

Submission
No 186

**INQUIRY INTO IMPACT OF THE WESTERN HARBOUR
TUNNEL AND BEACHES LINK**

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

To whom it may concern,

I wish to register my objection to the Beaches Link Tunnel. I live with in Gordon Street, Clontarf, with my young family and the tunnel stands to have a large and negative impact on our lives.

High risk to my family's health from the emissions stack at Balgowlah

The tunnel proposal includes an emissions stack on Balgowlah Golf Course. This stack will be an eyesore – at 6.5 stories high, there is nothing in the near vicinity of similar height and it will be an ugly blight on the landscape.

But far worse than that, it will be pumping unfiltered particulate matter into the air for a radius of 1.2km. Particulate matter has been proven in a UK court to contribute to illness and cause death in children. In 2013 a 9-year-old child, Ella Kissi-Debrah, died in the UK following a severe asthma attack, and in December 2020 the court made a landmark ruling that air pollution made a material contribution to her death. The coroner Philip Barlow said that the child was exposed to an excessive level of two air pollutants - nitrogen dioxide, a toxic gas largely emitted by diesel vehicles, and particulate matter.

My home is within 1.2 km of the proposed emissions stack. How can my family and I continue to live here knowing our children will be exposed to this dangerous unfiltered particulate matter? My parents' home is also within the 1.2km radius of the proposed stack, so even a retreat to Nanna and Poppa's house won't protect us.

The tunnel also stands to impact my children's education. My husband was the captain of Balgowlah Boys High School in 1996, and we have always wanted our children to follow in his footsteps and attend their local public high school, Bally Boys. However, the school is only 322 metres from the proposed emissions stack. I cannot, in good conscience send my children to Balgowlah Boys knowing it will be endangering their health. Where we will send them to high school if the tunnel is built, I do not know.

Given the location of our home and the local high school, if the Beaches Link Tunnel goes ahead as proposed, my children will be breathing life-threatening unfiltered particulate matter 24 hours a day. This is just not okay.

High risk to physical and mental health of residents and school children from Balgowlah Golf Course construction site

Even before the emissions stack is pumping its poisonous matter into our air, the seven plus years of construction noise, dust and traffic problems stemming from the Balgowlah Golf Course site stand to significantly and negatively impact our quality of life and our mental and physical health.

The EIS stated that the dust will potentially contain contaminants such as asbestos fibres or organic matter stirred up through the disturbance of contaminated soils. It also stated that 4000 homes in proximity to the golf course stand to be subject to noise increases throughout the construction phase. It will be relentless, with construction taking place at least six days a week, and for those of us who work from home there will be no respite.

Traffic will be a nightmare, with 2.5 vehicles leaving the site every minute (possibly more during peak times) according to the EIS. Local parking also looks set to be overrun with construction workers taking over all street parking within a 2km radius of the site. For residents like us without off-street parking, this is going to be problematic. And think of the impact of construction on the

Balgowlah Boys Campus and its students and staff, situated just across the road from the golf course. It will be horrific.

Suspicious and worrying lack of community receptor at Balgowlah Boys Campus

Why is there no community receptor located at Balgowlah Boys? If there is a site that warrants a community receptor, surely it is a school with 1200 students directly adjacent to the Balgowlah Golf Course construction site, and only 322 metres from the planned emissions stack. It is frankly deceptive to not have a community receptor located at Balgowlah Boys. It feels like the true impact of the tunnel on the children that attend that school is not being taken into account.

Promoting dangerous traffic 'rat-running' in residential streets

The tunnel's construction and operation will increase traffic in residential streets in Balgowlah, making our streets less safe for pedestrians, increasing noise in our homes and impacting the value of our properties.

My husband and I enjoy walking our young children to school, to visit their grandparents who live about 100 metres from us and to the shops at Balgowlah Heights. All of these activities require us to cross local residential streets. Thanks to the tunnel, many of these streets, including New Street West and Upper Beach Street, are set to become traffic rat runs. During the construction phase, motorists will be attempting to avoid the increased construction traffic, including slow heavy trucks, on Sydney Road. Once the tunnel is operational, motorists will use New Street West, Upper Beach Street and Maretimo Street, and their feeder streets, to access the link road through the golf course, and avoid the increased traffic on Sydney Road accessing the tunnel.

Motorists already drive too fast as they accelerate in a westerly direction away from the Balgowlah Heights shops. To have an increased number of vehicles using New Street West as a thoroughfare, driving fast as they attempt to get wherever they're going in the shortest amount of time possible, will make our streets more dangerous for pedestrians. It will make our home noisier, and it will negatively influence the value of our property, so even if we want to sell and move our options will be limited.

Dangerous link / access road intersection on Sydney Road opposite Maretimo Street

The link / access road connecting Sydney Road with Burnt Bridge Creek Deviation through the current Balgowlah Golf Course, complete with traffic lights on Sydney Road opposite Maretimo Street will:

- Make pedestrian activity around Maretimo Street and Sydney Road, particularly the movement of students arriving at and leaving Balgowlah Boys Campus, less safe
- Reduce the air quality in the area of the Maretimo Street / Sydney Road / link road intersection as more vehicles idle at the lights
- Increase traffic rat-running on Upper Beach Street, New Street West and Maretimo Streets and their feeder streets

Again, our quality of life, our health and the safety of our children as they come and go from school every day are at risk if this link road goes ahead as proposed.

Failure to consider public transport

97 per cent of climate scientists the world over agree that climate change is real, and human activity is its cause. Given what we know, we could and should be designing and building a world-leading

mass transport solution that will sustain commuters and visitors to and from the Northern Beaches for many years to come, whilst also leaving a smaller carbon footprint.

There has been no comparison of the tunnel project to a mass transport alternative in terms of its impact on local traffic, biodiversity, disruption, climate, waste, contamination, air pollution and effectiveness as a congestion solution. A fair study and comparison should be undertaken and published for public consumption before any tunnel project goes ahead.

Failure to fulfil stated objective of reducing traffic and travel times

I remain unconvinced that the Beaches Link Tunnel will reduce traffic and travel times.

Firstly, the 'work from home effect' brought about by the coronavirus pandemic has not been factored into any tunnel planning. Fewer people are commuting, and there are signs this trend might be here to stay. Is building a new car tunnel even necessary given the changed commuting patterns? More modelling and research need to be undertaken.

As we all know, a new car tunnel will create induced demand, where building a new road simply leads to more traffic and so any predicted reduction in travel time is soon absorbed. This is a well-known phenomenon, and there are plenty of examples where this has occurred in other parts of Sydney. Some experts predict that traffic problems will return to current levels within two years of the tunnel opening.

The EIS stated that the traffic along Military Road will fall by 11% once the tunnel project is completed. Even assuming the modelling is accurate, and this forecast reduction does come to pass, I do not believe that this fractional traffic reduction warrants the vast expense, irreversible environmental degradation, adverse effects on human health and loss of quality of life that this tunnel will cause should it go ahead.

High risk to human health at Sandy Bay and Clontarf

My family loves to visit Sandy Bay and Clontarf year-round to swim, picnic and play on the sand. My husband and I have been taking our children there since they were very young, and it is a special place for our family.

The dredging that will take place in Middle Harbour between Seaforth and Northbridge to build the cofferdams to construct the tunnel will disturb potentially high levels of dangerous toxins from the silt and sediment at the bottom of the harbour.

As the EIS stated, 'The sediments pose a high contamination risk to construction given that contamination is known to be present within sediments which are likely to be excavated and exposed during the construction of the cofferdams in Middle Harbour.' (EIS, Appendix M, p94).

This contamination is thought to include such toxins as heavy metals, hydrocarbons, pesticides, organotins, per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFASs).

The risk that these substances present to human health, as well as that of flora, fauna and marine life, is acknowledged by the Australian Government: 'The toxicity, mobility, persistence and bioaccumulation potential of PFASs pose potential concerns for the environment and for human health.' (Australian Health Protection Principal Committee Per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) FactSheet, Australian Government Department of Health)

The tide will carry the disturbed material towards Spit Bridge and beyond, and so this presents a major problem for people that spend time in Middle Harbour, Spit Marina, Sandy Bay and Clontarf

Beach and Children's Ocean Pool. The control of sediment, silt and sludge by means of floating curtains around the construction site in Middle Harbour presents a serious challenge. For example, silt curtains are set to descend only 12m in an area of depths of up to 34m. The contractor will not be able to provide a guarantee that the levels of toxins in the waters of Sandy Bay and Clontarf Beach will be within safe levels.

The risk this presents to the community is so vast, unavoidable and long-lasting that it is simply unacceptable.

Unknown environmental impact at Manly Lagoon, Queenscliff, North and South Steyne Beaches

We also love to visit Queenscliff and Manly beaches. Our children do Nippers at Queensie, and my husband won a national surf boat title for the club in the 90s.

According to the EIS, the tunnel construction site at Balgowlah Golf Course is set to pump 428,000 litres of wastewater into Burnt Bridge Creek every day, five or six days a week, for four years (EIS, chapter 17, page 44). Burnt Bridge Creek drains into Manly Lagoon, which leads to Queenscliff, North and South Steyne Beaches (also known as Manly Beach). The EIS states that the wastewater will be treated, but it's hard to imagine that the water quality at Queenscliff Beach will remain unaffected by such huge quantities of construction wastewater pumped into it every single working day for four years. But since the EIS does not contain any information, modelling or assessment of the impacts of the wastewater on the catchment downstream of Burnt Bridge Creek, its effect on the lagoon and beaches remains unknown.

Add to this that the EIS predicts a reduction in the baseflow of Burnt Bridge Creek of up to 79 per cent during construction, and up to 96 per cent after 100 years of tunnel operation (EIS, chapter 17, pages 49 and 57). The creek will effectively become little more than a stormwater drain.

The EIS fails to assess what impact this massive reduction in the creek's flow will have on every person, creature, and body of water downstream of the creek, including Manly Lagoon, Queenscliff, North and South Steyne Beaches. The long-term effects are a scary unknown, completely ignored by the EIS. Imagine the fallout when iconic Manly Beach is no longer safe for swimming because of the pollution caused by the tunnel construction. This cannot be allowed to happen.

High risk to biodiversity and human health at Manly Dam

My family also enjoys bushwalking and swimming at Manly Dam. Our two young sons (then aged 6 and 4) were so proud when they completed the walk circumnavigating the dam for the first time earlier this year. The tunnel puts Manly Dam and the surrounding bush areas at risk.

Work to widen the Wakehurst Parkway will result in uncontrolled flows of water into the dam during periods of heavy rain. Not only will Manly Dam no longer be safe for people to swim in, but biodiversity will also suffer. The only landlocked population of native Climbing Galaxias fish in Sydney live in Curl Curl Creek, part of the Manly Dam catchment. According to the Australian Museum, it is one of the most northern recorded Australian populations of Climbing Galaxias. They will most likely be eliminated should the water in the dam become polluted by the works associated with the tunnel project. What a tragedy that would be.

High risk to grey-headed flying foxes (a threatened species) at Burnt Bridge Creek

I strongly believe it is our responsibility to maintain and preserve the natural environment for successive generations, including protecting endangered species. The Beaches Link Tunnel construction and operation will endanger the protected grey-headed flying foxes at Burnt Bridge Creek.

The EIS stated that 'substantial base flow impacts at Burnt Bridge Creek are also expected during the operational phase with up to a 96 per cent reduction being modelled.' (EIS, Appendix O, page xi). It then goes on to admit that 'this could impact ecosystems reliant on the water within these creeks.' (EIS, Appendix N, page x). One example (and there are many) of the native fauna reliant on that water is the Burnt Bridge Creek grey-headed flying fox camp.

The grey-headed flying fox (*Pteropus poliocephalus*) is a threatened species, classified as vulnerable, and subject to protection both at a state and national level. Grey-headed flying foxes are classified as a 'landscape-managed species' and a targeted strategy for managing their survival has been developed under the NSW Office of Environment & Heritage's Save Our Species program. The program recognises that landscape-managed species such as the grey-headed flying fox are 'subject to threatening processes that generally act at the landscape scale (e.g., habitat loss or degradation)'. I would suggest that the Beaches Link Tunnel construction site at Balgowlah Golf Course constitutes a 'threatening process at a landscape scale' in this context.

Looking specifically at the impact the tunnel construction will have on the water in Burnt Bridge Creek (which is a 79 per cent reduction in baseflow at the end of construction (EIS, chapter 17, p49) and a 96 per cent reduction in flow after 100 years of operation (EIS, chapter 17, p57)), note that 'alteration to the natural flow regimes of rivers and streams and their floodplains and wetlands' was listed as a 'key threatening process' on Schedule 3 of the Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995. The impact that the tunnel project will have on Burnt Bridge Creek, as it is described in the EIS, would clearly be described as 'altering its natural flow regime', therefore presenting a 'key threat' to Balgowlah's vulnerable grey-headed flying fox population. Therefore, I would suggest that tunnel contravenes the Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995. It is up to us to preserve and protect this threatened species.

As you can see, every facet of my family's life stands to be negatively affected by the Beaches Link Tunnel. My children's health will be at risk at home and at school as they breathe in dangerous particulate matter. Even as they walk to and from school and around their neighbourhood their chances of being involved in a traffic accident will be higher. The special places we like to spend our time on the weekend swimming, bushwalking, and being in nature will be compromised, perhaps forever. Even if we wanted to sell up and move on, the value of our house will be reduced. Of course, we are simply one of thousands of local families and households who stand to suffer. And every single Australian will be impacted by the negative contribution the tunnel makes to accelerating climate change. And for what? A debatable 11 minute reduction in travel time to the city. The cost of the Beaches Link Tunnel is simply too great. It must be abandoned.