Notes for Submission to the Independent Advisory Committee for the North East Link

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About the submitter

I have lived in Banyule since 2005. I am a member of the Warringal Conservation Society and have a PhD in Botany. Until 2018, I owned and lived in house backing onto the Simpson Army Barracks. I have explored the remnant bushland of the area and observed the Defence Force management of Simpson Army Barracks. I have also had extensive interactions with NELA/NELP as an affected home owner, member of the Cycling and Walking Community Liaison Group, on behalf of the Warringal Conservation Society, and as a community member concerned about environmental outcomes.

NELP has promoted potential benefits, while failing convey the likely scale of negative outcomes.

Examples of this are:

- A reluctance to display the extent of the project area. The project area was defined in the EPBC submitted to the Federal Government in January 2018. Despite this, NELP continued to rely on artists impressions and did not show the project area at public information session. Friends of Banyule and the Warringal Conservation Society displayed large posters accurately depicting the project area outside information sessions. NELP representatives cautioned us not to unnecessarily frighten people. It was also requested that we use the term “investigation area” rather than “project area.” The project area was expanded in May 2018 and this was not conveyed to the public.

- A reluctance to publicise the EPBC referral report. There was no public notification that the EPBC referral had been submitted. Reference to the EPBC report was buried within the “Timeline” section of the North East Link website where it was very difficult to find. I attempted to encourage people to view and comment on the EPBC referral on the North East Link facebook page, but my comments were blocked.

- NELP’s Tree Planting Program Fact Sheet (April 2019) – This promotional material paints a misleading picture of environmental stewardship.

- Unwillingness to indicate houses likely to be acquired in Yallambie during the IAC bus tour. Properties subject to acquisition could have been noted from the bus. However NELP was not prepared to do this, citing privacy concerns. Public documents show where houses will be affected and NELP simply was deflecting attention from a negative impact.
Impacts to residents that have not been captured in the EES

Having owned a house and lived in Yallambie adjacent to the North East Link project area, I can report that the project has already a major impact on residents. A number of residents are still waiting to see whether the final design will bring compulsory acquisition, or see them living next to construction site then a major road. This uncertainty is a great burden. For home owners that feel the need to sell and relocate due to genuine concerns relating to health and amenity, the project reduces the pool of potential buyers and therefore the sale price of their property.

Advice provided to residents by NELP has been largely unhelpful. Those facing acquisition have been told to continue living their lives as usual. There was also advice that property values often go up after a major road project is completed. This is little consolation if you have to live next to a building site for most of a decade to see whether this optimistic outlook is correct. Concerns about the health impacts of living next to a major road and tunnel ventilation system were met with explanations that modelling and design will allow the project to hit arbitrary pollutant targets. Documented associations between a living near a major road and a negative health impacts were dismissed on the basis that the project would meet EPA targets most of the time. At one point we were even told that the air coming out of the ventilation stack would be the same quality as the surrounding air. Admittedly this advice came from a NELP representative who does not have expertise in this area, but a commitment to provide more details of air quality monitoring and modelling was not fulfilled. Information presented to the panel by the EPA substantiates residents concerns about air quality and health.

Weighing everything up, my family and I chose to sell our house and move. This has resulted in a substantial financial setback, but we felt like it was the only sensible option.

Implications for remnant bushland in the Simpson Barracks

The Simpson Barracks retains natural values that are not found elsewhere. I noted the importance of this area when speaking on behalf of the Warringal Conservation Society, but there are a couple of issues upon which I would like to expand.

Matted Flax-lily
Prior to surveys for the NELP, I was aware of several Matted Flax-lily along the publically accessible part of Banyule Creek the south of the Barracks, and two patches in Marigolds Reserve that I pointed out to the NELP assessment team. The size and extent of Matted Flax-lily population along the Western side of the Barracks came as a surprise to me, and indicates that there is something special about this area of Matted Flax-lily habitat. This may be due to relatively low levels of disturbance, limited public access, the vegetation structure, the mix of native and introduced grazing animals, the soil type, or a combination several factors. Based on my observations, I doubt that careful management by the Army is a contributor. Whatever the case, the factors that make the western part of Simpson Barracks such good Matted Flax-lily habitat have not been determined and it is a mistake to assume
that a translocation site elsewhere will provide comparable habitat. I am familiar with Marigolds Reserve which is one of the potential translocation sites. Existing Matted Flax Lily in this reserve are threatened by weed invasion, particularly Chilean Needle Grass. There is also frequent dumping of garden waste in the reserve, and I rescued one patch of Matted Flax lily more that once after it was covered with lawn clipping and prunings.

**Studley Park Gum**
The areas surrounding the Simpson Barracks contain Studley Park Gum, but these are often isolated individuals without opportunities for recruitment. The population of Studley Park Gum that will be lost in the Barracks is different because it is a dynamic hybrid swarm. While the River Red Gum and Swamp Gum parent species may be common, I am not aware of any other area where hybridisation and recruitment is supported in the manner seen at the Simpson Barracks.

**Army bushland management and knock on effects of the North East Link**
My observations suggest that the natural values of Simpson Barracks have been retained by good luck rather than good management by the Army. In 2007 an area along the southern perimeter was cleared to install a wire security fence. Subsequently the area surrounding this fence has been maintained by regular application of herbicide. In 2010 understory vegetation beyond the fence was cleared to make a firebreak approximately 20 meters wide and has since been maintained by periodic slashing. In 2014 vegetation was cleared along the fence line between the Barracks and Marigolds Reserves. In 2016 roads along the western perimeter were widened and covered with crushed rock. Various other drainage and road works have occurred over the years to allow access for security vehicles. Based on surveys presented in the EES, I suspect that the Army may have built on, slashed or sprayed Matted Flax-lily. My enquiries to the Army indicated that security requirements were prescriptive and the number one priority. It is almost certain that fences, roads, firebreaks and drainage lost to the North East Link will be reinstated, causing further losses of bushland habitat supporting endangered species. This should be factored into the impacts of the project.

**Very old River Red Gum on Bridge Street**

An email response from local historian and Reconciliation Manningham member Dr Jim Poulter provides more information on the history and significance of the Bridge Street tree.

Dr Poulter replied:
“The Caltex service station tree is a similar age to the Heide tree. Both are around 500 years old as far as I can determine. Both were struck by lightning 200 or so years ago, very probably in the same storm and on the same night. Both trees align on a north-south grid on the Songline heading past Bolin-Bolin Gathering Place. I also believe Tarnuks (large wooden bowls) were harvested from the Caltex tree and this explains the rotting hollows in which birds and possums nest. It is certainly a significant tree that deserves preservation and signage interpretation.”

**Mapping of Arching Flax-lily**
There appear to be two Arching Flax-lilies in the publically accessible bushland south of the Simpson Barracks along Banyule Creek. Only one plant is marked on vegetation survey maps.