

# TRANSCRIPT

## LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

### **Inquiry into Environmental Infrastructure for Growing Populations**

Melbourne—Tuesday, 20 April 2021

*(via videoconference)*

#### **MEMBERS**

Ms Sarah Connolly—Chair

Mr David Morris—Deputy Chair

Mr Will Fowles

Ms Danielle Green

Mr Paul Hamer

Mr Tim McCurdy

Mr Tim Smith

**WITNESS**

Mr Chris Chesterfield, Chairperson, Birrarung Council.

**The CHAIR:** I advise that the sessions today are being live broadcast on the Parliament's website and rebroadcast of the hearing is only permitted in accordance with Legislative Assembly standing order 234. Thanks, Chris, for joining us today at this public hearing of the Inquiry into Environmental Infrastructure for Growing Populations.

On behalf of the committee, I acknowledge the traditional Aboriginal owners of this land, and we pay our respects to them, their culture, their elders past, present and future, and elders from other communities who may be joining us today. I also extend a warm welcome to any members of the public who have rejoined us or from the media watching us today. This is one of several public hearings that the Environment and Planning Committee will be conducting to inform itself about the issues relevant to the inquiry.

Before I begin, Chris, I need to point out that all evidence taken today will be recorded by Hansard and is protected by parliamentary privilege. What this means is that you can speak freely without fear of legal action in relation to the evidence that you give. However, it is really important to remember that parliamentary privilege does not apply to comments that you make outside this hearing, even if you are just restating what you said during the hearing. You will receive a draft transcript of your evidence in the next week or so to check and to approve, and corrected transcripts are published on the committee's website and may be quoted from in our final report.

Thanks again for taking the time to speak with us. We are very excited to hear from you today. If we can just quickly go around with members on the committee, we will introduce ourselves, and then I will throw over to you, Chris, and you can introduce yourself and maybe give us a 5-minute presentation and we will jump right into questions.

**Mr CHESTERFIELD:** Wonderful.

**The CHAIR:** My name is Sarah Connolly. I am the Chair of this committee, and I am the Member for Tarneit.

**Mr MORRIS:** David Morris, and I am the Deputy Chair of the committee and the Member for Mornington.

**Mr FOWLES:** Will Fowles, the Member for Burwood.

**Ms GREEN:** Danielle Green, the Member for Yan Yean, and Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Victoria and for Sport.

**Mr HAMER:** Paul Hamer. I am the Member for Box Hill.

**Mr CHESTERFIELD:** Okay. Nice to meet you all.

**The CHAIR:** Go for it, Chris.

**Mr CHESTERFIELD:** Okay. Well, I am Chris Chesterfield, and I am appearing today on behalf of the Birrarung Council, which I chair, but I am also speaking on behalf of a personal submission I have made to the inquiry, which is drawn from my 30-plus years working in the water environment—the waterways parks space in Victoria. So thanks very much for the opportunity to present to you on these really important issues, pretty fundamental to the state I think. If I could give a quick presentation, if that is your expectation. I have prepared a few slides.

**Visual presentation.**

**Mr CHESTERFIELD:** Wonderful. The Birrarung Council, I guess, firstly, is established under new Yarra River protection legislation, the *Yarra River Protection (Wilip-gin Birrarung murrong) Act*. This was really landmark legislation, and many of you may have been in Parliament as part of that historic moment when Wurundjeri elders appeared during the second-reading process. That is the first time I think in the state's history when traditional owners have appeared and been part of the parliamentary process, and this *Yarra River*

*Protection (Wilip-gin Birrarung murrn) Act* is the first Victorian legislation to be co-titled in Indigenous language as well. Really, the purpose of the act is to improve the governance of the management of the Yarra River, to facilitate greater traditional owner involvement in planning and management of the river and its lands, and to provide a stronger voice for community, and that is particularly through a requirement to develop a 50-year community vision under the terms of the Act. The Act also establishes the Birrarung Council as a bicultural voice for the river and a champion for traditional owner and community aspirations for the Birrarung, for the Yarra River. So we have a membership which comprises currently three Wurundjeri elders as well as a number of citizens of the state, and I am sure you are familiar with elements of that as well.

I think it is important to understand that the Yarra act was really an outcome of a process that was very much driven by community, through Yarra River keepers, Environmental Justice Australia engaging with community and running a number of workshops around Melbourne with community members. It was also very much I guess driven as a reaction to the impact that growth and urban development was having on the river. I was at the City of Stonnington talking to councillors last night in fact who attributed some of this activity in their municipality to the community getting really fired up about intrusive development and the lack of control around development, and these are just a few examples—a couple of those there from Stonnington in Toorak; they are several years old now. There is one you can see there up in Victoria Street in Abbotsford—most of that is being built now—and a famous one in Coppin Grove, which is actually one that prompted Matthew Guy as planning minister to introduce some temporary planning controls. Interestingly, Richard Wynne as planning minister has taken up and extended those planning controls and announced only this week the introduction of permanent planning controls in the form of a design and development overlay and a landscape significant overlay right up to Warrandyte.

I think the history here is that there has been a very bipartisan view about the need to protect the Yarra and support for this modernisation of governance and a greater integration between the way the river is managed and its lands are managed and how the planning system provides for protection. But I think the circumstances that led to Parliament enacting this legislation to protect the Yarra River and to modernise governance are not really unique to the Yarra.

The elements of the Act, and the other reforms related to the Yarra, have come from the recommendations of a ministerial advisory committee which was set up by government off the back of the sort of community agitation for doing something about the Yarra. I was very privileged to chair that ministerial advisory committee, but I was then subsequently asked to also chair a Waterways of the West ministerial advisory committee because similar issues were being raised there and the communities there were very keen to have a very similar process to examine those issues. Really, the sort of issues that we are talking about are even more pressing I think in the west than they are for the Yarra. The west is perhaps the fastest growing region of Victoria, if not Australia. It has been growing rapidly for more than a decade. The current population across that western area is around 900 000 and it is expected to double to 1.8 million by around 2040, under what admittedly I guess are pre-COVID population projections. But that is a transformation in anyone's sense. We are building cities bigger than Perth and Adelaide to the west of Melbourne essentially. Now is really the time for visionary planning and investment to create a legacy of environmental infrastructure for the west.

A lot of the work on the Yarra was about protecting the legacy that has been created through past waves of visionary planning and investment, and in the west I think it is now about creating that legacy. I think it is this context for Melbourne that we really need to respond to. It is that narrative around that context that emerged from the work with the Yarra ministerial advisory committee and the Waterways of the West, which is the basis, I guess, for my personal submission, and that is this concept of the third wave for Melbourne. Melbourne is undergoing its third wave of population growth, putting pressure on infrastructure, services and the environment, and we have been here before. We have responded to two previous waves of growth in the late 19th century and mid-20th century, and we did have visionary responses and we did do investment. Really we need to learn from that, I think, about how we respond to this third wave.

I might just share this rather complicated diagram to just briefly talk about, I guess, those previous waves. This is the first one after the gold rush, so this is late 19th century, where we created that green ring of open space around Melbourne—the botanic gardens, the Alexandra Gardens, the Carlton Gardens, the Fitzroy Gardens, Princes Park and so on. But not only that, we reserved the headwaters of the Yarra catchment for Melbourne's water supply, and we are still getting 70 per cent of our water from that those catchments now. We created the western treatment plant and built a sewerage system. We started to create the institutions, I guess, to manage the environment.

We are still benefiting from that legacy today. From the mid-1950s we had that postwar population boom and again we had visionary planning and investment, but the leadership then was more from the institutions that we had created during those previous phases, like the MMBW. We now had a Planning and Environment Act. We had the profession of urban planning. We had institutions responsible—it was more the institutional leadership. We created new institutions, like the Environment Protection Authority, during that wave, which was the second environment protection authority to be created anywhere in the world. We created a regional open space network, we built the eastern treatment plant and we invested in a backlog sewer program. I can remember back to the 1970s and have seen the data for creeks like Dandenong Creek, where we had *E. coli* levels at 3.2 million. That is on par with the Ganges in India, essentially. Now we get upset if we see 5000 *E. coli* in the Yarra River.

So how do we respond now in this third wave? Things are fundamentally different. I think what the Yarra Act in particular is demonstrating is that this third wave needs to empower more communities and traditional owners to provide that vision and for governments to facilitate, if you like, or enable traditional owners and communities to be much more involved in the planning and decision-making than perhaps they have been in the past. I think the other thing here is that the institutional settings are fundamentally different now as well.

Some signs from the 1970s: I was brought up in Bonbeach on the shores of Port Phillip Bay, and these were the sorts of signs that were around me when I was a kid growing up on Port Phillip Bay because of those dreadful problems that we had with the backlog sewer program, for example. We did have this visionary response. We had planning policies that really put the Yarra and other waterways at the centre of our open space network, and we have this legacy now—this fantastic legacy for the Yarra—of nearly 4000 hectares of open space which through the Yarra Act is now being gazetted as the Greater Yarra Urban Parklands, to be managed as part of the living entity of the Yarra River and to be given a consistent and integrated identity, and there are fantastic opportunities. So we do have that important legacy.

Now I think in this third wave, planning and vision—we need to go beyond just planning and vision. We need to really think about creating the capabilities to deliver on that vision, and that is really my final point, I guess, and was the point in my personal submission around the need for some reforms. We do not have institutions like the Melbourne Metropolitan Board of Works anymore that were fundamental to delivering that mid-century vision, using things like the metropolitan improvement fund to acquire land to create those open space networks, to construct that backlog sewer system and so on. We need to think about: what is our current capability and are our institutions up to the job if we do want to carry out a major exercise and investment in environmental infrastructure? And I think we do lack capability to some extent.

A lot of our policy institutional settings reflect a 1990s mindset, when the state was kept in a very low growth situation, where we were coming out of financial and economic crisis. A lot of the reforms were driven by a neoliberal agenda, which has had a lot of benefits to Australia, but it has essentially meant that we have institutions that have very much this city-servicing mindset. It is about keeping costs down, managing risk. It is not about investing in a growth agenda. So I think there is an argument for really looking at potentially some reforms, and I am not necessarily suggesting a magic bullet answer to that. I think there are many potentially different ways of undertaking those reforms, but I think one of the things that we need to look at is how we can bring together and better integrate responsibility for planning and managing parks, waterways and coasts across that greater Melbourne region. So getting coordinated governance arrangements is really what the Yarra legislation seeks to achieve.

I think we really need to look at funding reform. So there are significant revenues that have been collected by what used to be the Metropolitan Improvement Fund but was reformed to become the parks charge under Mark Birrell as environment minister in the Kennett government. He created Melbourne Parks and Waterways as the institution then to strategically coordinate investment in open space. The last open space strategy for Melbourne was off the back of that process in 2000–02. We have not had an open space strategy for over 20 years. There is work going on on one now. It still has not been released, but we have had that real hiatus.

There is also huge revenue sitting in local government at the moment collected from developer contributions. I was having that discussion with the City of Stonnington yesterday. They have tens of millions of dollars in revenues collected from developer contributions, but there are really significant constraints around how that money can be spent that limits the flexibility in how they can respond. Collectively across the whole of Melbourne there are significant revenues there that in an integrated program with state government could enable us to undertake that sort of coordinated and strategically driven investment.

Then I guess my final point is that I just think there is the opportunity to really introduce a requirement for living infrastructure across all major projects, and this is also one of the parts of the Yarra protection legislation—the principle of net gain. This is something that Birrarung Council is working on with Wurundjeri elders and the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning at the moment. It is expanding the concept of net gain—a requirement that all infrastructure projects should actually deliver a net gain. You have heard of concepts like regenerative infrastructure. Birrarung Council is trying to get North East Link to recognise that opportunity at the moment. We have seen projects in the past that do that. The Metro Tunnel has a living infrastructure plan, so they are trying to create positive biodiversity outcomes, rather than negative, from those infrastructure projects. Wonthaggi desalination plant is another one which really has attempted to deliver multiple benefits from that project. So I just think that is a way that we can reverse that sort of incremental decline in our livability and our environment. Every time we do urban development or an infrastructure project where we look at offsetting negative impacts through things like net gain, we need to actually build these regenerative concepts into our ongoing grey infrastructure investment.

So I might leave it there. I have probably gone on a little bit longer than 5 minutes, but that was just sort of broadly trying to capture I guess the scope of the Birrarung Council's submission to you and my own personal submission, which has drawn a lot on that Birrarung Council experience and the Yarra River protection legislation also.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, Chris. I am just going to kick off with the first question and right off the back of the living infrastructure requirements. In your submission you talk about major infrastructure investments like the North East Link and the Suburban Rail Loop. I am just wondering if you could talk a little bit more about how that would work in practice and who would bear the costs. And then I just want to take your attention to that you talked about plans by the city of London to become a national park city—I have got many friends living in London—if you can talk a little bit about that.

**Mr CHESTERFIELD:** Yes, no problem. In practice how would such a thing as the regenerative infrastructure concept apply to the North East Link? Well, I think you can see an evolution in the way freeways have been developed across Melbourne over a number of years. I gave a presentation to the panel reviewing the environmental effects statement for the North East Link and talked about the concept that in the past rivers have given way to freeways; today freeways need to give more to rivers. If you look at international practice, freeways are being ripped up in many cities around the world. Concrete-lined waterways are being renaturalised, so you can see that in Seoul in Korea and in Madrid in Spain. We have since this century really started to incorporate things like stormwater treatment systems and wetlands into major freeway projects. So if you look at EastLink, for example—48 kilometres of freeway—all of the stormwater runoff from the EastLink goes through wetland treatment systems and rain gardens before any discharge to a waterway.

I have been a little bit disappointed in the environmental targets that have been set for the North East Link. They seem to be more about minimising impact rather than looking at how the impact of that investment can actually be positive, and I think there are many ways to do that. For example, the Eastern Freeway is getting an upgrade as part of the North East Link, being expanded to 10 lanes. That should trigger an upgrade to the environmental management of stormwater runoff from that freeway, which currently has no management of stormwater runoff. It should now be much more like EastLink than what is currently the way the Eastern Freeway has been designed and constructed, which predates, I guess, those sorts of processes.

I do not think enough effort has really gone into thinking about how truly a freeway project can add to livability beyond catering for increased traffic numbers. Birrarung Council is partnering with design schools from Melbourne Uni, Monash Uni and RMIT at the moment, and we are looking at the reach of the river, the Yarra River, between Punt Road and Wallen Road in Hawthorn, which has got the whole Monash Freeway along it. So again there is an example of a piece of infrastructure that was built in the 1960s and upgraded as part of CityLink. Significant revenues are being derived from that tollway now. What investment is going back into that environment? It has effectively cut off the community from that river. I constantly see investment in grey infrastructure in my other role as the Chairperson of the Victorian Environmental Water Holder where infrastructure is being built on waterways in the Murray-Darling Basin system to better manage water and improve irrigation efficiency—concrete structures with cyclone wire fences around them, no thought to how that investment can actually help the community connect with those waterways or help to also deliver broader environmental improvements, amenity, cultural connection and so on.

So I guess this is what I am talking about. I just think there is an immense opportunity there to think beyond the pure engineering of our infrastructure to broadening that investment. And does it cost more? Well, perhaps it does, but at the moment, when you look at those wasted opportunities and the impact that much of that infrastructure investment has, it costs the community in other ways—by reducing connection, reducing the amenity values, having an impact on biodiversity and ecosystem services and so on. I am sorry, Sarah, there was another part of your question as well.

**The CHAIR:** Yes. If you could just give us a very brief overview of what is happening in the city of London.

**Mr CHESTERFIELD:** The city of London, of course—national park city. This is incredible stuff. This again has been driven by a guy called Dan Raven-Ellison. He has excited people's imagination, including the mayor of London, and London has now committed to becoming the world's first national park city. The city of Adelaide—David Speirs, I think, as the environment minister in Adelaide has now committed Adelaide to becoming a national park city. And that figure that I included in my submission, it reflects the increasing thinking of cities—Singapore is also in this place now—about cities in nature. Singapore talks about 'A City in a Garden'—so recognising that cities have a natural environment and we are constantly adding to and changing that natural environment. That particular figure that David produced shows the area occupied by different forms of infrastructure and how significant the green infrastructure is within a city like London and the opportunity to actually then think about how we invest in infrastructure. So David would say: in a national park city if you were building a freeway, you would build that freeway as a way of enhancing the city's status and value as a national park city.

An example that he raised when he came in, because Melbourne is sort of famous for having peregrine falcons, is if you were building a 50-storey building in Melbourne, thinking in a regenerative infrastructure sense, you would be thinking, 'How can I incorporate nesting sites for peregrine falcons?'—not 'Incidentally they might go and nest on a window ledge and I hadn't really thought about it, but isn't it great that they do it?'. Why aren't we thinking in these ways every time we build infrastructure? How do we create opportunities for biodiversity, for community connection with nature, reflecting culture? So the Wurundjeri would say, 'Everything is an opportunity to recognise the cultural significance of place as well'. Sorry, Sarah, it was probably a bit of a longwinded answer, but there is some really exciting thinking going on in other parts of the world, and that is really developing here as well at the moment.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. I am going to throw to David.

**Mr MORRIS:** Thanks, Sarah, and thanks, Chris. It is a very interesting discussion so far; I am thoroughly enjoying it. The submission from the Birrarung Council suggests that the Greater Yarra Urban Parklands could encompass the entire landscape corridor, including private land. How would that work?

**Mr CHESTERFIELD:** I do not know if any of you have been on travels to national parks in Europe. For example, Cinque Terre on the west coast of Italy has that sort of status, and there are people living there in villages, carrying on with their lives. We have drawn on concepts of national parks from the United States, where national parks are separate bits of nature that are to be protected from development and so on, but there are alternative ways of thinking about national parks as being important because of their cultural significance as well as their natural significance. I think really that is the way the Birrarung Council and particularly the elders have been wanting to think about that whole Yarra corridor—not as being fragments of public land, and they are what we think about as being part of the Great Birrarung Parkland or the Greater Yarra Urban Parklands, but we think about the whole corridor in an integrated living entity sense and we invite people, including private landholders, to manage their land and to be excited by the prospect of being part of a significant landscape and to think about how they can contribute to that landscape. I think it is not the same way of thinking about putting horrible constraints on people and trying to take over their properties. It is really thinking more about the significance of that corridor and how everyone can actually be part of that corridor.

We are trying to stimulate a conversation around those things, not impose a preset concept about that. We are really interested, I guess, in getting people to think about: what does it mean to have a Great Birrarung Parkland or the Greater Yarra Urban Parklands? How do we manage that whole river corridor as part of the living entity? How do we give it identity? How do we all feel part of it rather than feeling like we are being excluded from it because you have got to put a fence around a park and manage access and those sorts of things? That is really, I think, the—

**Mr MORRIS:** So it is almost—encompassing the landscape tends to suggest that a vision might be opposed, and that is clearly not what you are saying. So the intention is more about working, I guess, in parallel with basically enlisting and convincing the private landholders that they should be part of that.

**Mr CHESTERFIELD:** Exactly, and I think that is what I was meaning by—I think in so much of what we do now we have to allow community and traditional owners to lead more of the thinking. We have to be patient and invest in those processes. Those things are not easy and they do take time, but, for example, I think the Yarra planning controls reflect more this thinking about the whole corridor and a more integrated approach. We are now looking at the way private land is managed through those planning controls and saying, ‘Well, if you’re going to develop land, you need to respect that corridor and the Yarra as a living entity and, you know, you need to have appropriate setbacks and height controls to protect that landscape’. I think that will have really positive outcomes.

**Mr MORRIS:** Yes. I will give someone else a go, but I just make the observation that we are talking about prospective change which is effectively what the zoning or the planning changes are. It is a different kettle of fish to where you have got existing ownership and existing development and saying, ‘Well, we really think there’s an opportunity for change here with your land’. But I get the point you are making. I think it is certainly a valid one, so thanks for that. Thanks, Sarah.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, David. I am going to throw to Danielle.

**Ms GREEN:** Thanks, Chris, and thanks, Chair. Following on from David’s point about the private land issue, I was interested in—and maybe I missed something—why it does not seem to encompass the Yarra’s tributaries. I just feel that that needs to be the next iteration. My electorate has the headwaters of the Plenty River, the Merri Creek, the Darebin Creek, the Diamond Creek and Arthurs Creek. I also liked what you were saying about not being opposed to urban development and form and your reference to sewerage. I have had difficulty, for example, with the Shire of Nillumbik trying to get support for a commercial development in Yarrambat which would actually resolve—they would put in a sewerage treatment plant which would then connect residential owners, and sewerage septic tank run-off is the biggest contributor to problematic river health in the Plenty. So I suppose in the end, why the focus on private land encompassing rather than saying, ‘Let’s talk about the tributaries’?

**Mr CHESTERFIELD:** Yes, that question has come up so much. In the Waterways of the West, setting up the ministerial advisory committee for Waterways of the West it was all waterways—tributaries, everything together. The government’s policy commitment was to do a piece of work on the Yarra corridor, and the Yarra River protection legislation itself only applies to the Yarra River corridor. I think consideration will be given to that question: why not the tributaries? What does this mean for the tributaries?

**Ms GREEN:** I understand the government’s view—I mean, it has been just about the Yarra—but I just meant in terms of your submission, because it only talks about private land and does not talk about the tributaries.

**Mr CHESTERFIELD:** Yes, well, I guess my personal submission relates to all the waterways in Melbourne, and those tributaries are incredibly important in their own right as part of the open space network but also how they then impact downstream on the Yarra River—for example, what is going on in the Merri Creek catchment in terms of urban development. It needs to be managed very carefully.

**Ms GREEN:** I note what you are saying about the Cinque Terre. But also in the Lake District in the north of England you have the villages that are within the national park. I represent a large part of the Shire of Nillumbik, and when you look at the amount of green wedge land that is in the Shire of Nillumbik which is owned by private landholders that actually really struggle with maintaining the environmental value and say, ‘Well, shouldn’t we get support?’, maybe working with traditional owners might be a way to get that support, because if you compare them, for example, to the Shire of Yarra Ranges, there the lion’s share of the environmentally sensitive land is not in private ownership; it is in parks so it is different. In terms of fire and environmental management it is difficult.

**Mr CHESTERFIELD:** Yes, I understand.

**Ms GREEN:** But it could be a solution, working with traditional owners, although we have some very conservative, right-wing entities within Nillumbik that are linked in with the league of rights and things like that so it would not necessarily be easy.

**Mr CHESTERFIELD:** Well, we have Warwick Leeson, who is the ex-mayor of Nillumbik and a Kangaroo Ground resident, on our Birrarung Council.

**Ms GREEN:** Indeed—a member of the Liberal Party but a great friend of mine, despite our political differences.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, Danielle. I am just mindful of time. I know Paul has a question for you, Chris.

**Mr HAMER:** Thanks, Chris. It is a really interesting discussion, as are some of the ideas that you put out. I would like to maybe get your suggestions or recommendations on two elements that you talked about in your submission. One was in terms of your talking about the major infrastructure and having that focus on not just minimising the impact on the environment but I guess what you might call a positive enhancement of the infrastructure. I would like your thoughts as to what would need to change to actually make that happen. The other question was in relation to the funding model. You talked about the amount of money that councils in particular have collected in open space levies and the like and how much of that is sitting tied up with council. What would your recommendations be in terms of facilitating the expenditure of that money in a way that provides the best benefit and advantage to the environment?

**Mr CHESTERFIELD:** Yes. Maybe I will start with that one, Paul. I am not an expert on the current legislative basis for the collection of those contributions and how they are expended, but, as I understand it, there are significant restrictions around the way those dollars that are collected from development contributions can be spent. They have to be spent in place and on certain things, like open space. But if you are in the City of Stonnington, there is actually very limited existing open space and there are limited opportunities to acquire open space, and what acquisition might be possible is incredibly expensive. You may be aware that they have recently undergrounded a major car park behind Chapel Street, servicing the shopping centre and the supermarket, and put a park on top of it, so that is one of the things that they are able to do, but they have amongst the lowest per capita area of open space of any municipality in Melbourne. I think Glen Iris is the other one. They have got that major growth area in Forest Hill where there are all those massive buildings, residential towers, going up at the moment.

I think there could be a great conversation between state government and local government around what are those constraints at the moment but also what are the opportunities and how expenditure could be more strategically guided and cost-effectively invested. For example, there are immediately opposite Stonnington significant areas of open space in the City of Yarra. Now, the City of Stonnington might be willing to invest in creating access and improvements to those open spaces in the City of Yarra if their residents, their community, could enjoy the amenity benefits of that access.

And Herring Island is a bit of an example of a piece of open space which is currently cut off from people. There is a bit of adjacent parkland on the Yarra side. There are just opportunities to really look at how to maximise the benefit from investment in our environmental infrastructure and what are those potential sources of revenue to do that. I think the important thing to do is to come at it strategically and look at what sort of investment would best serve communities and then what reforms might need to be made to policy and legislation to enable that. So I hope that answers that question.

Paul, just on facilitating an approach to regenerative infrastructure investment I think it is probably important to legislate in order to do that, but I think it is really important to work out a framework first that would guide the assessment of projects and the quantification, if you like. At the moment we have things like net gain, which are very transactional in their approach to offsetting impact. The Birrarung Council has been doing a bit of work to try and broaden that concept, have some more qualitative elements to it to include matters of cultural heritage in there as well and make a way of investing in net gain more flexible and more agile and so less transactional and rigidly driven by pluses and minuses of habitat hectares and so on. So I think the opportunity is there to build in quite a flexible framework that is driven, again, by what are the outcomes the community is really seeking in terms of livability and biodiversity in ecosystem services and access to open space and so on, and how can principles like regenerative infrastructure investment contribute to that and then what is the policy and



regulatory framework or perhaps legislative framework that you build around that to enable those outcomes? And obviously you have got to be mindful about what are the costs associated with these sorts of things as well.

To give another example there has been an idea of creating a cultural precinct around Bulleen which really centres on Indigenous cultural heritage but also post-settlement cultural heritage, because that precinct has been the centre of two of Australia's key art movements, the Impressionists and the Modernists—Angry Penguins and so on. So here is this incredibly important cultural precinct. It is of national significance. What is happening there at the moment? Other than Heide it basically just does not exist. It does not exist in the minds of Melburnians. It is not so much a place that attracts a lot of visitation, and it is an important meeting place of Wurundjeri and could become a cultural centre for Wurundjeri as well.

Here is North East Link coming along. They are going to remove tens of thousands of trees. There has been a lack of investment in this precinct that has got an old drive-in that is owned by the Greek community, who have been putting in development applications and wanting to get things done. You have got the Yarra golf club and a driving range. It is just this sort of neglected, daggy precinct that could be of national and international significance. And here is the North East Link, one of the biggest infrastructure projects in the whole of this country at the moment. Who has been talking about, 'How can this project contribute to a transformation of this space?'. It is certainly going to transform the space. We are going to have these entry and exit portals riddling this entire landscape, but all we can talk about is, 'How do we offset our impacts?' and 'How do we have a minimalist approach?'. This is this city-servicing mindset stuff that goes on across our agencies. We need to be putting pressure on. We need to be having these conversations. We need to be looking for opportunities for shaping the city, not just in terms of the dimensions of a bit of transport infrastructure, but shaping the city in a much broader sense, contributing to the wellbeing and the cultural lives of the people of the city as well.

Sorry—again, another longwinded approach to that. But I think we need to understand, if we are going to talk about regenerative infrastructure, whether we are just trying to get beyond this sort of minimalist, transaction-based approach offsetting impacts. In my mind, regenerative infrastructure is much broader than this and creates huge opportunities for us to help shape the city in a really positive way.

**Mr HAMER:** Thanks, Chris.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, Chris. I am just mindful of time. I am going to have to call time on that. Thanks for your discussion. I actually just wanted to say thanks for your passion—it is really interesting; it has been a great discussion—and your submission, also on behalf of the Birrarung Council. Thank you very much.

**Mr CHESTERFIELD:** Thanks for the opportunity. I really appreciate it. And good luck with your work. I think it is really important.

**The CHAIR:** Well, hopefully we will have some recommendations come out that you like.

**Mr CHESTERFIELD:** Great.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks so much.

**Mr CHESTERFIELD:** Thank you. Goodbye.

**The CHAIR:** Goodbye.

**Witness withdrew.**