



Hippocampus whitei

SYDNEY HARBOUR ASSOCIATION

PO Box 265 ROSE BAY NSW 2029

The Secretary

Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works

E: pwc@aph.gov.au

Reference: ***Air Warfare Destroyer Ship sustainment facilities at Garden Island, Randwick Barracks and HMAS Watson, Sydney NSW***

SUBMISSION

Summary: This submission offers certain recommendations relating to planting and external finishes having regard to the impact of the proposed works at **HMAS Watson** on the visual amenity of Sydney Harbour, and offers comment on local car parking issues. It contains no confidential material.

Authority: The submission is presented by Michael Rolfe, President of Sydney Harbour Association, by authority of the Committee of the Association, after having the benefit of briefing by Defence Department officials at the public information session held at Watsons Bay on 9 April 2013.

Introduction: The *Sydney Harbour and Foreshores Committee* was established in August 1979, to work for the protection and enhancement of Sydney Harbour. Its ambit of interest included Port Jackson, Middle Harbour and the Parramatta River. Membership included a range of waterside Councils, community organisations, and individuals. The Committee disbanded in 2010.

Sydney Harbour Association was established in 2010, as successor body to Sydney Harbour and Foreshores Committee. The Association is an unincorporated body of individuals interested in Sydney Harbour, having as its primary Object:

“[T]he promotion of the following principles in relation to development and change affecting Sydney Harbour:

- (a) protection and preservation of the natural heritage, assets and ecology of Sydney Harbour and its foreshores;*
- (b) primacy of the public good over private benefit in development;*
- (c) facilitation of public access to the waters and foreshores of Sydney Harbour;*
- (d) protection and enhancement of the visual and recreational amenity of the waterways and foreshores of Sydney Harbour”.*

The proposal: (a) HMAS Watson works

The NSW Government's *Sydney Harbour Foreshores & Waterways Area Development Control Plan 2005* for Sydney Harbour catchment, made under the *Sydney Regional Environmental Plan (Sydney Harbour Catchment) 2005*, includes HMAS Watson land as part of its *Landscape character Type 2: Entry to Sydney Harbour*. Relevantly for present purposes, the *Landscape Character Statement* in the Plan reads as follows (at p.20):

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPE 2

i. Area

Landscape Character Type 2 applies to the entry to Sydney Harbour.

ii. Statement of Character and Intent

This landscape forms the entry to Sydney Harbour. Development should ensure that the natural features which characterise the entry to Sydney Harbour are maintained. It should be sited so that the view of these natural features and landmarks are preserved. Development should be designed to complement existing features so that the contrast between the built and natural environs is minimised.

The intent in this area is to encourage development that:

- enhances the maritime and heritage significance of the Harbour through the protection of land uses that contribute to this character;*
- maintains and preserves the dramatic natural entry into the Harbour; and*
- has a direct relationship with the entry to the Harbour.*

iii. Performance Criteria

Any development within this landscape is to satisfy the following criteria:

- natural elements including cliffs, rock shelves and beaches are retained and views of these features are not obscured;*
- native vegetation on clifflines, ridgelines and along the shoreline is protected;*
- roof lines are below the tree canopy to maintain the prominence of the skyline of trees along the headlands;*
- built elements have a direct relationship with the entry to the Harbour, port, defence, tourism or recreation; and*
- overall colours should match native vegetation and geological features as closely as possible with trim colours drawn from natural elements such as tree trunks and stone.*

It does not seem to us that the HMAS Watson proposals are fully consistent with the Landscape Character Statement set out above; we think they should be.

While the proposed removal of certain existing trees about the HMAS Watson AWD site seems unavoidable, the documentation exhibited – especially Attachment 13 of the Defence submission to the PWC – indicates that the new building will be highly visible from the foreshores and waters of Sydney Harbour. Unless that impact is managed sensitively, the building will present a very discordant interruption to the general Harbour-side setting.

Two important approaches can mitigate the adverse visual impact of the tree removal and associated construction of the AWD building: they lie in its external finish and in strategic landscape replanting at its periphery.

External finish: External finishes of the various buildings about the base should desirably provide some coherence in the overall assembly of its constituent buildings, but present a neutral, recessive

appearance. Smooth surfaced- and colour-painted exterior walls (of the kind utilised in the finish of Asset 9/9A Navigation School) should be avoided for that reason.

Pre-cast concrete is proposed as the external wall finish for the AWD building, and we concur in principle with the choice of that material. However, we strongly recommend that it be finished with aggregate exposed to match the finish of the neighbouring Asset 5 Ritchie Building, which is well integrated into its natural context. Such a finish might desirably be adopted as the preferred finish for future projects at HMAS Watson too, so that, in time, the built establishment as a whole could exhibit a generally integrated visual quality.

Landscape management: The tree removal required for the HMAS Watson project is substantial. Security considerations and limited residual space combine to restrict replacement planting at the western face of the site adjoining the boundary of Sydney Harbour National Park. Viewed from the Harbour, the necessarily limited planting envisaged in the proposal will not provide either a green setting for the building consistent with much of the rest of the depot, nor will it sustain the essential character of the foreshore woodlands.

As shown above in the New South Wales Government's *Character Statement*, the regional significance of the Harbour foreshores lies predominantly in their wooded character, and disruptions to that character are always regrettable.

Consistently with the *Character Statement*, in the present instance we emphasise the desirability of maximising on-site planting about the AWD building's periphery, using native planting themes evident in the immediate vicinity.

In addition, we strongly advocate the adoption of a co-operative program with the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service such that additional planting may be undertaken on the Service's parkland adjoining the AWD site. Having regard to the adverse visual impact of the proposed tree removal at HMAS Watson, it would be entirely appropriate for such additional planting to be funded from the AWD project budget.

Car parking: Acute scarcity of car parking on the South Head peninsula is a fact of life for HMAS Watson personnel and for the civilian residents of and tradesmen and tourist visitors to the nearby district. On working days, overflow parking from HMAS Watson is usually accommodated in Cliff Street below the base. In the mornings that practice operates to the immediate inconvenience of local tradespeople whose working hours are similar, and later in the day to the exclusion of visitors of all kinds.

Recognising that construction parking is to be accommodated on-site, it remains that completion of the AWD proposal will, at least for some years, add marginally to the demand by service personnel for off-site car parking in the Camp Cove precinct of Watsons Bay and – presumably – to the daily traffic volume related to the base.

Group transport by charter bus is utilised for some purposes and occasions at HMAS Watson, and some personnel movements between HMAS Watson and Garden Island are evident in the local ferry service. Small Navy vessels carrying personnel call at the Watsons Bay wharf on occasion, too; we do not know their origin/destination.

There appears to be considerable scope for a more consistent and targeted approach to the movement of personnel to and from the various facilities at HMAS Watson, to reduce the need for single-occupant car travel and all-day off-site (and on-site for that matter) parking. It may be that

some arrangement to facilitate group travel for HMAS Watson could in turn be enlarged to improve public transport in the immediate district.

A co-operative endeavour by HMAS Watson to address the issue together with Sydney Ferries and Sydney Buses would be a useful first step towards that objective. We recommend that it be pursued.

The proposal: (b) Garden Island works

Having regard to the dedicated function of Garden Island as a naval base, and the consistency of the proposed works with the present built context of the base, no major concerns in relation to the general impact of the works on the visual amenity and other aspects of Sydney Harbour and its foreshores have been identified by the Association.

We commend our suggestions and recommendations, which were foreshadowed in our discussions with Defence at the Watsons Bay Public Information Session, to the Public Works Committee.

Michael Rolfe, President
on behalf of Sydney Harbour Association
PO Box 265 Rose Bay NSW 2029
10 April 2013