



SYDNEY HARBOUR ASSOCIATION

PO Box 265 ROSE BAY NSW 2029

To:

NSW Planning & Environment, via its website, 9 April 2016

Attention: Director – Key Sites Assessments

Application SSD 7419, Australia Habitat and Taronga Wildlife Retreat, Taronga Zoo

Sydney Harbour Association was established in 2010, as successor body to Sydney Harbour and Foreshores Committee (est. 1979). The Association is an unincorporated body of individuals interested in Sydney Harbour, having objectives that are very similar to those stated in *Sydney Regional Environmental Plan (Sydney Harbour Catchment) 2005 (SREP)*.

We note that this proposal for Taronga Zoo is intended to cater, among other uses, for events and weddings. According to the EIS, Taronga Zoo anticipates that an eco-tourist facility on the site will be occupied by:

- ♣ *Tourists and domestic residents wishing to visit, experience and stay within the zoo.*
- ♣ *International and interstate visitors looking for a unique nature-based experience close to the city.*
- ♣ *Mid-week **corporate and business events** market looking for a different and inspiring venue with immersive experience.*
- ♣ *Sydney residents and domestic visitors looking for a special night or weekend away.*
- ♣ ***Function organisers and wedding parties looking for a venue with on-site accommodation.***
- ♣ *Regional and interstate school excursions to the zoo where on-site accommodation and meals are available.*

We oppose the present proposal. Our rationale reflects two major concerns:

1. Conservation.... The emphasis we have added to the EIS statement quoted above identifies the focus of one important issue, namely the total absence of *conservation purposes* in those purposes that we have singled out. We can accept that some of the other purposes appear likely to have some educative and/or Zoo-related orientation and so may be seen as conforming at least nominally to the purposes for which the Zoo is conducted. However, the staging of business events and social functions is fundamentally and essentially a commercial activity which we think has no relationship to any conservation purposes of a Zoo. Taronga Zoo is not a commercial venue but a conservation one (as the preferred naming of the proponent as *Taronga Conservation Society Australia* is presumably intended to emphasise), and we do not think it is appropriate for the Zoo site to become just another (admittedly marvellously sited!) *de facto* business zone in this incremental manner.

2. Enhancing a natural asset.... We note that the buildings proposed are claimed in the EIS to be unobtrusive and to have no significant adverse effects on views and similar amenity issues, and that may well be correct, at least for some of them. And it appears from the EIS presentation that some, admittedly minor, adverse impacts will occur. But it is not apparent that any of the content of the proposal actually *enhances the Harbour foreshore* in any discernible manner at all. From our viewpoint, that is a major defect in the proposal. Development in the Harbour foreshore area is intended by the policy controls at State level not only to minimise adverse environmental impacts, but also to contribute to *positive improvement* of the natural environment of the Harbour and its foreshores. That this officially stated aspiration and intent is often un-recognised in practice even by State agencies is certainly regrettable. The dynamic nature of that aim may well pose difficulties for proponents of Harbourside enterprises, but we claim and submit that it is a valid aim, it is unarguably an official aim, and it is an aim that should be honoured in its observance rather than ignored for convenience in practice.

Accordingly, we direct the Assessor's careful attention to the content of *Sydney Regional Environmental Plan (Sydney Harbour Catchment) 2005*, (SREP), with specific reference to Clause 2: Aims, as follows:

"(1) This plan has the following aims with respect to the Sydney Harbour Catchment:
*(a) to **ensure** that the catchment, foreshores, waterways and islands of Sydney Harbour are recognised, **protected, enhanced and maintained** (our emphasis):*
(i) as an outstanding natural asset, and
(ii) as a public asset of national and heritage significance,
for existing and future generations....
....."

Hylde Rolfe, Secretary
(Home: 41 Cove Street, Watsons Bay NSW 2030. T: 02 9337 5058; E: hyldearolfe@bigpond.com)
9 April 2016