

**Submission to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works'
Inquiry into the HMAS Watson Redevelopment Project.**

Dear Chair,

I write to request the opportunity to appear before the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works' inquiry into the HMAS Watson Redevelopment Project.

While I do so in a private capacity, I should make clear to the Committee that I am the Chair of *Bondi to Manly Walk Supporters*, a small not-for-profit Incorporated Association dedicated to making the Bondi to Manly Walk a reality.

While I'm sure the matter I wish to raise would be considered minor and non-controversial by many, it does nevertheless have long-term implications for the success of the Bondi to Manly Walk, which I believe is likely to become a popular and internationally recognised multi-day urban walk.

First some background.

The Bondi to Manly Walk is a proposal to link all of the existing coastal and harbourside walking tracks and paths on public land between Australia's two most famous surf beaches - Bondi Beach and Manly Beach - in an 80 kilometre walk around the foreshore of Sydney Harbour.

In September last year, on behalf of *Bondi to Manly Walk Supporters*, I signed an MOU with nine major landholders around Sydney Harbour to establish the Walk.

Since then, all those partners: the six Local Councils - Waverley, Woollahra, City of Sydney, North Sydney, Mosman and Northern Beaches, two state agencies - the National Parks and Wildlife Service & Property NSW, and at the federal level, the Sydney Harbour Federation Trust have worked together closely and cooperatively and have achieved a quite remarkable outcome.

In November last year the partnership was publically launched at an event where the Mayors from all six Councils as well as the heads of the three state and federal agencies spoke.

Since that launch *Bondi to Manly Walk Supporters* has also signed MOUs with five additional State agencies with smaller, but critically important landholdings along the Bondi to Manly Walk. Those agencies are the Royal Botanic Gardens, Roads and Maritime Services, the Port Authority of NSW, Taronga Zoo and the Sydney Opera House. This means the Bondi to Manly Walk now has 14 MOU landholder partners from across the three levels of government in Australia.

Decision-making regarding the Bondi to Manly Walk is in the hands of the Bondi to Manly Walk Steering Committee, which was established at the time the original MOU was signed.

Our governance model is simple and works extremely well. All the major landholders are actively involved in the Steering Committee, full consultation on issues always occurs, and decisions are made by consensus. (Again for completeness, I should mention that I chair the Steering Committee and it is convened and supported, including full secretarial support, by *Bondi to Manly Walk Supporters*.)

Two additional agencies sit on the Bondi to Manly Walk Steering Committee - Destination NSW which has participated since the Steering Committee's establishment, and more recently, the Greater Sydney Commission represented on the Steering Committee at the Commissioner level. *Bondi to Manly Walk Supporters* also has the active support of the Committee for Sydney, the Walking Volunteers and the formal endorsement of the Business Council of Australia.

I should stress the absolutely crucial point that partisan politics has **never** played a part in any aspect of the Bondi to Manly Walk. Everyone involved has ensured that our work to establish the Walk has been scrupulously non-politically partisan. This approach has been a critical underpinning of our success.

From the Walk's inception *Bondi to Manly Walk Supporters* has worked very closely with both the La Perouse and Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Councils.

The feedback, advice, design suggestions and then the approval and strong endorsement of both Land Councils led to the launch of the Walk's Aboriginal Whale Symbol in May this year.

Our landholder partners are now, with our assistance, procuring, manufacturing and installing way marking and signage - utilizing the Aboriginal Whale Symbol - along the full 80 kilometres of the Walk.

Bondi to Manly Walk Supporters has also built a website – bonditomanly.com – and we will have developed a walking App for use by walkers on the Bondi to Manly Walk by the time of Official Opening of the Walk which will take place on December 8.

Second, a possible concern in relation to the redevelopment of HMAS Watson.

For many years I have hoped that it would be possible for the Bondi to Manly Walk track to be sited on the eastern edge of HMAS Watson – along the extraordinarily beautiful cliff tops between The Gap and South Head.

Currently the access to South Head is a harbourside path beyond the Western fenced boundary of HMAS Watson. Walkers can only return from South Head by using the same path – effectively a 'loop'.

My goal has been for a coastal cliff top path between The Gap and South Head to be constructed through an area of bushland currently fenced off as part of HMAS Watson.

Such a path would without doubt be considered one of the most scenic and dramatic coastal walking tracks in the world.

The only matter I wish to raise with the Committee relates to the issue of base boundary and security outlined in paragraph 17 b of the Department of Defence submission:

***“Boundary fencing.** The Base is currently fenced using several fence types that are in varying condition and, along with compliance concerns, present a security risk. There is a*

requirement for a compliant and integrated perimeter”.

The Statement of Evidence provided to the Committee proposes a number of options for Base redevelopment to meet Defence’s capability and estate requirements for HMAS Watson including its preferred option which includes *“installing new fencing to the entire [Base] perimeter”*.

My request to Defence and the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works is for the installation of any new security fencing at HMAS Watson to take account of the possibility of a cliff top walking track being built sometime in the future on the eastern perimeter of the Base.

I want to express in the strongest terms that this is a matter of the siting of a perimeter fence only - and not a matter of the importance or efficacy of such a fence. I know how important Defence Base security is and would never want any view I expressed to be interpreted as undermining such an important requirement in any way.

Finally I would like to make clear that this request to appear before the Committee has only come about because of a media story I noticed earlier this week about the HMAS Watson redevelopment issue.

Although I have spoken informally to many in Defence about my long-standing obsession with constructing a walking track on the eastern boundary of HMAS Watson it had been my intention to raise the idea more formally with Defence, particularly with the Royal Australian Navy, after the Official Opening of the Bondi to Manly Walk.

I do regret that I have been somewhat overtaken by events and sincerely hope that none in Defence will consider this Submission as disrespectful in any way.

I should finish by saying that the cooperative efforts to establish the Bondi to Manly Walk of so many entities across three levels of government, along with the strong support of non-government organisations and community leaders, is quite unprecedented.

I sincerely hope that sometime in the future these efforts will be enhanced by the construction of a walking path along the cliff top outside the eastern perimeter of HMAS Watson. There could be no better coastal walking path anywhere in the world.

I look forward to an opportunity to appear before the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works to address the matters raised in this submission but stress again that this submission is lodged in a private and individual capacity only.

Yours sincerely

John Faulkner