

Submission  
No 445

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

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## **NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into the Impact of the Western Harbour Tunnel and the Beaches Link**

That Sydney is such a magnificent city is due, in part, to its exceptional natural beauty. But much too, is owed, to those numerous community groups and individuals who have fought over the decades to protect beaches, waterways, urban bush, tree canopies and green spaces from inappropriate development. Likewise, those armies of volunteers who have, and continue to regenerate bush and clean up our environment. On the northern beaches we are the beneficiaries of such foresight and effort, living as we do alongside so many marvellous, but now endangered, species, and often within easy reach of wonderful remnant urban bushland and clear waters. In Middle Harbour we are the custodians of urban ecosystems that support the last 60 or so mainland fairy penguins in NSW. In Seaforth, we have recently rediscovered the last patch of the 'Seaforth mint bush', a plant long thought to be extinct. In the Manly Dam War Memorial State Park the climbing galaxias fish, a throwback to the Gondwana era, still manages to make it way up urban streams. For the wider city, the northern beaches serve as Sydney's northern lungs and an accessible 'green' destination. For Australia, urban bushland and green space now shelters 30 per cent of our rapidly declining endangered species.

The massive Beaches Link tunnel project will carve its way through this precious place, trading its claims of faster travel time for the destruction of the very environment that draws people to the region. What is so perplexing about the project is that it has been presented as a fait accompli. What communities have on the table is just one transport option that will lock the northern beaches into a tolled, private vehicle based model for decades, at a great cost to everything that makes the region so unique. Perplexing because the project comes at a time when governments everywhere and at every level are spruiking zero carbon emission targets, warning against cities 'enslaved' to private cars, promoting localism, active transport and liveability and pursuing the restoration of bushland and tree canopies. Perplexing because the areas to be bulldozed would, otherwise, be protected as climate change and the rapid collapse of Australia's ecosystems, and the extinctions this entails, coincide. Yet, for the supposed 'greater good' of dubious reductions in travel times, we can wilfully drive local extinctions in exchange for unseen, and unaccountable, environmental offsets elsewhere.

My request of the Committee is simple. That is, to ask whether we can do better? I am not naïve. I do not oppose development per se, nor do I fail to appreciate the need for infrastructure to serve large cities. We do, however, now have decades of science that tells us that merely building

more private vehicle based roads induces future congestion. We also know, as Northern Beaches Council has detailed, that merely funnelling more cars onto the peninsula will slow traffic speeds locally, thereby eroding claimed time savings. More importantly, perhaps, is that COVID-19 has demonstrated that we can spend more time working from home, and less time in traffic jams. And, what of cheaper, and demonstrably more popular public transport solutions using existing road corridors, accompanied by medium density housing? Where in the claimed consultation process are the communities' voices and choices? Where is the business case and the up to date modelling to justify this heavy handed approach? To oppose the Beaches Link tunnel is not merely short term NIMBY-ism, nor it is driven by politics or ideology. It is merely about the kind of Sydney we want – and will need – as the global transition to low carbon economies impact every aspect of our lives. I hope the legacy of this Inquiry is a sufficient pause – that will give everyone time to consider another way.

I thank you for your attention,

Louise Williams

Seaforth. 2092