

MICHAEL BERKMAN MP

Queensland Greens Member for Maiwar



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CC: Hon. Grace Grace MP - Minister for Education and Industrial Relations
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Submission on the Infrastructure Designation at Queensland Academy of Science, Mathematics and Technology

Dear Minister Dick and the Infrastructure Designation team

I appreciate the opportunity to provide feedback on the infrastructure designation at the Queensland Academy of Science, Mathematics and Technology (QASMT). As the member for Maiwar I consider my role in this kind of local planning processes is primarily to consolidate and convey the perspectives and issues brought to me by my constituents.

While this submission aims to outline some of the most common concerns locals have raised with me about the proposed infrastructure designation, we are fortunate to have a number of very engaged residents who have been closely following this proposal, including residents with relevant expertise. I consider these people are in many respects best positioned to articulate the detail of the issues identified, particularly those with expertise in school architecture and the potential impacts on the natural environment. In making your decision about this infrastructure designation, I urge you to ensure due consideration is given both to these expert submissions, and to the submissions from the many active and engaged community members that care passionately about the school and local area.

I acknowledge that the Building Future Schools (BFS)'s \$800m boost to Queensland's education is a welcome injection of desperately needed resources for the growing inner-city population - as I have previously, I comment the Government's investment in this program. With appropriate planning, it represents a meaningful investment in our state and local communities. In saying this, I would also note that primary and secondary state schools in the inner-west are absolutely heaving with increasing enrolments, and are desperately in need of greater investment in infrastructure. Local residents have been approaching me with these concerns for many months now, and my view is that Government needs to urgently invest in a new P-12 school in the inner west.

QASMT is an outstanding school, and undeniably a wonderful feature of the educational landscape in this electorate. The broad sentiment I've experienced in the electorate is that, in general terms, the community supports greater investment in schools and wants to see the academy's infrastructure needs met, but locals are also very aware that its expansion does little to alleviate the pressures on inner-western families and the

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catchment schools their children attend. It's not clear that opening QASMT enrolments to grade 7-9 will substantially reduce enrolment pressures in nearby schools, and the additional student numbers will increase the burden on the already strained public transport and roads infrastructure in the inner-west. This infrastructure is already under significant pressure from the increasing development in the area.

While there are a number of discrete concerns about the proposed development, a number of highly engaged locals have expressed to me their sense that the community is largely shut out of this planning process. At each of the information sessions and briefings held, community members were told they would be given sufficient detail to meaningfully contribute to the planning process during the consultation period. However, residents attending the March information session conveyed to me that they were simultaneously being told there would be **no significant changes to the Masterplan**. Stakeholders were not given the chance to have input before then and, against this backdrop, feel as though their input now is largely tokenistic and likely to be dismissed.

Given the importance of schools to our local areas, engagement with community members and stakeholders could and should have been far more extensive and involved than it was. As the local representative, I have engaged directly with the team at Building Future Schools and Kath Kayrooz (Principal at QASMT) who have been extremely helpful in listening to concerns, and I very much appreciate that issues raised by the community about vegetation clearing were directly addressed and reflected in a realignment of the proposed Miskin St carpark. However, I am in little doubt that the community could have been much better consulted and engaged in developing the plans, which in my experience results in more effective resolution of conflicting interests and better outcomes for all stakeholders.

Toowong Creek

The Toowong Creek is a vitally important feature of the local ecology, and it flows through the Infrastructure Designation area and along the boundary of much of the QASMT school precinct. The creek is a part of a critical wildlife corridor for the local area - in fact, this is the only relatively complete corridor connecting Mt Coot-tha State Forest to the Brisbane River. The Toowong Creek and its riparian zone supports significant biodiversity including amphibians, reptiles and mammals that forage, nest and inhabit the area. I am informed by local residents with relevant expertise that several threatened wildlife species, including the Tusked Frog, Powerful Owl and Grey Headed Flying Fox inhabit Toowong Creek in the area of the proposed infrastructure designation. The vulnerable Tusked Frog in particular conducts its entire life cycle there so it's completely dependent on the integrity of the creek and its buffer zone for survival.

A number of residents have expressed their concern to me about the potential impacts on this creek, both during the construction phase and throughout the life of the building. This concern is largely around the proposed three story 'Northern Hub' building and its current location within the buffer zone of the creek.

Rather than go into the detail in this submission, I would urge the department to give due consideration to those submissions from locals with better first-hand experience, and particularly those of with relevant experience, such as Iris Haring. I have met with some of these local residents, who described to me in great detail the protected species that are known to inhabit Toowong Creek, the impacts of other significant construction close to the creek, and the anticipated impacts of the Northern Hub. In short, these experts are of the view that there are significant methodological flaws in preparation of the Ecological Assessment Report (EAR) for the site, which calls into question the current understanding of both the ecological values and potential impacts of the proposal. I urge you to give the detail of their submissions careful consideration.

I also draw your attention to a current parliamentary petition that at the time of writing has gathered 1,482 signatures in only 2 weeks. The petition calls for the building to be relocated well away from its proposed location along the Toowong Creek and associated buffer zone.

I understand the Education Department gave a commitment to local residents on 6 October 2018 to do everything possible to relocate the Northern Hub building, but there is no significant change in its location in the current plans. It would be valuable to better understand how the Education Department considered and responded to the concerns raised, and whether alternative locations for the building will still be considered.

Loss of vegetation

The proposal would see 59 mature trees removed if the construction proceeds as indicated in the EAR. I understand, and very much appreciate, that this is a significant improvement from the initial 169 trees proposed to be removed and welcome the role community consultation has played in this improved outcome. While I'm advised that a number of these trees have been planted by the school, there are certainly some much older trees that would be lost, including trees with hollows that support and shelter a diversity native mammals and birds for the area.

While tree removal is to some extent unavoidable in an expansion like this, it is not clear to me that every effort has been made here to situate the buildings within already cleared spaces on the grounds, and to retain those older trees that provide the most valuable habitat. The loss of vegetation on site is directly relevant to the concerns identified above about the adequacy of the ecological assessment.

I welcome the proposed planting of new trees as indicated in the EAR but have general reservations about the effectiveness of any proposed offsetting, particularly where replanting occurs after the loss of mature habitat trees. As a minimum, should the development proceed as proposed, I encourage the preparation of comprehensive records to show due consideration of wildlife impacts where trees are to be removed, compensatory planting for removed trees, and the procedure for their care and replacement should they not survive.

Traffic concerns

Residents in the Mossman, Dampier and Howitt Street Cul-de-sac are concerned about recent and potential ongoing use of informal parking areas accessed from Dampier St, particularly where this may be encouraged by the location of the proposed temporary buildings.

While it may already be the school's policy that parking is not permitted in this area, a number of locals have informed me that this routinely happens. Residents would like to see measures in place to stop this practice, and to limit access via this street to maintenance vehicles only.

Temporary buildings

The temporary classrooms proposed to be installed on the southern end of the site have also raised concerns about their location in a flood prone area and the proximity to residences. A number of residents have raised that there is scant detail about the maximum time these buildings will remain in use, and the impacts on amenity for adjacent residences. I expect there will be ample additional detail on this point in submissions from the local residents affected.

STEM building

Residents have raised concerns about the STEM building, and particularly the bulk, height and scale of the building relative to the surrounding development. The consequence of the location, height and scale of the STEM building, while it does not exceed the absolute height of other buildings on site, is that it will dominate the landscape, overlook private residences and affect these residents' privacy and visual amenity.

I anticipate there will be significant additional information from the residents' perspective on this issue, including submissions from a resident with architectural expertise, which I implore you to read and consider carefully.

Once again, I appreciate the opportunity to provide feedback on this infrastructure designation. I would be happy to clarify any of the above or discuss these matters in more detail if that would be helpful.

Please contact me on 3737 4100 or maiwar@parliament.qld.gov.au.

Kind Regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M Berkman', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Michael Berkman MP