



Melinda Pavey
Minister for Water, Property and Housing
Parliament House, Sydney.

Dear Ms Pavey

This is an appeal to you to engage with fellow Ministers Matt Kean and Rob Stokes to prevent an environmental mis-step by the Government and to enable the completion of the Wolli Creek Regional Park, which would be a big plus for the Government. The action we ask for is set out at the end of this letter.

We have written to you before about this bad decision by Sydney Water, but have mostly received back letters from Sydney Water itself. We are now making a repeated appeal to you for political intervention to prevent the implementation of this decision. Our request is backed by the over 3,300 signatories of an online appeal to you, open only since January 20, 2021, which can be found at <https://www.nature.org.au/get-involved/take-action/save-wolli-creek-regional-park/>. The wording of the petition is attached below. Our appeal is also supported by our local MPs and Councils and by many community organisations.

We firmly believe that the issue needs consideration from a broader political perspective, rather than the narrower engineering perspective brought by Sydney Water, which has made the decision that its proposed action did not require a full Environmental Impact Statement, with the opportunity for public consideration and comment. Instead, it produced a Review of Environmental Factors, under which it is both the proponent and the determining authority for the proposal and no provision is made for public comment or independent review.

Positive for the Government

The plus would be fulfilling a 1998 commitment by then Environment Minister, Tim Moore, to establish the Wolli Creek Regional Park to protect the bushland of the Wolli Creek Valley. This was at the time when the decision was made to put the M5East underground.

Protection of the bushland has been campaigned for over more than four decades by local residents, led by the Wolli Creek Preservation Society since its formation in 1983. The Society went on to promote the introduction into Parliament in 1993 of a Private Member's Bill for the establishment of the Park (it lapsed when Parliament was prorogued). The Society and the wider community have been pressing for the completion of the Park ever since, but progress has been incredibly slow, over several changes in Government.

Wolli Creek Regional Park is administered by the National Parks and Wildlife Service, with strong support from the Wolli Creek Preservation Society, through public education, monitoring, citizen science, and practical bush restoration work. We know that Minister Kean regards the Wolli Creek Valley highly. As he wrote recently to Brian Everingham of the National Parks Association: *"Wolli Creek Regional Park provides rare and valuable open space in the urban environment between Bexley North and Earlwood. It is a recreational and educational resource for local and regional users that contains important habitat and features of cultural and historical significance."*

The Regional Park is greatly valued by both local and regional communities for providing inner urban access to bushland and to the [Two Valley Trail](#), which attracts walkers from all over the Sydney Basin and from as far afield as Wollongong, the Blue Mountains, and the Central Coast. This value has increased dramatically during COVID, with Park visitation now 250% of pre-COVID levels.

So, there are very many people who would welcome a decision to complete the Regional Park in your Government's current term.

Currently, about 74% of the designated Park area is in the hands of the National Parks and Wildlife Service as Park managers. We are confident about the handing over of a further 24% over the next few years.

Half of the remaining 2% is in private hands, but essentially unusable by the private owners, and may have to be subject to compulsory acquisition orders as a final resort. Much other private land has been acquired by agreement. The other 1% is in the hands of Sydney Water, a State-owned Corporation and it is this land that is the object of current concern.

The environmental mis-step

It is on this 1% block, forming the eastern gateway to the Regional Park, that Sydney Water proposes to build an industrial plant right across the popular Two Valley Trail that passes through the site. The plant is an Odour Control Unit (OCU) to control both odour and corrosive gases in the sewer pipes. We do not question the need for the OCU, just its location. And there is a better alternative nearby: a vacant, government-owned, non-bushland site, outside the Park boundaries.

Among the negative consequences of the proposed location, four stand out:

- **the destruction forever of a lovely natural sandstone cliff face;**
- **the loss of an essential link between local landmark, Wolli Bluff, and the rest of the Park;**
- **the loss from the Park of a significant area of restorable bushland;**
- **the presence of a jarring modern plant dominating the heritage-listed 1890s South-West Ocean Outfall Sewer, which crosses Wolli Creek at this point.**

We have prepared a six-minute [video](#) giving a succinct overview of the various issues we have with the proposal. More detailed background information, timelines, photos, and maps are available via the WCPS [OCU webpage](#) and the links provided there, including to Sydney Water documents.

I am attaching a timeline of the more recent events concerning the establishment of the Regional Park and our efforts to get Sydney Water to change its decision, along with a brief summary of the reasons it has given for rejecting our alternative and our rebuttal of their reasoning. We contend that the alternative site is not only better for the environment and heritage, but is also in the long run less costly for Sydney Water.

Action sought

To make the alternative site a reality requires co-operation between Sydney Water, the Department of Planning and the National Parks and Wildlife Service, but we believe that, given Sydney Water's intransigence, it requires the three relevant Ministers to agree that it needs to happen. We are confident that senior bureaucrats with decision-making authority can make the needed land-swap and acquisition happen, and happen expeditiously.

Please work with your colleagues, the Minister for Planning and the Minister for Environment, to make the needed decision at a political level and set the bureaucrats to work on the necessary steps.

Yours sincerely

Gina Svolos
President

PETITION

To Water Minister Melinda Pavey

We, the undersigned, call on you to intervene on Sydney Water's planned location for a sewage Odour Control Unit (OCU), a large, intrusive piece of industrial infrastructure, at the eastern gateway to the Wolli Creek valley and across the popular Two Valley Trail. We value highly the Wolli valley, its bushland and its heritage. Our objection is not to the OCU itself but to the insensitive and unnecessary location of the unit when there are better alternatives.

Our urban bushland areas are where we walk, rest and play. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the popularity of the 4.5km walking track through the Wolli Creek valley has soared to 250 per cent of its pre-COVID level.

Residents of the surrounding suburbs and Greater Sydney have flocked to quality local recreation and environmental experiences.

Sydney Water's proposal locates the OCU at the entry to the Two Valley Trail, cutting into a natural sandstone cliff-face and destroying bushland.

It will also be an ugly intrusion too close to a state heritage-listed aqueduct.

This plan will ruin forever the striking entry point to the visitor's experience of this unique place and seriously damage Sydney Water's reputation for environmentally sensitive works.

Minister, it does not have to be this way. There is a suitable alternative site nearby.

Sydney Water and the NSW Government can adopt the alternative, abandon a plan that would severely mar the start of the Two Valley Trail and the nearby heritage aqueduct, keep the bush that the local community has advocated to protect for 30 years, and complete the Wolli Creek Regional Park, promised 20 years ago.