deal simply needs to be undone. I am confident it will be undone eventually; it is unimaginable for it to stay in place for 47 more years. It would be better for all if it was unwound now, rather than waiting for the effects to become painfully evident, reputations further besmirched and embarrassment to grow.

Here is the chance for the Commonwealth to show some infrastructure leadership rather than blathering on about city deals as a way to spend money.

J Austen

1. http://specialreports.theaustralian.com.au/415218/ [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. http://www.hellenicshippingnews.com/corruption-found-in-new-south-wales-ports/ [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. http://www.containerterminalpolicyinnsw.com.au/the-inside-story-of-the-astonishing-5-1bn-nsw-ports-sale/ [↑](#endnote-ref-3)