

**Submission
No 549**

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

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The Hon. Daniel Mookhey MLC
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<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/committees/inquiries/Pages/inquiry-details.aspx?pk=2767#tab-submissions>

Submission to the Inquiry into the Impact of the Western Harbour Tunnel and Beaches Link

Dear Members of the Public Works Committee,

I have been thinking about this submission and what to write ever since the Inquiry was called. I have thrown away so many drafts, so many facts. So the day before submissions are due I have written my story about Flat Rock Gully and my journey as an ordinary working mother of two to becoming an advocate to save Flat Rock Gully (FRG).

Before I get started though I wanted to let you know that I have previously made submissions for the Western Harbour Tunnel and Warringah Freeway Upgrade, as well as for the Beaches Link EIS

My EIS submissions can be accessed here:

WHT/WFU - <https://www.planningportal.nsw.gov.au/major-projects/submission/708756>

Beaches Link - <https://www.planningportal.nsw.gov.au/major-projects/submission/781386>

My EIS submissions particularly address the following terms of reference of the Parliamentary Inquiry:

(a) the adequacy of the business case

Please see page 1 of my WHT Submission and page 1, paragraph 1 of my BL submission

(b) the adequacy of the consideration of alternative options

Please see page 1&2 of my WHT Submission and

Page 1, paragraph 1 of my BL submission

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

Please see page 1&2 of my WHT submission

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

Please see page 2 of my WHT as it relates to the school environment and impacts on health due to increased traffic dust and air quality consideration.

Please see page 1 of my BL submission – covering loss of bushland and biodiversity, including marine ecosystems in Middle Harbour

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

Please see page 5 of my WHT submission

Please see page 2 of my BL submission on increased noise during construction and operation at Flat Rock Drive dive site

(l) the impact of the project on nearby public sites

Flat Rock Gully as a public site. Please see page 1, 2 of my BL submission outlining loss of bushland, contamination, drawdown and ground water impacts on page 4.

My personal submission below particularly addresses

(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 as they relate to Flat Rock Gully and Middle Harbour.

A little bit about me - I live a short walk away from Flat Rock Gully, have lived here almost 20 years and each day I am so thankful that this beautiful slice of bushland was regenerated from an old tip site almost 30 years ago.

I have seen the bushland grow and mature in this time. In the last year it has been looking more beautiful because of the increased rainfall. But what I've also noticed, particularly in the last 5 years is the increase in the number of animals and birds. There were no wallabies in the gully, then I saw one, and then I saw two. I have seen echidnas, snakes, water dragons, so many lizards, eagles, kites, black cockatoos, blue wrens and non-backyard birds. But the best sound of all is at about 3am when all is quiet, I can hear the hooting of one powerful owl calling to another. It is then that I realise what a sanctuary and special place this is.

I walk in the gully every day – usually first thing in the morning, sometimes with friends, often with my family. But 3 years ago I noticed a drilling machine boring holes into the ground. I had a terrible feeling, the gully would be making way for development.

Flat Rock Gully as you would know from the EIS and other submissions is the proposed primary tunnelling site for the Beaches Link. For an estimated 5 years there will be 24/7 tunnelling from this site. 10% of the bushland will be removed, the wildlife corridor extending to Lane Cove National Park will be cut, the creek will be diverted in two places, wastewater from tunnelling construction and operation will be flushed down the creek that leads to Middle Harbour, 70 trucks per hour will be entering and leaving the site, making their way uphill out of the Gully.

You might ask, well if FRG was an old tip site then what is the harm in putting a dive site there? Well FRG is more than just the regenerated bushland. It follows Flat Rock Creek. It essentially has three parts. Playing fields and the Willoughby Leisure Centre to the west of Flat Rock Drive, regenerated bushland on the east side and then it moves into remnant forest with the original topography of steep slopes and trickling waterfalls, mature angophoras. Then the Gully tracks down under the old suspension bridge to the playing fields at Tunks Park which meet the waters edge of Long Bay in Middle Harbour. Flat Rock Gully is connected and one part impacts the other. A rare oasis only 5 minutes from the city.

After seeing the drilling machines, I started asking around, what was happening? That's when I discovered that the area was being scoped as the primary dive site for the BL tunnel. At first I was told that the primary dive site would be where the new baseball diamond field was over on the west side of Flat Rock Drive. No trees need be removed, good access to the main road. But the baseball club and the other sporting clubs that use the area and courts nearby started lobbying to have the dive site moved to the 'vacant' land across the road. This was such a shame, residents /bushwalkers and sporting clubs were pitted against each other to choose which part of the Gully would house the dive site.

This is when I got involved. I signed the petition to stop the tunnel, I started asking other people to sign, I set up my own petition which 400 of my neighbours signed, we wanted to save the bushland in this urban area. I presented the petition to my local member the Premier Gladys Berejiklian, but never received a response. I wrote letters to her and was told that she had listened to the community and the good news was that the dive site would be located in the bushland rather than the baseball diamond. This was devastating news to me. The bushland was to be cleared. The problem was that one part of the community was pitted against the other as to which part of the gully was to be the dive site.

We should have been working together, as no matter where in the Gully the dive site, the distance is so small. We are all going to be impacted from the increased pollution from heavy vehicles, from the silica and construction dust that is unable to be contained, from the exposure of contaminants as the dive site digs through the historical tip, from the noise and vibration, from the loss of our green space. There are so many people who use the facilities in the Gully – all the kids who play netball, baseball, soccer, rugby to the passive recreation users who walk through the stretch from Tunks Park to Artarmon Reserve, it really is an inter-generational living space.

So how else could I be heard and inform our community? I had done the petitions, I turned to Face book, I joined our local Progress Association, I became part of the local high school P&C at my son's school, I even started talking at Willoughby Council meetings in their open forums. It has been a hard journey because although many people were very supportive, there were many who didn't understand the impacts of the tunnelling on our environment and on the health and well-being of our children. It seemed as though so many trusted that the government would do the right thing and something had to be done about the traffic to the Northern Beaches anyway.

I attended RMS information sessions on the WHT/WFU EIS, I put in a submission. We were not listened to – no changes made from the original plan.

Then the EIS came out for the Beaches Link. The timing couldn't have been worse. It came out on the 9 December 2020, just as schools were breaking up. What was worse was that the EIS was 12,000 pages long with a lot of technical information. Information about the dive site was not in one place in the document, not even information about contamination was in one place – there were so many chapters and appendices and the summaries in the chapters contradicted the data within the appendices and other chapters. It felt as though it was deliberately put together to make it extra hard to find out what the impacts would be.

In reality, the month of February – a short month – was the only month I could really get active to rally the community and schools. It wasn't long enough but we did our best. There are some amazing people who give of their time and energy, but it felt like a small group up against Goliath. We put in more submissions, we attended more consultation sessions where many of our questions remained unanswered..

I think what was really devastating was that the Beaches Link EIS not only stated that the Dive site would be in the bushland, but that once the tunnelling was finished after 5 years, there was no guarantee that the site would be reinstated as bushland. Willoughby Council could choose how it would be used. They could regenerate the bush or they could use it for playing fields, or they could leave the acoustic shed onsite and develop it into a recreational facility. I can't understand why this Wildlife Protection Zone is lost forever for a temporary structure. Is it for financial reasons as recreational facilities can be leased? 40 years ago the fight was on to save this part of bushland and for 30 years volunteer bush carers and council have cared for it. Its needing to be saved twice in less than 30 years.

Living near Flat Rock Gully, I have been thinking more about the Cammeraygal people who were on this land for 1000's of years. I have just starting to look into the indigenous history of the area, there seems to be so little documented. This is a sacred place a special place, this is Aboriginal land. I have been reading that the Cammeraygal people called Flat Rock Creek – "Mugga" meaning diamond python, which is the totem of the Cammeraygal. There was an aboriginal community living in Flat Rock Gully right up until the 1890s. There were beautiful waterfalls and swimming holes here before it became a tip site from the early 1930's. Henry Lawson used to sleep off his drunkenness in a cave overlooking the ravines, which have since been filled in and levelled by landfill. But there are still remnants of peoples past, including cave paintings of the diamond python that have been dated as older than 5000 years.

It feels like Flat Rock Gully is being stabbed at its very heart by this dive site which drills down into the earth taking the topsoil and insides away. I know this sounds dramatic but there have been many cuts to FRG and it is critical that we keep what we have – it is only just starting to regenerate. So to expose the contaminants again, to cut down what has been planted, to drill through sandstone and have the silica dust floating in the air, to have the noise of construction and operation, the vibrations from drilling, the light pollution, the increased traffic will drive much of the wildlife away.

I fear that for many years I will not be able to hear the Powerful Owls calling to each other, as they are endangered perhaps they will never be heard again in the Gully if the dive site is there.

This land is one land and includes Middle Harbour. The proposed dive site is in the middle of a water catchment area, whatever flows down into Flat Rock Creek will flow though the dive site, the contamination, the sensitive fish ecosystems and straight into middle harbour, polluting this waterway as well.

A final point, I have thought long and hard about including this personal note in my submission, but what have a got to lose? My father died of silicosis six years ago and we cared for him until he died at home. He was an office worker, but he built the front fence and some retaining walls at our family home out of sandstone in his spare time. I know firsthand what its like to see someone with silicosis struggle to breathe and watch the life in their body slip away. Sydney sandstone is 95% respiricable which means that even a small amount when it enters the lungs can lead to silicosis. With many children living in the area (and they are classified as sensitive receivers), traversing the area to get to school, playing in the nearby fields and courts this is not the place for a dive site and the EIS even admits that dust cannot be contained in dry or windy weather.

I am very happy to be asked to speak at the Inquiry. I would consider it an honour.

There is so much more I can say but I have focussed on Flat Rock Gully. Is all this construction and destruction really worth it? Will it relieve traffic congestion, what are the travel changes since Covid? Shouldn't we be thinking about what infrastructure can be put in place that serves the community rather than tollway operators? Is the building of a road tunnel – in a climate emergency – the only option we have? Is cutting into our last remaining areas of urban bushland really necessary? Is it going to benefit those who are still recovering from the bushfires in regional areas, health services across the state, roads that really do need to be repaired, schools that need to be built and expanded? \$14billion is a lot of money and is this the best way to spend it, a dead-end road that doesn't quite reach the Northern Beaches? Is it a cheap option for the government, who doesn't then need to provide and maintain public transport as it will be handed over to a private operator?

I am so thankful that this Inquiry is taking place. Thank goodness we live in a democracy and hopefully this Inquiry will recommend that the Beaches Link not be built – it is too high a price to pay environmentally, for our health, well-being and safety, for a toll road where the business case has not been released and the expense cannot be justified.

I am happy to have my name published. I have added some photos below

Kind regards

Kristina



Flat Rock Creek after the rains





Flat Rock Gully from the Suspension Bridge, looking over to the proposed dive site



Mature trees in the proposed dive site