

Submission
No 469

INQUIRY INTO IMPACT OF THE WESTERN HARBOUR TUNNEL AND BEACHES LINK

Organisation: Friends of Manly Penguins

Date Received: 18 June 2021

16 June, 2021

The Hon. Daniel Mookhey MLC
Chair
Public Works Committee
NSW Legislative Council
Parliament House
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Submission to the Inquiry into the Impact of the Western Harbour Tunnel and Beaches Link

Dear Members of the Public Works Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit to the inquiry regarding the Impact of the Western Harbour Tunnel and Beaches Link projects.

This is a submission by the “Friends of Manly Penguins”, a group of 60 volunteers who actively patrol Manly Harbour and foreshores monitoring any penguin activity in their critical habitat and surrounds, cleaning beaches in their habitat, ensuring it’s safe for the penguins to return to their breeding sites and educating the public.

As a group, we strongly object to the project on the grounds of potential environmental impact on marine life in the Middle Harbour area including the Spit, Clontarf, Beauty Point and Sailors Bay, (Terms of Reference (j) the impact on the environment, including marine ecosystems) and urge you to recommend that the NSW Government abandon these plans immediately. As suggested in Appendix S of the EIS, a potential catastrophic risk faces the Little Penguins.

Background:

Manly is home to the only remaining Little Penguins (*Eudyptula Minor*) breeding colony on the NSW mainland, which has persisted despite fox and dog attacks, boat strikes, human activity and environmental degradation. The colony is listed as endangered under the *NSW Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995*, and remains endangered despite efforts by local organisations (Manly Environment Centre and Northern Beaches Council), government departments and other entities developing and implementing recovery plans that include the enforcement of rules to protect the penguins.



Impact of tunnel construction:

The Northern Beaches Tunnel requires construction of two cofferdams and the laying of two immersed tunnel tubes. This construction is likely to pose significant risk by disturbing the highly sensitive ecological interaction of marine life. The disturbance of sediment and increased turbidity will spread accumulated toxins, affecting the sensitive seagrass and the microscopic organisms within. Subsequently, this will threaten the survival of larger animals such as the endangered White's seahorse (*Hippocampus white*), several fish species and consequently the Little Penguins.

The endangered population of Manly's Little Penguins feed on small sea creatures, which only exist within sea grassed areas all around Sydney Harbour. Even though all the nests are located within the protected bays of Manly, many penguin sightings have been reported from the Middle Harbour area, Clontarf, Spit and Northbridge. We are deeply concerned that all the disturbance through dredging of the sea beds as well as construction side effects, such as potential fuel leaks and under-water noise, will be a catastrophic risk to the seagrass patches (as evidenced in other local areas where recreational boats anchor), and with it the foraging opportunities of our endangered Penguin Colony.

Community Involvement:

It is incredible that we have the smallest species of Little Penguins in our area and many people: volunteers, general public, tourists, locals and schools, are emotionally invested in the penguin population of Manly. As a consequence, several awareness programs have been set up.

Project Penguin, now in its 15th year, is a Conservation Education Program delivered by Taronga Zoo's Learning Centre in partnership with local Northern Beaches primary and high schools, with over 800 students participating each year. For six weeks, the students learn everything about the Little Penguins that live in the local area, becoming youth ambassadors for our endangered penguin population.

As a key part of improving the community's penguin knowledge and understanding, a major sponsor has installed new awareness-raising signage on the Fast Ferry services, with on board commentary focusing on the latest research and the role people can play in protecting the little penguins. Drivers are on the lookout for penguin 'rafts' (groups of penguins floating on the harbour surface) and often point them out to the commuters.



Photos 1 & 2 -Project Penguin T-shirt and participants; Photo 3 – signage for boats to slow down in penguin habitat; Photo 4 – Information board at Manly Wharf

Conclusion:

The Friends of Manly Penguins do not accept the EIS's claim that the construction of the Northern Beaches Tunnel's impact will be "minimal". As suggested in Appendix S of the EIS, a potential catastrophic risk faces the Little Penguins. The slightest impact maybe a hugely significant risk to the survival of the highly sensitive sea creatures in the seagrass and consequently the survival of our world-famous Little Penguins.

We implore you to consider the above concerns and take the existence of this endangered colony of Little Penguins, the last one on mainland NSW, seriously. In the light of exponential Species Extinction and Climate Change, everything ought to be done to avoid the destruction of our natural environment and alternative transport options should come first.

We are happy to have our submission published and would be privileged to be called as witnesses.

Yours Sincerely,

Philippa Cave

(on behalf of the "Friends of Manly Penguins" Volunteers)