

Submission
No 499

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

Name: Name suppressed

Date Received: 17 June 2021

Partially
Confidential

Fairlight NSW 2094

17th June 2021

Re: Northern Beaches Tunnel Link – Objection

I am writing to object to the proposed beaches tunnel. I'd be very curious of what the vote would be if this was put to a referendum for northern beaches rate payers right now. The intent from the government at that time, to try and solve a problem, was credible however like any aspiration, if after due consideration, if it is clearly sub-optimal then there is no loss of face to walk away.

In particular, I am keen to see a Parliamentary enquiry to give greater consideration to the environmental damage and the permanent loss of our natural and physical amenities which will ensue, and which have not been properly assessed in the Environmental Impact Statement by Transport for NSW (TfNSW).

I have lived on the northern beaches for almost 20 years. My family and I are avid users of the extraordinary natural amenities of our area. I mountain bike multiple times every week, my wife swims in the ocean or one of the ocean pools daily. We walk/swim/ride Manly Dam and that precinct often.

The Beaches tunnel project is an example of an un-examined political announcement and I urge the enquiry to note in relation to items of the Terms of reference that:

(b) the adequacy of the consideration of alternative options,

- The terms of reference for the tunnel proposal excluded consideration of public transport options and options for better linking residents to public transport.

(a) the adequacy of the business case for the project, including the cost benefits ratio; and

(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,

- The project did not include a cost benefit analysis which was publicly available.
- Did not include stand-alone cost benefit analysis for the two tunnel projects separately.
- A project of this size will certainly contain extraordinary cost blow-outs which will be paid for by taxpayers across the state and by we the residents in perpetuity.
- Does not include traffic mitigation plans throughout the duration of the build. The cost to business of the traffic problems the build will create has not been addressed.

(e) the extent to which the project is meeting the original goals of the project, and

(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 ration

- The project Is based on an assumption that those crossing Spit Bridge do so only to access the CBD and ignores the multitude of other locations within our locale.
- The tunnel access and egress are poorly planned at the site of Manly vale/Balgowlah such that it simply moves the bottle neck and has been designed with no knowledge of local traffic movements.
- Traffic assessment was conducted prior to COVID-19 and has not accounted for the changes to Work From Home (WFH) changes which are likely to persist beyond COVID-19. TfNSW consider these impacts to be temporary. However, McKinsey Global Institute stated in early 2020 that changes to work that had been predicted to pan out over the next five years were delivered in 60 days. (Baig, A. et al (2020) *The COVID-19 recovery plan will be digital: A plan for the first 90 days*).

- Independent assessment of traffic movement on the beaches by Dr Michelle Zeibots has shown approx. 44% of residents move East to West. The remainder is evenly split between local traffic and those who cross the Spit bridge (but don't necessarily travel to the city). Her recommendation for traffic relieving infrastructure for the Beaches was to improve east to west public transport and could be achieved at far less cost than the proposed tunnel. This was supported by the Beaches Council but rejected by the current State government.
- There are no measurable goals which indicate that travel times will actually be improved. Closures of local roads to force people into the tunnel will increase congestion - not relieve it. The EIS indicates that travel times will be increased due to changes at other major intersections such as along Warringah Freeway and Military Road.
- The EIS states increased traffic congestion will occur particularly on weekends – with nowhere for the additional vehicles to travel to and park.

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

This will be the first tunnel built in Sydney with such enormous and significant environmental impact to our region with no attempt to dramatically reduce the environmental consequences of the proposed Northern Beaches Tunnel link. The environmental damage in the EIS grossly underestimates the actual damage which will occur. The following summary of environmental damage has been identified in the EIS but has not been addressed:

- Removal of some 2500 trees and permanent loss of greenspace with no local biodiversity offsets;
- The permanent loss of the diverse habitat at Balgowlah Golf course which will be replaced by open green fields.
- Changes to the Manly dam catchment area, and into the Garigal National Park will impact several endangered and very rare species.
- Rainwater runoff to Queenscliff lagoon and subsequent ocean outfall from Wakehurst Parkway.
- Predicted reduction in water flows down Burnt Bridge Creek of 96%;
- Reduction to the water table in Seaforth and Balgowlah which will have an enormous impact on remaining trees and plants of our area.

The recent significant weather event of March saw flood waters down Burnt Bridge Creek were far higher than predicted in the EIS. With loss of tree and ground cover, together with increased hard surfaces this will become a significant flood hazard which has not been accounted for in the EIS.

Manly dam catchment: The widening of Wakehurst Parkway from two to six lanes will do untold damage to the Many dam catchment area, threatening endangered species. The EIS states the topography of the area means the environmental impacts of the build cannot be controlled along this route. This will threaten amongst other sensitive fauna and flora the recently re-discovered climbing fish (*galaxias brevipinnis*) – thought extinct and which dates back 60 million years. Manly dam is home to diverse and endangered bird species.

Queenscliff Lagoon will have nearly half a million litres of wastewater pumped into it daily, contaminating the lagoon and beaches. Queenscliff beach is only 1.5km from the marine sanctuary of **Cabbage Tree Bay** – ocean currents will ensure this area is also polluted. This is the daily swimming area of over 700 members of the Bold and Beautiful and many splinter groups – of which I am one. This is a precious marine resource.

The tree canopy cover of our suburbs will be decimated – we know the importance of tree cover to mitigate against heat sinks and offset pollution. They are vital to soil stability and health and to retaining the water table. We know loss of green canopy adds to heat sinks and subsequent heat stress. Rob Stokes has himself identified that tree cover is vital for the city and much has already been lost at Frenches Forest to the Northern Beaches Hospital and related road works.

Burnt Creek water flow will be reduced by 96% by the end of the project, destroying the ecosystem. Removing all trees in the Balgowlah golf course area will prevent mitigation of dust produced by the build and increase water run-off in storms. It will adversely impact our local bird life. Old trees are

vital to the environment and health of regions. I urge you to take steps to retain as many trees as possible. It is lazy to plan to simply remove them all.

The suggestion that the environmental damage can be 'offset' by purchase of biodiversity offsets elsewhere is a furphy. Endangered species won't move to a new area, we the residents can't access offsets elsewhere.

This damage is extremely upsetting and stressful – our family and friends are regular and frequent users of the Manly Dam bush walks, Bantry Bay walks and daily ocean swimmers – the loss of the extraordinary natural environment right on our doorstep is a source of enormous stress.

High contamination risk has been cited for heavy metals and organotoxins into Middle Harbour from tunnel dredging, polluting The Spit, Clontarf and threatening harbour species including the last population of penguins which the EIS states will likely permanently leave the area. Swimming areas such as Clontarf is an area we use frequently.

An **unfiltered exhaust stack** in close proximity to numerous houses and local schools and childcare centres will have significant health implications. While similar stacks are in use in NSW, they do not match international standards. Nowhere in the world is a tunnel of the proposed length of this one serviced by a single unfiltered stack. Yes, pollution will be reduced along the entire road length but that is no consolation for those under the stack.

Additionally, when it was decided to move the air stack from Dudley Street to next to Balgowlah Boys high school, the air quality was not re-assessed – figures are based on the Dudley St readings.

In conclusion: The economic viability of the tunnel has not been demonstrated. Declarations made prior to the last State election have been relied upon without further detailed analysis and review. The benefits of the tunnel are questionable but the impact of the tunnel during the build and the loss of our natural environment and the amenity of our suburbs will be permanently lost. The knowledge of which is enormously distressing to our family. I am dismayed the project will even go ahead given the poor business case and a spectacular failure to consider adequate public transport options.

Yours sincerely,

Fairlight NSW 2094