

Saffioti decries ‘grubby attacks’ as EPA declines Burswood racetrack assessment

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The Environmental Protection Authority will not assess the Cook government’s \$217 million Burswood racetrack and sporting precinct plans, in a major win for the government and a blow for nearby residents.

Of the 953 comments received in a week-long comment period, 877 supported a formal assessment.

A noise survey of the Burswood racetrack.*EPA/government*

Those pleas were rejected by the EPA, which decided the environmental and noise impacts would be “localised, intermittent and short in duration” and could be managed under existing rules.

EPA chair Darren Walsh said in his decision that the likely environmental impacts of the proposal were not so significant as to warrant formal assessment, and the precinct was next to existing entertainment venues.

“We recognise the community’s concerns but are comfortable that there are other regulatory mechanisms in place to address potential issues,” he said.

“The EPA has also been advised by the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation that conditions can be applied to control the number and types of events, their times and duration, maximum allowable noise levels, and the approach to managing noise impacts.”

Transport Minister Rita Saffioti said she wasn’t surprised at the decision, and took aim at opponents of the project who claimed the site was environmentally significant.

“People made different claims about that site, but it was a landfill [site]. The ponds are contaminated,” she said

‘I’ve been dealing with facts, and people want to create some absurd assertions. One is that it’s a wildlife sanctuary. The CEO of the Burswood Park Board last week said there were 25 dead birds in April because of the water.

“The idea that somehow it’s currently a place where people are picnicking, I challenge you to go down and see if there’s anyone picnicking. It’s not being used by the community...because there’s no infrastructure there.

“For a big part of the year, it’s a marshland whenever it’s raining.”

The Burswood Park Board said last week that those 25 bird deaths occurred in the park “more generally”.

According to noise reports, some residents within 100 metres from the proposed racetrack may be subjected to noise around 91 decibels on race day. The World Health Organisation says exposure at that range should be limited to four hours per week.

Saffioti echoed the EPA's decision and said noise could be managed, while taking aim at opponents of the project for sending personal attacks about her and Victoria Park MP Hannah Beazley's families over social media and via email.

"I'm happy to have a debate about the facts of matters ... but when people, to be honest, make some extraordinary claims, use AI images to try and portray something and send personal attacks to local members and to ministers – grubby personal attacks that are sent late at night attacking people's family – I'm sorry, that is just not a debate that I'm wanting to engage in," she said.

"I think when people have to go to extreme measures and have those personal attacks, I think they discount themselves from a normal debate."

Saffioti would not name who was sending the attacks or what was said.

Beazley confirmed she had been subject to the personal attacks.

"Some of the discourse around the Burswood racetrack and the campaigners against it have become very personal and quite hurtful, and have involved my family members," Beazley said.

"As the treasurer has said, that does exclude them from the public discourse."

Save Burswood Park Alliance co-convener Robin Harvey said the group was deeply disappointed by the decision.

"[The EPA] must be seen as an organisation that does not support the environment and the negative impact of government and big business, who champion developments that impact the environment and the community," she said.



"The government submission was very scanty on actual detail around noise and environmental mitigation and the EPA has not called them out on it.

“877 submissions asked for a full public review and this has once again been ignored. What is the point of requesting public submissions if they are ignored?”

Harvey pointed out that a formal EPA environmental review was conducted for the Keysbrook and Kwinana motor racing sites.

“Why not for this project? Only 17 people live within 2 kilometres of the Keysbrook site compared with 35,000 to 40,000 people within 2 kilometres of the Burswood site, and Kwinana is buffered by an industrial area and setbacks,” she said.

“Our trust in government is at rock bottom.”

Harvey said the alliance had consistently focused on the issues surrounding the racetrack and had never made personal statements against Saffioti or other government MPs.

She said they had no control over what was posted on social media.

“We see this as another strategy to change the commentary on the proposal and distract from the key issues but also recognise the anger and frustration of many members of the public whose views are discounted and ignored,” she said.

“If there are personal comments being made that are threatening or abusive, then these should be referred to police for follow up. We want to draw attention to the commentary of the Deputy Premier in Parliament when issues about this project have been raised which has often been personal and certainly not transparent.”