

## INQUIRY INTO WINDSOR BRIDGE REPLACEMENT PROJECT

**Name:** Name suppressed

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Partially  
Confidential

## **SUBMISSION**

To:

Portfolio Committee No.5 – Industry and Transport

**Inquiry into the Windsor Bridge replacement project**

11/01/2018

## **BACKGROUND**

*As a Hawkesbury resident since 2013 I was unaware of this issue prior to then. Having to cross Windsor Bridge twice a day for work I am fully aware of the traffic congestion at both ends of the day and anyone with any sense of logic can see that merely replacing the bridge will have no positive impact on this as the surrounding roads will remain the same. There is no justification to irrevocably destroy valuable heritage at any time, but when there is no gain to anyone in the community or the people of NSW, it really makes me wonder about the real motivation for this project.*

## **ISSUES**

- Traffic
- State of current bridge
- Flood mitigation
- Heritage
- Political interference

## **COMMENT ON ISSUES**

### **Traffic**

- The NSW State Government claims that replacing the current bridge with a slightly wider and slightly higher bridge will alleviate congestion. There is no logic to this as it is the feeder roads to the bridge all converging on one location that causes the congestion, not the bridge itself. I believe that the best solution would be to retain the current bridge for local traffic and build a new bridge and bypass for through traffic and heavy vehicles.
- Windsor and Thompson Square currently endures more traffic and heavy vehicles than Berry, Kempsey, Moree and other places which have received bypasses. The recently opened Berry bypass cost \$580M and will cater for the 19400 vehicles passing through it per day. The RMS costed a Windsor bypass at \$116M and there are currently over 22500 vehicles (including over 2200 trucks) crossing Windsor bridge each day. Despite this the Government says those traffic levels don't warrant a bypass. ([www.cawb.com.au](http://www.cawb.com.au))
- In August 2012 the RMS said: "The replacement of a bridge alone is unlikely to improve capacity as there are other constraints beyond the scope of this project that would need to be addressed."

### **State of current bridge**

- Dominic Perrottet (Liberal Party, State Member for Hawkesbury) claims the existing bridge is in "perilous condition" and needs to be replaced, despite the RMS and Government's structural engineers saying it is "safe" and in remarkably good condition.
- "The condition of the existing bridge is such that it is not in a dire condition and could relatively economically be refurbished and strengthened." Report on Structural Condition of the existing Windsor Bridge, pg.31

### **Flood mitigation**

- Ray Williams MP (Liberal Party) has claimed that the new bridge would provide the first flood free crossing in 200 years. However the RMS says the proposed bridge will have the same flood immunity as the approach roads, which are either the same height or lower than the current bridge. Even if this were not the case, the proposed bridge height is 9 metres, nearly 2 metres lower than the 1992 flood. ([www.cawb.com.au](http://www.cawb.com.au))

## Heritage

- The destructive implications of the project are so severe the Government had to change legislation to get it approved. Under State Significant Infrastructure legislation introduced in 2011 heritage protections were able to be switched off, and the Government no longer had to seek the approval of the Office of Heritage.
- In 2013 Duncan Gay (National Party), then Minister for Roads stated, “the new bridge does not require the acquisition of any heritage buildings in Windsor”. However in my opinion, the NSW State Government and the previous Liberal-dominated Hawkesbury Council have been complicit in finding a way to bypass the otherwise necessary approval by the Heritage Council of the acquisition of heritage listed buildings. One property in particular, although no longer present in artist’s depictions of the finished project, has been left off the list of buildings requiring approval. Instead details of the reserved acquisition are buried deep within a Hawkesbury Council planning document. ([www.cawb.com.au](http://www.cawb.com.au))
- "Working Paper 1 says impacts are so major WBRP should not go ahead. RMS’s heritage consultants in Working Paper 1 state the proposed impacts on Thompson Square Conservation Area are so major the WBRP should not go ahead. But RMS has chosen not to accept this advice because they had already chosen to explore only Option 1 in this EIS." Windsor Bridge Replacement Project Independent Heritage Review August 2013, pg.8

## Political interference

- Documents from 2013 revealed that the then Hawkesbury Council was the only one of six Government agencies to be in favour of the project.
- The push for a new bridge came largely from Bart Bassett, who was elected as a Hawkesbury Councillor in 2004 and then Mayor. He was then elected as a Liberal State MP in 2011. In 2014 the Liberal Party asked him to resign in due to ICAC investigations into his conduct. In 2016 he was found to have knowingly solicited illegal donations from the property developer Builddev. In 2013, after scathing peer reviews about the project, the Department of Planning initially opposed the project. When word reached Mr Bassett, he campaigned the offices of then Premier Barry O’Farrell. Copies of emails released in a NSW Parliament upper house show Premier Barry O’Farrell’s office put pressure on Roads Minister Duncan Gay and Planning Minister Brad Hazzard to deliver the new bridge project. It was after this the Department of Planning changed its refusal and recommended the approval of the project. ([www.cawb.com.au](http://www.cawb.com.au))
- “Some in the Hawkesbury community believe there is another agenda behind the bridge replacement – sand extraction on the Richmond Lowlands. Sand is a vital resource for the NSW state government’s mega infrastructure building plans and it is in critical short supply. The sand resources along the Hawkesbury River on the Richmond Lowlands are extensive and are close to Sydney. Replacement of the existing bridge in its current location, but with wider-spaced pylons to allow barges to pass underneath, is key to cost effectively removing sand for transport by barge, according to local sand dredging experts.” ([www.hawkesburycouncilintegritywatch.org/windsor-bridge/](http://www.hawkesburycouncilintegritywatch.org/windsor-bridge/))

## CONCLUSION

I am very glad there is an inquiry into this issue as I am firmly of the opinion that the stated reasons for the replacement of Windsor Bridge are merely smokescreens to hide the real agenda. There are no logical reasons why expert opinion was ignored in order to push on with a project that has no apparent merit or benefit to the local or wider community. In the absence of any other reasons the theory that the real motivation is to open up the Richmond Lowlands to sand mining is hard to ignore, given the outcomes of the project are inevitable destruction to heritage with no significant traffic alleviation or flood mitigation.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Windsor Bridge Replacement Project be stopped immediately along with archaeological “salvage”.
- The RMS plans for a Windsor bypass.
- The current Windsor Bridge be maintained and ultimately be used for light traffic only (once the bypass is in place).

*11 January 2018*