

INQUIRY INTO THE MANAGEMENT OF THE SYDNEY HARBOUR FORESHORE AUTHORITY

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Subject: Luna Park

Summary Acknowledged

Submission to Inquiry: Management of the Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority.

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Confidentiality: **General submission** **Requested confidentiality**
Readers: **[LC Proc], [General Purpose]**

1. Current SHFA planning process is not transparent and blocks community out of much of the process

The Harris Community Centre worked with local residents who were unhappy with City of Sydney's new design for the Ultimo Aquatic Centre. This was our first experience of DAs coming under the jurisdiction of SHFA (previously they had been handled by City of Sydney, Planning NSW or Central Sydney Planning Committee (CSPC)). We found the process was not open and transparent. Submissions went to a SHFA planner who then prepared a report, and at no time was this response public. The report went to the SHFA board who also made no public response to the report and their secret recommendations then went to the Minister for Planning. This process left many questions unanswered- for example- How many submissions were received? What were community concerns? How were these addressed? In the past the process has been far more thoroughly documented- minutes of meetings are available to the community, reports are available, community members could attend and address both Council and CSPC meetings, objections can be heard through the Land and Environment Court. The process adopted by SHFA leaves absolutely no recourse for DA objectors.

In this instance we sought and were granted a meeting with the Chairman in order to state our case. However, we are still not aware of how these concerns were addressed either by the planner or at board level. Nevertheless the approval process should at a minimum provide the same level of public scrutiny as that of the City Council and the CSPC.

2. Planning assessment methods are flawed as they only address the physical building structure and not the social impact of the development

Once again using the Ultimo Aquatic Centre as an example, SHFA planners told residents that they could not consider any objections to do with public interest or social implications. The Aquatic Centre DA proposed deleting several key facilities including the leisure pool- this was despite the growing number of families and children moving into the area. It was felt that this in turn would then place pressure on the 'program pool' which the community wanted kept for hydrotherapy priorities. The community considered these changes unacceptable considering the increasing number of families and children as well as the growing ageing population living in the locality. We were informed by SHFA that these issues could not be considered when assessing the DA as their criteria is restricted to the physical dimensions of the project.

SHFA guidelines for assessing DAs must include assessment of social implications rather than just physical impact. To ignore social implications is short-sighted and can lead to major problem for the community in years to come.

3. Lack of trust in SHFA as an independent consent authority

There is a general lack of trust of SHFA by the local community due to its position as a government body with a mandate for selling off land and making profit from it, as well as from its many subsidiaries such as Darling Harbour. It is perceived that in many instances SHFA will compromise community needs in order to maximise profits.

For example of this is SHFA was one of the organisations which would potentially be most affected by the Cross City Tunnel, in particular the proposed emission stack, which is to be situated in SHFA land in Darling Harbour. For several years the RTA presented the community with various Environmental Impact Studies. The community vigorously opposed the unfiltered emission stack on health grounds. The community was aware that SHFA were in their own meetings with the RTA however the topics and outcomes of these meetings remained a secret and at no time did SHFA assist or support the community in their very real concerns about an unfiltered emission stack in the middle of Darling Harbour. Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority remained ambivalent and unprepared to make any independent stand at the many public meetings that were held around that time. At one precinct meeting the Director of Built Environment admitted that SHFA could not do anything because they were a government department. However in documents released to the Upper House in September 2003 it became apparent that SHFA was actively pursuing the option of hiding the stack in a new building in Darling Harbour. It would appear that protecting its monetary affairs is of far greater concern to SHFA than helping to protect the health of the local resident and business community.

Given this history how can the community trust SHFA to address their issues properly when assessing planning in the local area?

4. SHFA has lack of commitment to true Community Consultation

As evidenced by the many glossy brochures and polished powerpoint presentations which have been presented at public meetings it is clear that SHFA has money to spend when it comes to selling their own development proposals. It is hard for the community to compete with this when wanting to highlight issues which will impact the local community as a result of the development. SHFA is also extremely selective in the way that it consults with the community and it would appear that it has often already made its decision prior to the consultation. In truth often they are in fact making a presentation of a fait accompli in the name of consultation.