

Councils reject heliport plan for Sydney Harbour



An artist's impression of the proposed Sydney Harbour Floating Heliport. *Source:* The Daily Telegraph

PLANS for a floating heliport on Sydney Harbour are being opposed by local councils, who say the idea appears to have been rushed and they - and their ratepayers - were not consulted.

The Daily Telegraph revealed last week that Deputy Premier Andrew Stoner planned to allow Newcastle Helicopters to run tourist flights from a barge at several harbour sites. Now a coalition of harbourside councils is complaining that the decision was made without proper consultation.

It has also now emerged the Department of Planning was not consulted, with a spokesman confirming it would meet with RMS to see if further environment and planning approvals were required.

"The department has been advised that RMS has issued the appropriate aquatic licence ... including operations to ensure the heliport is operated safely. The department has no role in the issuing of these licences," the spokesman said.

"In conjunction with RMS the department will now look into whether any approval will also be required under the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act."

North Sydney mayor Jilly Gibson is calling for a freeze on the project until more consultation is done.

In a mayoral minute, to be presented in council this week, she writes: "Newcastle Helicopters is now claiming that it has consulted with harbourside councils, including Mosman, Woollahra and North Sydney.

"Council received a letter in late October from Newcastle Helicopters, however this letter did not include any of the details council would consider essential for consultation, such as the proposed locations of the heliport, the expected number of flights each day or the flight routes.

"Not surprisingly, none of the councils contacted recognised the letter as consultation and none of us responded.

"I understand that this has been taken as tacit approval for the concept and the heliport is due to begin operation next month.

"It is extremely disappointing that the state government, which sets such rigorous criteria for council consultations, should accept this uninformative letter from a commercial entity as a formal consultation process for a significant new transport proposal."

The council will seek "an immediate hold on the project until appropriate consultation has

been conducted". "Council requests that the consultation follow normal processes with details ... and a six-week period being made available for comment by councils and residents."

Woollahra mayor Andrew Petrie also expressed his concern. "Sydney Harbour is for the enjoyment of all the people of NSW, not just a privileged few, so I have considerable reservations about the proposal," Mr Petrie said.

Newcastle Helicopters' owner James Guest said he had meetings scheduled with City of Sydney council and North Sydney and Mosman councils this week to attempt to

allay concerns.

A spokeswoman for Mr Stoner said: "Thus far all the proper processes have been followed and will continue to be followed."