

It's Mabo. It's Justice. It's WestConnex. Protesters rally against Mike Baird's vibe

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MARCH AGAINST MIKE TARGETS BAIRD

Thousands of protesters gather at Sydney's Town Hall to rally against a host of Mike Baird's most controversial policies.

A crowd of more than 3000 marched on NSW Parliament House on Sunday, venting opposition to a range of policies of the Baird government.

The WestConnex motorway, the sacking of councillors, increased police powers and anti-protest laws were all criticised strongly at the protest, which also reflected local opposition to a western Sydney airport, to the removal of trees in the eastern suburbs, to TAFE cuts, and to lock-out laws.

"It doesn't matter what your issue is, at some point you will ask yourself the same question," said rally MC Alex McKinnon, a journalist with Junkee.com.

"Whose city is this? Whose state is this?"

Holding a sign quoting the movie *The Castle* - "It's Mabo. It's justice. It's the constitution. It's the vibe." - one protester, Brook Tait-Styles, said excessive secrecy over development projects and council mergers most concerned him about the government's agenda.

It was a common sentiment among those in attendance, who gathered at Sydney's Town Hall to hear from speakers at about 2pm before marching to Parliament.



Protestors gather in Sydney's CBD to oppose the draconian laws and policies of NSW Premier Mike Baird and his government. Photo: James Alcock

"I'm here protesting against just about everything the Baird government's been doing lately," said another attendee, Peter Donley.

"From their anti-protest laws, to their changes to the nature conservation impacts, the biodiversity laws, the land-clearing laws ... there's a whole range of things."

Although the rally was notable for the breadth of issues raised by those in attendance, some developments appeared to generate more heat than others.

Perhaps the loudest jeering and booing occurred after McKinnon mentioned "James Packer's monstrosity of a casino going up on public land at Barangaroo."

Speakers, including Greens MP David Shoebridge and former Labor mayor of Leichhardt Darcy Byrne, accused the premier of undermining local democracy and favouring the interests of corporations.

"We know what his real agenda is: having eliminated all organised governmental opposition he plans to give the green light to WestConnex, to rush through wall-to-wall skyscrapers in the Bays Precinct, Parramatta Road and the Sydenham to Bankstown corridor," said Mr Byrne.

The Baird government has an ambitious transport and development agenda, though has faced at times fierce localised opposition.



A protestor at the anti-Mike Baird rally in Sydney. Photo: James Alcock

The removal of hundreds of trees in the city and eastern suburbs to accommodate a light rail line has provoked a backlash to a project the government says should increase the efficiency of inner-city transport.

Others at the rally spoke against the lock-out laws, which have resulted in fewer instances of alcohol-related violence, but which have had a chilling effect on many CBD night spots.

"There's no acknowledgement of the fact that most of the people who work in these bars and music venues at night-time tend to be younger people who are often putting themselves through tertiary education and TAFE," said Tyson Koh, a campaigner against the laws. "Whose standing up for young people here?"

The rally was used as a platform by some to voice concerns about long-running development disputes. "We are opposed to the destruction of Thompson Square, which is one of the oldest squares in Australia" said Jan Sparkes, whose group have been fighting plans for over three years to tear down Windsor Bridge in north-west Sydney.

"We believe there's possibly an ulterior motive," said Ms Sparkes.

<http://www.smh.com.au/nsw/its-mabo-its-justice-its-westconnex-protesters-rally-against-mike-bairds-vibe-20160529-gp6ljk.html>