

DEFINITELY NOT THE POINT

WHAT'S in a definition? Not a lot I'd suggest, but Newcastle MP Tim Crackanor bravely moved an amendment to the ALP's policy at their NSW weekend conference calling for clarity on funding categories ("Regional funding support", Herald 2/7).

Definitions and categorisations matter if you are bereft of ideas and vision. Definitions matter if you think the NSW government would return to the bad old days of not spending a razoo in Newcastle as Labor did in its 16 years in office.

Definitions count if you don't think your city or electorate can put up sound business cases for productive infrastructure. Some would say definitions are important because it is easier than doing the comprehensive planning, prioritisation of infrastructure, calculating costs and benefits, making the case to Infrastructure NSW and Treasury and building broad support.

The NSW Liberal government confirmed it has \$87.5 billion of infrastructure planned for the next four years. Newcastle and the Hunter will be sharing in that because the projects are needed, planned and backed by a government that believes in the region, not

because of any definition or category.

This figure doesn't include a share of the \$4.1 billion windfall from the sale of the state's share of Snowy Hydro. My advice from Treasury is no worthwhile, productive project should be excluded from consideration just because it touches on an excluded metro council area. Inevitably major infrastructure projects have a large footprint and cross over multiple local government areas.

The Berejiklian government is spending about twice as much on infrastructure as the previous Labor government. Health Infrastructure told me their annual budget was just over \$300 million in 2012. Now it is more than \$2 billion each year. Building a new Maitland Hospital was not possible under Labor simply because they didn't have the funds. I'd suggest Mr Crackanor and Labor focus less on definitions, categories and whining and more on identifying well developed infrastructure proposals with solid business cases. When Newcastle is revitalised with modern health, education, urban, justice and transport infrastructure, who honestly cares about its category?

Scot MacDonald, Parliamentary Secretary for the Hunter