

Appendix 3

Summary of committee site visits

This appendix contains summaries of the committee's site visits undertaken during the inquiry. These visits were to:

- the Toolangi State Forest and the Healesville Sanctuary, in the Yarra Valley, Victoria; and
- the site of proposed developments by Walker Group Holdings (Walker) at Toondah Harbour in Cleveland, Queensland.

Site visit: Toolangi State Forest and Healesville Sanctuary

On 21 November 2018, Senators Rice, Duniam and Urquhart visited sites in the Yarra Valley in Victoria: the Toolangi State Forest; and the Healesville Sanctuary.

Toolangi State Forest

The visit to Toolangi State Forest was hosted by Professor David Lindenmayer, Professor of Ecology and Conservation Science at the Fenner School of Environment and Society, at the Australian National University (ANU), and two ANU research officers based in the Victorian central highlands, Mr Lachlan McBurney and Mr David Blair.

The committee visited a number of sites in Toolangi State Forest, and received in situ briefings, as follows:

- coupes where logging has recently been undertaken, which have not yet been re-planted. This included sites where forestry activities have left buffer zones around areas where threatened species have been located prior to logging;
- sites showing the effects of bushfires. This included the recovery of areas damaged in the 'Black Saturday' bushfires of 13 April 2009, as well as the long-term and lasting effects of the 'Black Friday' bushfires of 1939;
- areas of old growth forest and forest areas that include individual old trees that provide habitat to threatened species, including the critically endangered Leadbeater's Possum, the vulnerable Greater Glider, and many species of birds whose populations have been declining;
- newer areas of regrowth forests, including areas representing up to two decades of regrowth;
- water catchment areas in the Toolangi State Forest that feed the water reservoirs supplying Melbourne and other parts of southern Victoria; and
- sites where long-term monitoring of animals occurs, including possums, gliders and birds, undertaken by the ANU research team directly, as well as

through programs they run for members of the public to participate in monitoring species population.

The committee looked at sites of old growth mountain ash, which provide critical habitat for populations of animal species, including the critically endangered Leadbeater's Possum. These possums nest in hollows of mountain ash, which almost always require trees to be around 150–years old before they develop. The committee looked at conservation strategies that have been explored with limited success, including artificial hollows and nesting boxes. Professor Lindenmayer noted that populations had declined, with site occupancy for Leadbeater's Possum around half of rates two decades ago.



Professor Lindenmayer gives an in situ briefing at a coupe in Toolangi State Forest to Senators Rice, Urquhart and Duniam

The committee considered the different burning patterns of old growth and younger regrowth forests. Professor Lindenmayer explained that younger forests burned with greater severity, as they are more prone to crown-scorching fire patterns. This has effects not only on the amount of forest destroyed, but also more devastating effects on animal populations due to the speed and heat of burning in younger forest areas.

As well as noting the effects of regrowth forest on the severity of fires, Professor Lindenmayer commented that research pointed to more frequent occurrence of re-burning bushfires in these areas, due to the younger tree populations.

The committee was advised of the importance of old growth forest to the health of water catchments. Professor Lindenmayer stated that some old growth Victorian water catchments are 'closed' for logging, whereas others are 'open'. He commented that,

whereas younger forests draw on water and take it out of the catchment system, older forests increase the intake of water into catchments.



Mr Blair and Mr McBurney give an in situ briefing at a bird monitoring site in Toolangi to Senators Urquhart, Rice and Duniam

Healesville Sanctuary

Following the visit to Toolangi, the committee visited the Healesville Sanctuary. The committee was given a briefing and tour of the Sanctuary by its General Manager of Life Sciences, Dr Rupert Baker.

Healesville Sanctuary is a zoo-based conservation organisation, which is one of three zoos that operate under Zoos Victoria (along with Melbourne Zoo and Werribee Open Range Zoo).

The Healesville Sanctuary states that its mission is to 'fight wildlife extinction' through:

1. Innovative, scientifically sound breeding and recovery programs to support critically endangered Victorian, terrestrial, vertebrate species;
2. Partnering with the Victorian community to create the world's most wildlife friendly society;
3. Providing profound zoo-based animal encounters to connect people with wildlife; and

4. Strong commercial approaches to secure financial sustainability.¹

The Healesville Sanctuary supports the recovery programs for 21 species that are at risk of extinction. It does this through a range of activities, including captive breeding and reintroduction programs, research, and raising community awareness. The Sanctuary also assists species recovery in other ways, including raising money for recovery programs, and through its collaborations with recovery teams and experts around Australia.

The committee had the opportunity to view the Sanctuary's programs for some of these threatened animals, including species of:

- birds (including the Helmeted Honeyeater and Orange-bellied Parrot);
- frogs (Corroboree Frog, Baw Baw Frog) and lizards (including the Guthega Skink, Grassland Earless Dragon); and
- the Leadbeater's Possum.

Evidence taken at the committee hearing on 22 November 2018

The day after the site visit, the committee held a public hearing in Melbourne to take evidence. Professor Lindenmayer appeared at this hearing in a private capacity. At this hearing, the committee also took evidence from Ms Rachel Lowry, the Director of Wildlife Conservation and Science for Zoos Victoria.

1 Healesville Sanctuary, 'Vision and mission', www.zoo.org.au/about-us/vision-and-mission (accessed 14 February 2019).

Site visit: Toondah Harbour

On 31 January 2019, a subcommittee consisting of Senators Rice, Watt and Waters visited the site of proposed developments at Toondah Harbour, in Redland City, about 25 km south-east of Brisbane.

The committee received a briefing and a guided tour of the site from representatives of several organisations at Toondah Harbour, namely:

- Mr Steve MacDonald and Mr Tom Taranto from Redlands2030;
- Ms Judith Hoyle from Birdlife Southern Queensland; and
- Dr Peter Rothlisberg and Mr Robert Bush from the Queensland Wader Study Group.

Background

Toondah Harbour is the location of the Stradbroke Island Ferry Terminal, which is used by ferries and water taxis servicing North Stradbroke Island. It sits on the western shore of Moreton Bay, in the suburb of Cleveland, which has a population of around 15 000 people.²

The Queensland Government declared Toondah Harbour to be a Priority Development Area (PDA) on 21 June 2013. The Queensland Government and Redlands City Council chose Walker Group Holdings (Walker) as the preferred development partner.³ Walker is proposing the redevelopment of the existing marine facility at Cleveland and a new residential development of 3600 units.

Toondah Harbour is in the Moreton Bay wetlands, one of five areas in Queensland that are protected under the Ramsar Convention, an international agreement that protects representative, rare or unique wetlands that are important for preserving biodiversity. The site was first protected under the Ramsar Convention in 1993.

The committee briefly discusses the proposed development at Toondah Harbour in the main body of this report. The committee notes that future reports for this inquiry may discuss the matter further.

Site visit

The committee received a briefing on the proposed development and related issues from representatives of Redlands 2030, BirdLife Southern Queensland, and the

2 Redland City Council, 'Cleveland', www.redland.qld.gov.au/info/20125/our_suburbs_and_islands/164/cleveland and 2016 Census QuickStats, http://quickstats.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/SSC30627 (both accessed 25 January 2018).

3 Walker Group Holdings, 'Project Details', www.toondah-harbour.com.au/#projectdetails (accessed 24 January 2019).

Queensland Wader Study Group. This was held at the Grand View Hotel overlooking Toondah Harbour, following which Senators had the opportunity to ask questions.



Senators Watt, Rice and Waters with representatives of Redlands 2030, BirdLife Southern Queensland and the Queensland Waders Study Group

The committee then walked to several sites with the hosts, including:

- viewing the proposed development from the back of the Grand View Hotel. The hosts had marked out the proposed development area with buoys in Moreton Bay. From this elevated location, the committee could view a panorama of the proposed development of 3600 units, to be built on the mudflats;
- observing several critically endangered Eastern Curlew from locations along the shoreline of GJ Walter Park, as well as some Bar-tailed Godwit (listed as vulnerable) and Whimbrel. The committee saw some Eastern Curlews feeding on the mudflats at low tide. The mudflats are critical habitat for the Eastern Curlew, and would be completely destroyed by the proposed development;
- inspecting the Stradbroke Island Ferry Terminal, which sits at the southernmost point of the proposed development, and is proposed to be redeveloped;
- seeing other development sites currently being undertaken in Toondah's residential areas;
- viewing koala habitat in GJ Walter Park, as well as in adjacent residential streets. This included one koala in a large gum tree on Shore Street East. The

committee heard that this population of urban koalas would almost certainly be threatened by the Walker proposal, including through the risks of increased traffic flows.

Evidence taken at the committee hearing on 22 November 2018

Representatives of Redlands 2030 and BirdLife Southern Queensland appeared at the committee's hearing the following day to give evidence.

