

Submission
No 394

INQUIRY INTO IMPACT OF THE WESTERN HARBOUR TUNNEL AND BEACHES LINK

Organisation: Rozelle Against WestConnex

Date Received: 17 June 2021



<http://rozelleagainstwestconnex.org>

SUBMISSION FROM
ROZELLE AGAINST WESTCONNEX
TO THE
NSW PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY
INTO THE IMPACT OF
THE WESTERN HARBOUR AND
NORTHERN BEACHES LINK

PREPARED 16th 2021

INTRODUCTION

RAW notes that the members of the inquiry are made up of parliamentarians who are members of political parties who support all stages of WestConnex, including the WHT and the NBL, with the notable exception of the Abigail Boyd, who opposes the project; and possibly the Deputy Chair, Mark Banasiak, whose private secretary states that; *“He has no formal position on the project itself”...*

Mookhey, Daniel	(ALP, LC Member)
Banasiak, Mark	(SFF, LC Member)
Boyd, Abigail	(GRNS, LC Member)
Farraway, Sam	(NAT, LC Member)
Khan, Trevor	(NAT, LC Member)
Mallard, Shayne	(LIB, LC Member)

Bearing that in mind, we do hope that the result of the Inquiry will not be a foregone conclusion; however it does seem that based on the evidence given by **RAW** and other community groups to the **Parliamentary Inquiry into The Rozelle Interchange**, and the lack of action in relation to those recommendations, that little good, if any, will come from this exercise.

It's on that understanding that **RAW** accepts the opportunity to make a submission to the **NSW Parliamentary Inquiry** into the proposed **Western Harbour Tunnel (WHT)** and **Northern Beaches Link**.

Our submission is lodged so that the 850 members of **RAW** may appear on record as having drawn the members of the inquiry's attention to what we firmly believe is a serious misstep in relation to the excavation of the harbour floor; the failure to filter the five tunnel exhausts that will impact on residents in the vicinity of the WHT; and also to the construction and privatisation of all five stages of WestConnex.

We remain gravely concerned about the essentially uncontrolled release of a highly toxic cocktail of cancer inducing chemicals that are currently buried under a layer of silt on the harbour floor, according to a 2015 NSW Government Parliamentary Research Paper by Daniel Montoya; (which was apparently completely ignored), and should *not* be disturbed and so should remain buried forever.

This document is titled [NSW Government Parliamentary Research Service sewage, toxic chemicals and microplastics. Briefing Paper No 03/2015](#) and it concluded that;

"With regards to the pollution currently in the Harbour, it appears that remediation of polluted sediments is technically and financially impractical. It seems that the only way to address the problem is to wait until sediments cover the contaminated layer. The environmental impacts of these pollutants are expected to continue for decades, if not centuries". (1)

RAW's SUMMARY OF CONCERNS:

Following is a summary of the main issues raised in this **RAW** submission and each complies with one or more of the terms of reference.

- **RAW** notes that whilst WHT construction activities have yet to begin at any significant scale within the Inner West Council area, we are nonetheless able to predict the nature and extent of these impacts, due to its negative experience over several years dealing with WestConnex.
- **RAW** has a long-standing position of opposing radiating inner-urban motorways, including Westconnex and the WHT, as they have never solved traffic issues anywhere in the world.
- **RAW** is extremely concerned about the project's air pollution impacts (particularly on sensitive uses such as schools, especially the growing vehicle emissions from surface traffic growth and the emissions from the four Rozelle stacks and the fifth in Waverton.
- **RAW** members are most concerned about the release of toxic sludge, the potentially fatal impact on the health of harbour users on, in and adjacent to the water and the marine ecosystem.
- **RAW** firmly believes that all work on inner-Sydney motorways should cease until the NSW Government completes an infrastructure construction health impact study.
- **RAW** has serious concerns about the negative WHT, (previously known as Stage 4 of

WestConnex construction impacts, based on the abysmal contractor/resident relationship with the previous 3 Stages of WestConnex.

- **RAW** members have also concerns that have been raised about the 24/7 construction hours of operation, noise, vibration, dust, odour, property damage, heavy vehicle movements, and worker parking demand.
- **RAW** prefers traffic-reduction options to address congestion, including public and active transport, travel demand management and transit-oriented development, with some modest/targeted improvements to the existing road network.
- **RAW's** Birchgrove members adjacent to Yurulbin Point have also raised concerns about impacts on Yurulbin Park, marine flora and fauna, marine water quality, barge movements and the release of toxic sludge, the poor containment record and the risks involved with the construction and use of cofferdams.
- **RAW** opposes the use of the former Balmain Leagues Club site as a WHT construction site because of construction impacts on adjacent homes, shops and schools.
- **RAW** requires confirmation that WHT construction will not delay delivery of the WestConnex Rozelle Rail Yards public park.
- **RAW** is concerned about cumulative road safety and traffic congestion impacts on Victoria Road, White Bay, Anzac and Iron Cove Bridges, City West Link and adjoining roads from construction traffic associated with WHT, WestConnex and other projects planned for the Rozelle area.
- **RAW** does not for an instant believe that any traffic benefits from the project actually exist and so do not justify the project.
- **RAW** recognises that filtration of WHT vent stacks is essential, consistent with a recommendation from the 2018 WestConnex Parliamentary Inquiry, however retro fitting costs should be borne by the contractor.
- **RAW** also believes that the Governments' often stated position that WestConnex and its various stages "*are world's best practice*" is a mendacious statement and may well be criminally negligent, as in tunnel filtration is the only proven method.
- **RAW** agrees with the IWC and other community groups who all believe that the project would create multiple biodiversity impacts, and that the mortality and morbidity risks associated with harbour pollution from dredged material are totally unacceptable.
- **RAW** recognises the significant noise, vibration, health and other impacts on nearby residents that will be a fact 24/7 for several years, particularly those at the end of Louisa Road and in Numa Street, Birchgrove.
- **RAW** is well aware of the very real potential for damage to houses and other buildings wherever tunnels are at a shallow depth, as would be the case near Yurulbin Point.
- **RAW** is not alone in recognizing the inherent construction risks involved in constructing and decommissioning the cofferdam and joining the driven tunnel to the immersed tube.
- **RAW** also agrees with the IWC in relation to the impact on trees and other valued features of Yurulbin Park and denial of public access to this park during the construction period.
- **RAW** believes that the impact on the inevitable drain down of the water table on the root system of established trees above the WHT tunnels path will cause their inevitable slow death; and foresees the potential for serious damage to persons and property, due to the unlined tunnels.
- **RAW** also acknowledges the negative impacts associated with the relocation of the Birchgrove Ferry Wharf.
- **RAW** believes that "Commercial in Confidence" is simply a confidence trick purely to

mislead the public and to keep them uninformed.

Since the announcement of the commencement of construction of WestConnex in 2016, approximately 140 members of **RAW** have sold up and moved to other suburbs, or out of the city altogether. All have cited the reason for moving as being the loss of amenity due to WestConnex, and the unfiltered stacks in particular.

However with the new arrivals, some of whom initially believed the Government's spin, and who were then quick to join **RAW**, our numbers have remained relatively constant at around 850 families.

TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY

- (a) The adequacy of the business case for the project, including the cost benefits ratio,*
- (b) The adequacy of the consideration of alternative options,*
- (c) The cost of the project, including the reasons for overruns,*
- (d) The consideration of the governance and structure of the project including the use of a 'development partner' model,*
- (e) The extent to which the project is meeting the original goals of the project,*
- (f) The consultation methods and effectiveness, both with affected communities and stakeholders,*
- (g) The extent to which changes in population growth, work and travel patterns due to the Covid-19 pandemic have impacted on the original cost benefit ratio,*
- (h) Whether the NSW Government should publish the base-case financial model and benefit cost ratio for the for the project and its component parts,*
- (i) Whether the project is subject to the appropriate levels of transparency and accountability that would be expected of a project delivered by a public sector body,*
- (j) The impact on the environment, including marine ecosystems,*
- (k) The adequacy of processes for accessing and responding to noise, vibration and other impacts on residents, during construction and operationally,*
- (l) The impact of the project on nearby public sites, including Yurulbin Point and Dawn Fraser Baths, and*
- (m) Any other related matter.*

The issues raised in the **RAW** submission have relevance to the inquiry's terms of reference as outlined above.

(a) The adequacy of the business case for the project, including the costs benefits ratio:

RAW agrees with and contributed to the review commissioned by former Leichhardt Council in 2016. It concludes that the project's business case is poor and WestConnex is not justified; and as WHT is a motorway extension of WestConnex, aka Stage 4, the same conclusions can be applied to WHT.

(b) The adequacy of the consideration of alternative options:

RAW believes no documentation exists to show that there ever was any attempt made by the NSW Government to proceed with anything other than a motorway option, with other transport options never given any serious consideration, if they were considered at all.

(c) The cost of the project, including the reasons for overruns:

RAW has always maintained that motorway options are never the most cost effective solutions to traffic congestion. Congestion can only ever be resolved by reducing the number of vehicles, not by building more roads, as they only serve to induce traffic. It is impossible to make any meaningful comment on cost incurred and cost overruns as these documents are deemed Commercial in confidence.

(d) The consideration of the governance and structure of the project including the use of a 'development partner' model:

RAW is not in a position to comment on this term of reference simply because the material required to evaluate this question is again deemed Commercial in Confidence.

(e) The extent to which the project is meeting the original goals of the project:

RAW is not alone in expressing the view that that the original goals of Westconnex will prove to be unachievable and will continue to be a drain on the individual toll user and the collective taxpayers of NSW, as is the case with the Sydney Harbour Tunnel, costing NSW taxpayers well over 1 billion dollars since its inception, in 'forgone' revenue payments to the operators.

(f) The consultation methods and effectiveness, both with affected communities and stakeholders:

RAW has witnessed firsthand the bitter experience with residents and WestConnex; and has shown and continues to show that the consultation methods are simply a box ticking exercise and hence its effectiveness continues to fall well short of what would be minimally acceptable.

It is a fact that some residents will suffer considerable negative impacts, including loss of sleep and the inability to work from home due to unacceptable noise levels. Complaints fall on deaf ears. Diesel motor noise from the goods yard tower crane was suggested to a Burt Street resident by a CRB/John Holland spin doctor as *"noise from cicadas!"*

(g) The extent to which changes in population growth, work and travel patterns due to the Covid-19 pandemic have impacted on the original cost benefit ratio:

RAW is unable to provide data in relation to this question as the necessary material is commercial in confidence.

(h) Whether the NSW Government should publish the base-case financial model and benefitcost ratio for the project and its component parts:

RAW firmly believes that ALL financial information for major infrastructure projects should be made publicly available.

(i) Whether the project is subject to the appropriate levels of transparency and accountability that would be expected of a project delivered by a

public sector body:

No such transparency exists in relation to WestConnex and all of its five Stages.

(j) The impact on the environment, including marine ecosystems:

RAW, articles in major newspapers, Independent newspapers such as City Hub and television reports, all express serious concern over disturbance of the Harbour floor, particularly in the Berry's Bay region. *The Government's own report and recommendations have been ignored in this regard!* (1)

Sediment sampling carried out for the project for Sydney Harbour, in White Bay and Berrys Bay, found that selected contaminants were generally above guideline criteria. These included:

Polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), Total recoverable hydrocarbons (TRHs), Organochlorine pesticides (OCPs), Tributyltin (TBT), Arsenic, Copper, Mercury, Lead, Silver and Zinc. Dioxins were detected above laboratory levels in sediment samples taken from Sydney Harbour and White Bay. (1) (2) (3) (4) (6)

(k) The adequacy of processes for accessing and responding to noise, vibration and other impacts on residents, during construction and operationally:

The experience of members of **RAW** who reside within a few hundred metres of Stage 3 of WestConnex has been extremely negative with WestConnex as construction noise, vibration and other construction impacts on residents has been significant.

Night works and long-duration impacts have been particular issues, leading to medical problems associated with loss of sleep; and operational impacts from WestConnex have been felt by residents in the form of increased traffic on residential streets.

Cumulative impacts from other major project works in the White Bay and Rozelle areas are also a concern.

(l) The impact of the project on nearby public sites, including Yurulbin Point and the Dawn Fraser Pool:

In raising concerns about the potential for contaminated dredged material to pollute the harbour, it has recently noted that this will undoubtedly affect the Dawn Fraser Harbour tidal pool, with serious and life threatening implications for human health. (1) (3)

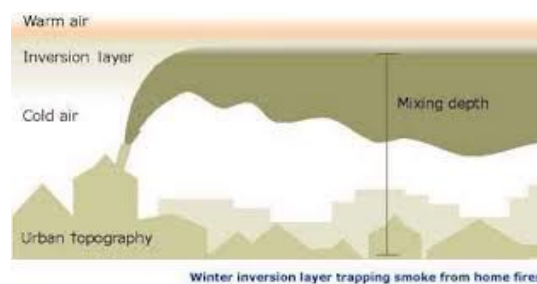
The impact on the Dawn Fraser pool was not assessed in the Reference design or EIS, therefore it is essential that it be assessed as part of this inquiry. Yurulbin Point will be profoundly affected by becoming a WHT construction site, and will not be available to the public during the construction phase.

(M) Any other related matter:

These are covered in summary in the prelude to this document. However **RAW** both articulates and/or proposes the following:

- *The construction of in tunnel filtration is essential for the effective removal of particulate matter, particularly the extremely harmful < 2.5 pm diesel particles. These carcinogenic particles are invisible to the naked eye, yet are much more harmful than the larger particles which the body's natural defense mechanisms are able to cope with.*

- *The move towards smaller particulate vehicle emissions is actually regressive as it encourages the population to believe that if the pollution can't be seen, then it doesn't exist.*
- *In tunnel filtration incorporated into the tunnel design is cheaper to run than the method currently employed in Australian road tunnels. In this regard we are an outlier with almost all other countries utilizing the cheaper and highly effective in tunnel filtration systems for the almost complete removal of all particulate matter and the oxides of nitrogen.*
- *Vehicle occupants in the tunnels will experience toxic air at a concentration 50 times greater than that of the outside ambient air, based on RMS figures from the Lane Cove Tunnel.*
- *Retrofitting filtration to the proposed and existing stacks will be hideously expensive and for this reason alone it is almost certainly not going to proceed, even if there was the will to do so.*



- *The present system of pumping poisoned, cancer laden, imported, exhaust fumes out through the unfiltered stacks, is easily defeated during temperature inversions, because the concentration of polluted air builds up under the mixing level or inversion layer, often for days on end; and well exceeds the WHO recommended maximum exposure levels for these carcinogens.*
- *During times of extended temperature inversions the volume of polluted and cancer laden air will build up below the inversion layer and will reach staggering life threatening levels in the White Bay valley. The health costs are almost incalculable.*
- *Figures provided by the South Sydney Area Health Service show an increase in lung cancers of 44% in residents who live downwind of the M5 East Turrella plume, generated from a tunnel just 2.2 klms long, while the State average over the period of the study, fell by 9%! The Birchgrove, Balmain East, Balmain and Rozelle region is in the predicted fallout zone from the five unfiltered Waverton and Rozelle exhaust stacks.*
- *The Committee members would all do well to remember that the public are well aware that both the ALP and the Coalition at State and Federal levels are wholehearted supporters of these denigrated, outdated, hideously expensive, badly designed, unlined and unfiltered road tunnels. Massive resident protests over the past 5 years have had little impact.*

RAW is also in complete agreement with the following recommendations developed by the **Inner West Council WestConnex Community Forum**, to which the **RAW** delegate was a regular contributor: (6)

- *All drivers should be certified specifically for the project and its designated construction traffic routes.*
- *The driver certification process should include safety awareness in relation to all road users and a requirement to walk and ride around the construction site and any key locations identified as having high levels of conflict to gain an understanding of the needs of vulnerable road users.*

- *All vehicles should be clearly identified as WHT vehicles with a unit number clearly displayed.*
- *All vehicles should include a clearly visible contact number for complaints.*
- *Penalty systems should be introduced for drivers who breach specific safety, environmental or amenity provisions with the fines paid for by the head contractor.*
- *All vehicles should be fitted with GPS tracking, which can be monitored from a central control point.*
- *Construction management plans should compare single trucks with truck-and-dog combinations to assess the safety and construction time/cost implications of different truck types.*

In conclusion the members of the committee are referred to the following article from **The Guardian: (8)**

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/mar/18/oil-industry-fossil-fuels-air-pollution-documents>,

This frightening article highlights the bleak future that faces all Inner West residents who live within the fallout zone of any of the unfiltered exhaust stacks.

The members of the Inquiry have a duty of care. You can't say that you weren't warned. Unless you act, preventable, premature deaths will be forever on your heads.

In a democracy however we do have one card left to play - and that's the one that we all place in the ballot box.

Peter Hehir
Convenor & RAW Spokesperson
Rozelle Against WestConnex

REFERENCES

- (1) *Pollution in Sydney Harbour: Parliamentary Research, sewage, toxic chemicals and microplastics. Briefing Paper No 03/2015 by Daniel Montoya.*
- (2) *Roads and Maritime Services. Western Harbour Tunnel and Warringah Freeway. January 2021.*
- (3) *Upgrade Technical working paper: Marine water quality January 2020.*
- (4) *Douglas Partners and Golder Associates, 2017, Jacobs, 2020.*
- (5) *Technical working paper: Contamination, Jacobs, 2020.*
- (6) *Submission from IWC to NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into WHT May 2021.*
- (7) *Roads and Maritime Services. Western Harbour Tunnel/Warringah Freeway Upgrade Technical working paper: Marine water quality January 2020.*
- (8) *Oil firms knew decades ago fossil fuels posed grave health risks. 2020. Oliver Millman. The Guardian.*