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Submission from Friends of Callan Park

Tidal Pool at Callan Park DA/2025/0516

The Friends welcome this opportunity to comment on the DA for the tidal pool at Callan Park. The proposal has been discussed at a number of Friends' monthly meetings and more recently by a small sub-committee. This submission sums up the major concerns that have emerged from those discussions.

We note the pre-DA community engagement report responding to concerns expressed by the community (including from Friends of Callan Park) after the pool was first proposed in April/May 2024. We are pleased that our concerns about the interference with the long-established rowing activities in Iron Cove have been responded to and the pool's location moved, although that does not solve the other problems.

After careful consideration of the proposal, the Friends of Callan Park still have some serious concerns that we believe require satisfactory response and resolution before any approval of the DA (or any tidal pool DA) can be contemplated.

While sharing the universal support for the idea of Harbour swimming, the Friends' concerns in this instance focus firstly on the suitability of the location at Callan Park, and then on the timing of any Harbour tidal pool given the water contamination problems and the serious threats to human health that this poses.

Our principal concerns are:

Safety – remoteness and after dark

Friends recognise that such tidal pools are not generally attended by lifeguards or patrolled. However the remoteness of this pool magnifies the dangers such pools naturally have. Given the distance from the nearest occupied area, homes on Balmain Road, how does Council propose to ensure safety and security at night in particular?

Access problems – parking is to be abolished on the foreshore

Greater Sydney Parklands is aiming to remove car parking along the foreshore at the location, as recommended under the Landscape Structure Plan. The traffic impact statement accompanying the DA, however, ignores this intention and has evaluated the existing foreshore parking situation as though it is permanent.

Loss of prized foreshore area

This foreshore space is very special as passive recreation for the whole community ... where the land meets the water.

The proposed site for the pool has a serious drawback which appears not to have been considered. The traffic to and from the proposed pool will be across the only foreshore area in Callan Park with uninterrupted access to the water views, an area where there is now some tranquillity and is currently used for picnics and other passive uses. This elimination of a unique passive recreation area does feed into the question of more suitable location for the swimsite.

It would be helpful if the traffic across this area could be minimised by not locating the bike parking near the picnic tables and trees. Instead parking station for bikes should be located near the Bay Run.

The proposed secondary short access path to the west should be eliminated.

First Nations heritage

In discussion Friends noted that one of the reasons for ruling out the siting of the proposed pool off King George V Park, or east of Callan Point, is this area's "cultural heritage significance", particularly in relation to First Nations. Attachment 3 emphasises that sites of First Nations significance are on the eastern side of Callan Point and as the proposed pool is on the western side it concludes there is no likely disturbance of significant sites.

However, the report does underline the lack of protection of the Indigenous sites on the eastern side (see pp 13-25) and some Friends were concerned that the presence of the pool would increase traffic across Callan Point from the east, that is, from King George V oval, and that this would impact and increase the degradation of the surviving First Nations archaeological sites. Regardless of the decision on the tidal pool, this problem needs a fresh examination by Council and GSP.

Water contamination is currently too dangerous

This was a major concern of the Friends. It is partly confirmed by the documentation accompanying the DA – and by the reported decision of the City of Sydney Council to pause construction of further Harbour pools until water quality improves.

Water contamination of the tidal pool will come from three sources, only one of which is evaluated – and then only incompletely and summarily in less than one page! – by the Statement of Environment Effects.

The first source of contamination is from the long-term presence of toxic sludge on the bed of Iron Cove. Tests of the surface water and suspended sediments at the pool location have detected heavy metals, dioxins and furans, pesticides, pharmaceuticals and PFAS (or forever chemicals).

(Possibly micro-plastics were present too, but there is no mention of testing for them – although, given recent concern about the significant effects on human health of micro-plastics, this is surely required. This is a major oversight.)

The conclusion drawn from the consultants' report is that these pollutants are at safe levels for human health and besides the toxic sediment will be washed off during swimming (see Attachment 14 and page 39 of the Statement of Environmental effects). The assumption of the report is that the swimmers will not disturb the polluted sludge on the harbour bed which would thus increase the levels of dangerous pollutants in the water. Given that at low tide the depth in the pool will only be 2.5 metres, the Friends believe that is a heroic assumption.

It should be noted that the examination of the aquatic ecology (Attachment 5) describes the sediment as "readily mobilised". The full sentence is: "The water column in the vicinity of the Callan Park foreshore has higher levels of readily mobilised sediments on the channel bed." (page 27) Later in the same report (see page 30) "disturbance of intertidal habitat by pool users" is assumed as "likely" by the authors. They also mention the "potential for repeated disturbance to silty sediments in the swimming area by users".

Tests of the results of disturbing the toxic sea-bed on water quality are surely required.

The second source of water contamination is run-off from surrounding neighbourhoods and recent reports suggest that the faecal bacteria is high in such run-off. Earlier this year the *Sydney Morning Herald* (27 January) reported:

Water testing conducted by the *Herald* revealed elevated levels of faecal contamination at several sites around Sydney Harbour, with results for the bacteria *Enterococci* at Dawn Fraser Baths in Balmain 10 times the safe level on the day of testing.

Further on in the article the City of Sydney Lord Mayor, Clover Moore, is quoted as saying her Council had as long ago as 2021 suspended its plans to open more tidal pools because of water contamination concerns.

The third source of water contamination is admittedly theoretical. It comes from the possibility that a plastic-grass field will be installed close to the proposed pool site. We know that such fields shed considerable amounts of micro-plastic – the NSW Chief Scientist's report accepts the figure of hundreds of kilograms per year. Some of that will find its way into the nearby waters of Iron Cove. In addition, the plastics used in many variants of these plastic playing surfaces contain PFAS to varying degrees. If this field is installed its impact on water quality will be deleterious, yet this possibility is completely ignored in the environmental assessment.

We are now at a critical point in estimating the dangers posed to human well-being from micro-plastics and PFAS with research pointing to their dangerous carcinogenic and cardio-bronchial impacts. The case for pausing any developments involving micro-plastic and PFAS pollution is irresistible if human health and well-being are valued. (see this recent summation of the state of research: https://www.theguardian.com/news/ng-interactive/2025/jul/28/the-life-of-microplastic-how-fragments-move-through-plants-insects-animals-and-you?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other)

Friends acknowledged that it is partly reassuring that monitors and testing equipment can be installed on site to, one assumes, continuously monitor water quality at the pool – and that the DA can be conditioned in this way. But even with the best monitoring there will be a time lag between dangerous results being detected and the closing of the pool.

The consensus in the Friends is fully supportive of access to Harbour swimming but, given the practical problems at the proposed location and the health and environmental dangers, considers this DA should not proceed in current circumstances.

Yours for Callan Park



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