

Taronga Zoo Sky Safari SSD 2nd exhibition

June 10, 2025

Linda Bergin OAM

Dear Planning,

I wish to REGISTER AN OBJECTION.

This submission is concise and in outline form. I may provide additional details in the next few days.

Thank you for considering my submission and I look forward to the applicant's replies.

Conclusion – The severe visual impact of the new gondola lift has not been accurately assessed and, I believe, minimized by the applicant. It will most certainly have a major impact on the heritage values of Sydney Harbour. It will likely be baffling to international visitors, who expect a world-class harbour, to see what resembles a ski-lift built on its slopes.

I believe the design could be modified to have far less visual impact and still service the Zoo's visitor ferry arrival demand (no more than 10-minute wait time). It appears the applicant has designed a gondola to accommodate very infrequent "mega-peak" times and has also not considered supplementary means of transport to the Zoo entrance or demand management.

I am estimating the Zoo may have spent around \$15m so far on design since 2022, but relative to (what will become) a multi-hundred million dollar project, this is small and so a re-design would be financially feasible.

- Visible from many vantage points including those that are "heritage items" as set out in SEPP (Biodiversity and Conservation) 2021 and on the National and World Heritage List
 - SEPP (Biodiversity and Conservation) 2021
 - Visual Impact Assessment and Statutory Compliance Table both OMIT consideration of Part 6.4 of this SEPP.
 - The first requirement in the SEARS is that the applicant must show that it is legally compliant under NSW law.
 - In my opinion the applicant is NOT compliant with 6.52(f)(i) of the State Environmental Planning Policy (Biodiversity and Conservation) 2021
 - (f) development near a heritage item, including development that—

- (i) may have an impact on the setting of the heritage item, including by affecting a significant view to **or from** the item...
- The SEPP heritage items are mapped with brown dots. I am AT LEAST sure that the following are impacted (Google Earth street-view)
 - #123 Fort Denison
 - #81 Garden Island
 - #118 Clark Island
 - #92 Bath House and Jetty
 - #77 Man O' War Steps
 - Note the 2 items on Bradley's Head, #37 is the concrete wharf, gondola lift not visible from there, and #138 is a shipwreck.
- See map end of submission.
- The federal EPBC Act has not been taken into account.
 - the gondola lift will be seen from 3 items of national significance, one of these world-heritage listed
 - Opera House
 - The Visual Impact Assessment claims this is minor, but it does not take account of the moving cars or the nighttime use.
 - It is likely that the gondola lift will **catch one's eye** even from the Opera House.
 - I asked for a hi-res image of the view from the Opera House in the assessment report but never got it.
 - Sydney Harbour Bridge same.
 - foreshore of the Royal Botanic Gardens same.
 - it will also be visible from Commonwealth Heritage Listed Garden Island even closer than the Opera House, but Visual Impact Assessment didn't look at this location.
 - applicant should consider whether there is the potential for a significant impact on matters of national significance and if so (or unsure) refer the development to federal Minister for the Environment and Water for assessment.
- Since the development will be seen far and wide around the Harbour, the visual assessment should have included a **visual catchment area**, i.e. everywhere it could be seen, not just selected points.
- the 20-25 cable cars (usually moving) are not considered in the visual impact assessment and have been omitted from the report.
- detailed consideration of heritage has been omitted from the report.

- I disagree that the night-time lights are not considered impactful *“Night time illumination associated with this proposal is compatible with this overall context (Zoo lighting), and is less noticeable than Taronga Zoo Ferry Wharf.”*
- Over-design?
 - The new gondola lift may be over-designed and have excess capacity much of the time, being designed to handle “mega-peak” which apparently is only 1 week of the year
 - the old gondola could already accommodate folding prams.
 - a video of a Zoo employee says that the new cars are to accommodate double-prams and wheelchairs.
 - The Zoo’s CEO said at a public Mosman Council meeting that the #1 reason for the new gondola was “accessibility”
 - Zoo has used Transport for NSW estimated visitors with mobility restrictions.
 - but these figures are overstated.
 - mobility and wheelchair are only 2.8%.
 - but Zoo also included persons over 75 and prams total 13.2%.
 - Over 75 cannot be assumed to be mobility impaired but may be relevant to Transport for NSW where steps are involved.
 - old gondola already accommodated most prams.
 - Zoo staff told Mosman Council public meeting that new lift can take 1,600 per hour, whereas the old lift could only accommodate a maximum of 800 per hour.
 - but they are predicting an “assumed average cable car occupancy rate of 40%”.
 - Max ferries are 4x hour 400 pp each, only “mega-peak” first week in January.
 - supplementary transport from the wharf to ease lift congestion was not considered.
 - outdoor escalator
 - footpath
 - additional dedicated (not public) busses
 - timed tickets, i.e. no more 400pp ferries every 15 minutes
 - 10pp cars versus old 6pp cars, 2 minutes versus 4.5 minutes not necessarily a good thing.
 - a quick 2-minute ride is not necessarily what visitors want.
 - sharing a larger car with other families/individuals is not necessarily what people want (they like the family time).
 - looking at many YouTube videos, the old gondolas cars were rarely full, many time just singles and couples.
- Pylon design
 - the great height of the pylons has a significant visual impact.

- two are almost 40 metres tall on top of a 60-metre-tall headland.
- they will necessarily have to have lights.
- but there was no alternative scenario other than using the height of the existing pylons, in other words nothing in between the proposed height and the old height was considered.
- the clearance report is very brief and looks at keeping the existing pylon height but with the new cars (wider corridor).
- the report shows that using the existing height does not clear 2 buildings
 - one of the buildings is the “elephant barn”.
 - but the elephants have been relocated to South Australia.
 - there is no longer an elephant exhibit at all.
 - the barn has also disappeared from the Zoo’s visitor map.
 - is the barn being retained? if not why is it in the consultant’s report?
 - I think the other “primate building” is a simple open structure and could be easily altered
- the clearance above the Food Market is only “recommended”
- the clearance standards document costs \$150 so not available for free to check anything
- other problem areas are footpaths, could not these be easily re-routed?
- Published project costs wrong
 - the published project costs, i.e. \$77-80 million, are inconsistent with NSW Budget Paper 3, \$105m as of June 2024 and before the design revisions and an entire year ago.
 - why does the applicant publish inaccurate costs?
 - who is paying for the project?
 - is it likely that there will be significant cost increases?
- Great heritage significance of Bradley’s Head not considered
 - Bradley’s Head (Booraghee) was originally home to the Borogegal clan. It is one of the last headlands still bush-covered, a magical glimpse into what Sydney looked like before English colonisation.
 - It has outstanding significance to the history of Australia. In 1788, two days after the First Fleet arrived, Sirius’s Lieutenant William Bradley and 2nd Captain John Hunter surveyed the Harbour, naming the headland “Bradley Point”. They encountered the Borogegal and Bradley later wrote *“On a point of land... between Middle Head and Bradley Point, we saw several of the natives.... who made a great noise and waved to us to come on shore. There being a great surf we could not land at the point we wished which, they observing, pointed to the best place to land and came down unarmed to meet us.”*
 - There is no doubt the proposed “revitalised” Sky Safari will solve the patron congestion problem, but its design will significantly disfigure Bradley’s Head. It will be unmistakably visible from both the water (ferries and cruise ships) and

the land (both sides of the Harbour) and for a great distance even to the World Heritage-listed Opera House. It will potentially operate from dawn to twilight and sometimes to midnight, lighted, and to accommodate special events, a far cry from the present 9-5

SEPP (Biodiversity and Conservation) 2021 map relevant to Part 6.4

