

**Submission
No 521**

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

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Submission to the Inquiry into the Impact of the Western Harbour Tunnel

Dear Members of the Public Works Committee,

Thank you for taking the time to read this submission regarding the Western Harbour Tunnel. I strongly object to this project due to its impact on the environment. Pollution released due to disturbance of sediment containing toxic chemicals should not be undertaken. Furthermore, storage of this sediment should not be contemplated adjacent to dense residential development on Balmain peninsula.

I have been a local resident at White Bay for over forty years and taken an active interest in the welfare of our community. That includes membership and Secretary of the Bays Community Coalition since its inception in 2014 and contributions to local precinct meetings for many years prior to that. Since 2000 the work of Professor Birch has influenced thinking and understanding of the contaminants in our harbour. Resources include

A short geological and environmental history of the Sydney estuary, Australia Gavin Birch. In brief, he has argued that there should be no disturbance of the toxic sediment.

“Sediment in some parts of Port Jackson is the most contaminated of any harbour worldwide. Sediments mantling the estuary contain high concentrations of a wide range of contaminants over extensive areas, including heavy metals, organochlorine pesticides, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), polychlorinated dibenzo-p-dioxins and dibenzofurans (Birch & Taylor, 1999, 2000; Birch et al 2006; Irvine & Birch, 1998; McCready et al 2000).”

I feel that the Committee would be aware of a ban on fishing and prawning in the harbour from 2006 and that blood tests on fishermen showed dioxin levels at more than four times the recommended level. That suggests an unacceptable health risk is posed for the adjoining areas and water craft activities if the sediment is disturbed by dredging as planned in this proposal.

1. Local Impact

Tides and wind drift from work in constructing this tunnel will bring the disturbed toxic chemicals to heritage listed Dawn Fraser Pool. This pool was the home training ground for Olympic gold medallists in Water Polo and is used by many school groups from outside our area.

This community and the pool should not have to face possible contamination and associated health risks.

White Bay has been chosen for the site where highly contaminated dredged material will be stored because it cannot be dumped at sea. While this toxic sludge dries out prior to being moved by truck to landfill, it presents a health risk to this densely populated area. According to the report, poisonous material needs to dry out for transport to dump sites. No plan is evident for the water run-off and damping procedures to prevent top layers from blowing into surrounding homes, gardens and park. Prevailing winds will bring odours and dust into the valley which is densely populated and has two schools and a hospital on the ridge. Removal of this debris by truck will increase an already congested access to Victoria Road. Reports claim that controls will be in place to reduce environmental pollution risks but this community has already faced similar, unfounded assurances. Retrofitting homes because of cruise ship pollution is the most current example.

Yurulbin Point is another historic aspect of Sydney Harbour. It should be left as public open space and not treated as a construction site. Marine life has already suffered from pollution. Yurulbin Point carries its Indigenous name meaning “swift, running water” and has a strong connection with the marine environment with prevailing currents carrying contaminants into the harbour. This proposal can only contribute even greater negative impact on the local environment.

Both sites, Yurulbin Point and White Bay are unsuitable for this proposal.

2. Budget Concern

The current budget is facing many challenges despite the high income gained. Projects already under construction have been reporting increased costs. This project is no different. Current estimates will not be the final cost and there are many other projects which would benefit the wider community of NSW.

I hope that this Committee finds the contamination risk too great for the Western Harbour Tunnel to proceed. The anticipated cost is another factor which makes it a poor option for the NSW community.

Yours sincerely,
Michele Hacking