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Dear Peter

Submission: EIS for Northern Beaches Hospital

The appearance of this Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Northern Beaches Hospital (the Hospital) is not only welcome, but long overdue. Personally, I have been involved in community committees and, sat on various Health Service advisory and governance committees, for over a decade. Therefore, while writing this submission in a strictly personal capacity, it comes from someone who has watched with a growing amount of frustration, as a long line of local councillors and other largely self-appointed “community activists” attempted to scuttle progress towards design and construction of the new facility.

Even in the past few days, this process has continued.<sup>1</sup> The suggestion that there is anything of any great environmental value on the site appears dubious at best. I am aware that some residential properties had to be purchased during land acquisition and, that a fence was subsequently erected to discourage squatting and unauthorised disposal of refuge. And while acknowledging that the *Historic Heritage Impact Statement* notes the existence of two apple trees from the period when this area was largely given over to orchard farming,<sup>2</sup> it also makes clear that this is far from a pristine environment. From orchards and brickwork in the late nineteenth century, the next significant change was:

*“...the post-war boom of the mid-twentieth century, that (saw) part of the site was subdivided for residential development. There are no indications that the site was developed prior to the 1950s subdivision, other than the complex of buildings seen on the 1943 aerial. While they appear to be functionally related, documentation is sparse or in poor condition and the purpose or date of construction of the complex could not be determined. Today all that remains of the overlying mid-twentieth century residential dwellings are a number of concrete foundations and remnant gardens. The major part of the study area is dominated by dense scrub and woodland...”<sup>3</sup>*

Therefore, I struggle to see much of any significance that would outweigh the urgent need for the hospital; Manly and Mona Vale Hospitals are ageing facilities, while the demographic centre of the northern beaches peninsula is in the Warringah Local Government Area. All of this can be confirmed by going through the virtual mountain of consultation, demographic planning and assessment documents (including a State Parliamentary Inquiry), which have characterised the long, winding road to the point.

Equally, in my view, the “on again/off again” hospital project, has had a similarly deleterious effect on other projects mooted in the area. This includes the augmenting of public transport and the

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<sup>1</sup> Charis Chang, Manly Daily, November 22, 2013 4:36PM *Environmental offset planned for Northern Beaches Hospital 'grossly inadequate'* <http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/newslocal/northern-beaches/environmental-offset-planned-for-northern-beaches-hospital-grossly-inadequate/story-fngr8hax-1226766267690> as at 24 November 2013

<sup>2</sup> See Northern Beaches Health Services, Frenchs Forest: Historic Heritage Impact Assessment, Prepared by Australian Museum Business Services for SMEC Australia Pty Ltd, Final Report, September 2012, p. 4 (12 of 48)

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.37 (45 of 48)

establishment of light rail, which seems to have a life on the northern beaches similar to that of the Very Fast Train linking east coast capitals. If the hospital was more certain, perhaps these other pieces of infrastructure would come too. The hospital design should certainly allow for a light rail and bus stop, to permit ease of access. A medium to long term vision could include a tunnel under Warringah Road for light rail, private vehicular and emergency vehicular traffic, with the tunnel resurfacing within the hospital precinct; thus allowing most hospital related traffic to avoid the not infrequent traffic jams on Warringah Road and surrounding streets.

It would have been appropriate for the Government to pass special legislation making the hospital site a special development zone, where other legislative instruments such as the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*, the *Heritage Act 1977* or the various Council plans and policies operated only at the discretion of the Planning Minister, in consultation with the Health Minister.

While keenly aware that this project has been planned multiple times, I can only observe how small the site looks in aerial shots contained in the documentation. Equally, given that the hospital adjoins a major high school, it is concerning that this may place pressure on parking facilities. Certainly, there are parking challenges at both current hospital sites on the northern beaches. If Manly Hospital's proximity to a school is any guide, some potential parking challenges come from newly minted licensed drivers who are still attending school.

It would be appropriate to have multiple levels of underground car parking beneath the hospital, for staff, patients and their families. Equally, providing sufficient parking is also important to minimise the costs on people, when they are trying to access the facility for its primary purpose, which is providing health care. To construct a new hospital, only to limit parking and making parking fees prohibitive, is a mistake that we should work to avoid. This is why I would recommend that in continuing the planning process for the Northern Beaches Hospital, the planning team prepare to make use of section 96 and/or section 96AA of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*. This permits amendments to approved plans.

In my view, the main amendment would be to increase the foot print of the hospital; we have one chance to build a new facility that will serve the northern beaches for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is noted in the *Environmental Impact Statement* that:

*"...the Frenchs Forest site is considered well placed being generally in the centre of the NBHS catchment, and also in relation to Mona Vale and Manly Hospitals. The site is also adjacent to the major transport routes of Warringah Road and Wakehurst Parkway, and in close proximity to Forest Way..."*<sup>4</sup>

A new hospital will also encourage others to come and see it. I understand it to be the case that with the opening of the new Royal North Shore Hospital (RNSH) facility, many people requiring hospital care presented at the new RNSH, in preference to attending other facilities. Therefore, while pleased to see the EIS indicative diagrams make provision for expansion,<sup>5</sup> the slice of retained vegetation on Wakehurst Parkway alongside the 10 storey limit, puts a real cap on the development.<sup>6</sup> Again, while

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<sup>4</sup> Northern Beaches Hospital, State Significant Infrastructure (SSI) Application , Environmental Impact Statement for Stage 1 including Concept Design, Site Clearance & Preparatory Works, October 2013 p.66 (80 of 93)

<sup>5</sup> See *ibid.*, p.45 (59 of 93)

<sup>6</sup> The retained vegetation area could have accommodated the bus and light rail stops, as well as one end being the tunnel entry/exit point on the hospital site. I am also concerned that the indicative diagrams do not make reference to helicopter pad; I understand that there is currently one at Mona Vale Hospital.

appreciating the need not to unduly shadow neighbouring properties,<sup>7</sup> there are other ways of preserving sunlight.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps, by looking to the Norwegian innovation, we can free the hospital from its height restriction.

I acknowledge my long term support for a new Northern Beaches Hospital and, my growing frustration at the long lead time, delays and the regrettable history of politicking. But now it is time to build a health facility specifically for the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I encourage you push the bounds of finance, technology, clinical knowledge and planning law to make it happen.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'A Johnston', written over a horizontal line.

Adam Johnston

26 November 2013

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<sup>7</sup> See Northern Beaches Hospital, State Significant Infrastructure (SSI) Application, Environmental Impact Statement for Stage 1., op. cit., p.46 (60 of 93)

<sup>8</sup> See in particular, *Remote village installs giant mirrors to enjoy winter sun*, World Travel News – Date: October 29, 2013, at <http://www.smh.com.au/travel/travel-news/remote-village-installs-giant-mirrors-to-enjoy-winter-sun-20131029-2wcwy.html#ixzz2lkApOYV0> as at 26 November 2013 (Also see: <http://www.canberratimes.com.au/travel/travel-news/remote-village-installs-giant-mirrors-to-enjoy-winter-sun-20131029-2wcwy.html>)