

# Lawyer to lobbyist

Former premier Peter Dowding lends hand to 'West Freo' developers

by JENNY D'ANGER

FREMANTLE local and former WA premier Peter Dowding has hung up his lawyer's wig to take up lobbying.

But Mr Dowding says he won't be replacing it with a Panama hat, a la controversial lobbyist Brian Burke, despite being on the government's lobbyist register.

"I won't be taking up the mantle of Brian Burke," said the man who followed Mr Burke as premier in March 1988.

While his lobby work focused on Aboriginal issues he was recently called in by the proponents of the North Port Quay development to contact Fremantle movers and shakers the week before the electrifying project was unveiled.

"It was not lobbying it was just a discussion ... I didn't urge them to take a view," he said, adding

he reckoned the development was visionary and should get a hearing from government.

Mr Dowding declined to say who he spoke to but he said he wasn't paid for the couple of hours worth of phone calls.

"If [NPQ] wanted me to tell them how they could win public approval I might charge a fee," he said.

Mr Dowding went on the lobbyist register when the Carpenter government first moved to reign in lobbyists – following Corruption and Crime Commission revelations – saying, as a lawyer dispensing advice and with his political connections, he didn't want any comeback.

"It's more sensible to have it on the public record."

He ruled out taking advantage of any boost to business due to the fall from grace of lobbyists

Burke, Julian Grill and John Halden (all former parliamentary colleagues) and said there was plenty of former pollies in the market: "My activity is extremely low in that area."

His focus was Aboriginal issues currently working with "an Aboriginal mob" in the north west along with mining companies over indigenous issues including native title, he said.

Mr Dowding said there was no love lost between himself and one-time boss Brian Burke, fuelled by then premier Burke putting him in charge of mining – at direct odds with his passion for indigenous social reform. "That was pretty awful," he said.

"It's a bit like the current government, what do they do for social issues? They're too busy dealing with big developments."