

Dowding roots for NPQ

FORMER WA premier Peter Dowding took to the digital highway last week, emailing the *Herald* his outspoken support for the North Port Quay six-islands development, saying the "clanging of the mindless naysayers" had firmed his position.

His move followed last week's front page story in which he revealed he had informally contacted some of his Freo home-town's movers and shakers in the lead-up to the public announcement of the massive six-islands development in North Fremantle's Rous Head (*'Lawyer to lobbyist'*, *Herald* 7/6/08).

In the email, the former flamboyant WA premier said he was "shocked" by peoples' reaction to the project.

"I am not only happy to support the project but have encouraged the company that I participate in ... to offer to actively work for the acceptance of the [project]. And if that involves lobbying then so be it." (see email in detail on letters page).

Meanwhile another person was also quietly typing out a message for the *Herald*, and Mr Dowding. In last week's story Mr Dowding said he was committed to his work for the Ngarluma Aboriginal Corporation over native title

claims over the Burrup Peninsula.

However Mr Dowding's niece by a former marriage, Robyne Churnside, a member of NAC and director of the Murujuga Aboriginal Corporation board said she felt her uncle "in lore" was not listening to her people.

Ms Churnside said "the old fella" had a "heart of gold" and was well-respected for his work, but that Murujuga old people, who relied on her to translate what was being said along with explaining complex documents, weren't always happy with the hearing they got.

However Ngarluma CEO Laurie Poland told the *Herald* Ms Churnside was not on the NAC committee and hadn't attended its meetings with Mr Dowding.

"If there's anyone who doesn't listen it's Robyne," he said adding, that as a lobbyist, Mr Dowding was required to listen and act on committee decisions.

Mr Dowding reckoned it's "spoilers" with conflicting claims who continued to cloud the issue. The Ngarluma claim was a "deep personal commitment", he said, flagging the "biggest announcement to come out of the Pilbra" would be made in a few days, then threatening to roast Freo's

favourite Rooster if it got the story wrong.

"I will be there on the doorstep on Monday morning if there is any suggestion of impropriety," he thundered.

Ms Churnside also criticised Mr Dowding's lobbyist role with high-profile Fortescue Mining Group, which used Mr Dowding's former Labor parliamentary colleague Julian Grill to lobby the WA government behind the scenes to push a railway line through an Aboriginal heritage area.

The fall-out of a WA Corruption and Crime Commission inquiry saw resources minister John Bowler expelled from the ALP and Sheila McHale stripped of her Aboriginal Affairs portfolio for their roles in the affair.

While Mr Dowding was not involved with FMG at the time of the railway-line controversy, only taking up the cudgels for WA's third-largest iron ore producer since the CCC hearings, Ms Churnside wondered how someone hot on indigenous social issues could work for the company.

Mr Dowding refused to comment on his role with FMG: "I have no comment about matters that don't involve Ngarluma," he said icily, freezing the phone to the journalist's ear.