

## **Has “The Age” Aged? and does the Sydney Morning Herald, herald Neoliberalism?**

Has the Fairfax stable retained it's mostly great Journalism since it was taken over by Nine? Or is the paper once great media empire a shadow of its former self, replete with right wing Opinion, meme and outright propaganda?

I aimed to find out after 26<sup>th</sup> August 2021, when there was a change of Federal Labor policy. The Labor party had decided to drop its “hated” (by property developers and Investors) Negative gearing policy and also not to oppose, the already legislated tax cuts for middle and higher income earners.

Five negative and shallow articles were written in the SMH about these policy changes. They mentioned the disaffected labor hardliners who opposed the change, the dissatisfaction and the turmoil (all my own words) in the labor party.

I had quite a few labor comrades ring me and complain until I explained to them what I thought was the reasoning behind the changes.

Firstly I explained that since Howard liberal party policy had been to “excite” the housing market. Howard did this by giving away money to First home buyers.

This has had an enormous disservice to the community and to home ownership generally. Of course what happened was that people asked for more for their houses and they got it. One person I know bought an investment unit for \$109,000 in Melbourne and three years later sold it for \$250,000.

Not only did that investor make some money, the value of the purchase and sale was reflected in the National Accounts and made the Howard government look good. The Howard government also had to receive their Capital Gains taxation of 50% from the Investor, which made their bottom line also look good.

What they didn't tell you was that the price of houses rising wasn't reflected in wages rising and so it made it hard for younger families to attain the goal of home ownership.

In 2008 a labor government came to power and was immediately assailed with the Global Financial Crisis and unfortunately silly internal politics.

They lost Power in September 2013 and a new Liberal/National Coalition Government came on the scene. The New Treasurer, Joe Hockey declared Australia was open for Business. But what did he mean by that?

Well earlier this year as part of my small team effort to actually tell Australians the truth about what is happening in their economy, I downloaded the data from the Foreign investment review board and analysed it.

The results of my Analysis can be found on my website at

<https://www.thevogfiles.com/investment-games.html>

This shows that between 2015 and 2019 there was just over a trillion dollars invested by Foreign countries in Australia. 42% of that was in real Estate, both Commercial and Residential.

The upshot of this was that the Property market kept moving upwards and the National Accounts showed growth again. The downside was that the goal of home ownership became even harder. This was made worse by another problem caused by the Liberal/National Government. That was the import of Labor for foreign projects under the trade deals that they completed.

I also explained to the complainers that the Labor party had bigger fish to fry to do with Taxation, than concentrate on PAYG Tax payers.

Another analysis I did was to look at the Tax paid by entities who had gross income over \$100 million per annum.

This is another problem that the Liberals and Nationals haven't addressed properly.

I analysed the years 2013-14 to 2018-19. The analysis can be found at

<https://www.thevogfiles.com/further-analysis.html>

I won't repeat it all but generally speaking 30% of the reported firms pay No Tax each year and of those who do the highest Taxation paid is 2.68% (as a proportion of gross income).

In the last year (2018-19) there were 107 entities or firms who earned over \$1 billion and paid no tax.

I compared the Budget outcomes for the years covered.

In those years the federal budgets had a cumulative deficit of \$174.5 billion.

I modelled a scenario where ever entity paid 30% tax on 20% of their gross income. Just like BHP Billiton, Fortescue Metal and Hancock prospecting.

Under that scenario the Budgets would have been \$166 Billion in surplus over the reporting period. If they had paid 30% Tax on 20% of their gross income..

So what has all of this got to do with the Age and the SMH articles?

It shows what is really going on in Australia and is NOT being reported by the Nine Group newspapers. They are not canvassing all of the data. I have not seen one article about the FIRB and such an analysis or the taxation in depth analysis and model I have described.

All I saw was 5 articles in three days which were negative about the Federal Labor party.

Not happy with using the 5 articles in three days as evidence of bias, I decided to look at when the author of the articles had last done a negative article about the Labor party.

Goodness did I unearth a can of worms.

The previous article was on 20 Jun 2021 and entitled.

“ALP powerbroker advising company behind Bacchus Marsh toxic soil dump”

With two authors!

I hadn't heard of this toxic soil dump because I don't take the Age. But I went searching for it and found a swag of articles about it.

The “toxic soil” in Question was from the Westgate tunnel, a project which Transurban had proposed to government and which government had accepted.

As I read the copy I thought how useless the project managers must have been, verging on incompetence in fact.

However one thing kept nagging at me all the time, a holdover from my years as a Police Constable in the UK, a small matter of Evidence to go with the claims of “Toxic” soil.

Especially when I read the following article.

[“Calls for contaminated West Gate Tunnel soil to be treated rather than dumped in landfill”](#)

It was after I read this article that I questioned whether there was toxic soil from the Westgate tunnel at all.

Form this particular information.

*“But Deakin University’s Will Gates, who specialises in mineralogy, has questioned the wisdom of sending the project’s rock and soil to landfill. The amount of waste dug up could fill the MCG and will chew up a significant portion of the state’s landfill capacity.*

*Associate Professor Gates points to a treatment now used at a facility in Dandenong called Renex, which heats the soil to 600 degrees in an industrial furnace – a process that removes PFAS chemicals.*

*His research, published in the Sustainability Journal, shows the treated soil could serve as a viable replacement for fine aggregate in concrete – for which there is a worldwide shortage.*

*This would avoid the need to dump large amounts of PFAS waste possibly dug up on future projects – including the North East Link and the Suburban Rail Loop – into landfill.*

*“This is a win-win for governments and the construction industry as well as the environment,” Professor Gates said.*

*While PFAS has been detected in the groundwater along the tunnel alignment, a new report confirms that contamination levels are very low.*

*The report by consultants AECOM prepared for Transurban and its builders shows that 80 per cent of groundwater borehole tests contain PFAS levels that are safe enough drink. Just 1 per cent is unsafe to drink or swim in, the report shows.*

*The project has only measured PFAS levels in groundwater, which may not necessarily reflect what is found in the rock and soil that is ultimately dug up, Professor Gates said.*

*But the groundwater results gathered on the project indicate that contamination levels were extremely low, he said.*

*“We have no idea how much of the soil is actually contaminated and what level of contamination it is,” he said. “If they lump it all together in a landfill, they have to treat all of the soil as if it was all contaminated.”*

AECOM documentation at

<https://aecom.com/projects/west-gate-tunnel-project-environmental-planning-and-approvals/>

States.

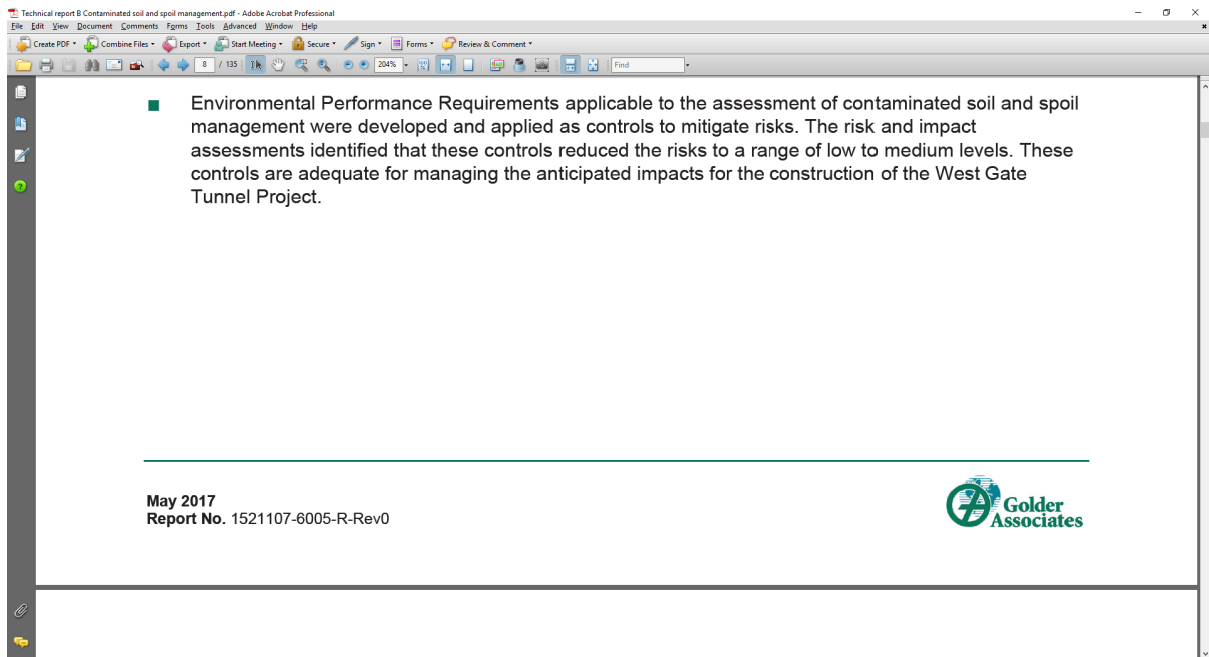
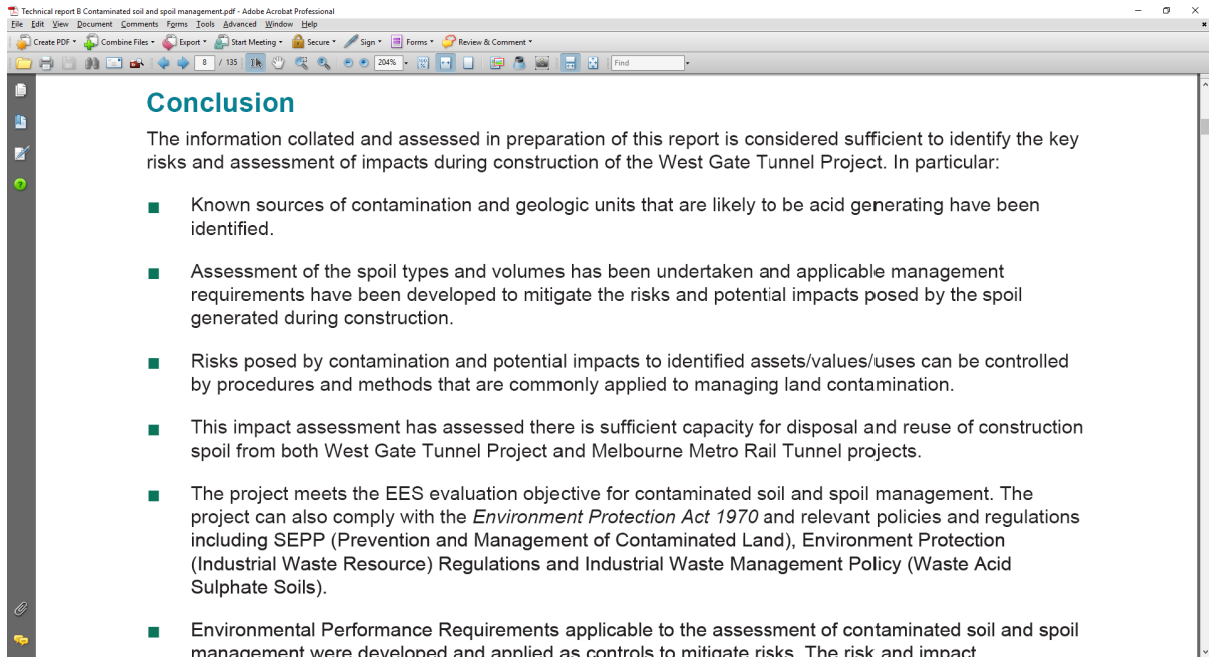
*“AECOM was engaged by Transurban as technical advisor (encompassing engineering and environmental planning and approvals services), to assist with the project’s development through each stage of this market-led proposal. Transurban’s proposal led to discussions with the Victorian government and key stakeholders, followed by the preparation of a business case by the Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources (DEDJTR) to test the merits of the project and extensive joint development work undertaken by Transurban and DEDJTR. This work culminated in the preparation of a reference design for the project.”*

So AECOM was engaged before the contract was signed.

Yet the Newspaper article states that Soil and rock sampling was never done. (For PAFS).

Was it?

The report done for AECOM by Golder Associates and created on 25 may 2017 concludes that



So all of this was considered at the time and a risk management strategy was put into place before approval of the project.

The report can be found here.

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/ey6pyrnishjlxbt/Technical%20report%20B%20Contaminated%20soil%20and%20spoil%20management.pdf?dl=1>

Under the main page of

<https://westgatetunnelproject.vic.gov.au/library/environment-effects-statement/ees-documents>

Nothing is hidden or mysterious. The State government is not hiding information. It is there to read if you go and find it.

This particular Article in the AGE also repeats a claim that the cost of the tunnel has blown out. Normally the blow out in the Age articles is \$3.3 Billion, but in this article they claim the cost has blown out by \$4 billion:

*“The \$6.7 billion toll road is running at least two years late and faces claims of [a \\$4 billion blowout](#). This is due to a protracted dispute over how to manage the project’s waste, some of which is contaminated with potential carcinogens called per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS).”*

There is that pesky PAFS I can’t find any report on, but I did find a graph of the PAFS groundwater contamination.

It can be found at

<https://www.epa.vic.gov.au/about-epa/publications/1876>

As the scientist says in the article, some contamination at points but most at drinkable levels.

So the second Question this article raises goes to the cost blow out, caused by a dispute about contaminated soil that I can’t find evidence of being contaminated.

Not being a Journalist and knowing everything, I asked myself the following Question.

How could a contractor made a 50% mistake in the costing for a 4 kilometre long tunnel (times 2) which cost \$6.7 billion?

I looked at the project with new eyes.

This project is called a Market led Proposal (MLP), which basically means that it was someone else’s idea than Government. If you like a Private Public Partnership (PPP) where the risk in the venture is supposed to be transferred to the Private part of the venture.

The lead in this instance was Transurban, who proposed the scheme and then underwent all of the environmental evaluations and submissions to satisfy the Environmental requirements of any project.

Apparently they passed those approvals and then signed a contract with the State Government.

Giving the work to John Holland and CPB contractors, a division of CIMIC. CPB are a merger of Thiess and Leighton and they have 6 other major tunnel projects under way at this time.

Why is this project 50% blow out in cost? Especially when the CEO of Transurban used to work for Leighton’s?

These people don't make 50% blow outs on 4 Kms of tunnel (each way), after all their documents say they have been doing this since 1948!

I wonder if the Age reporter/Journalist/blogger/scribe/doodler has read the documents that I have?

### **More Classy journalism?**

There is no doubt that the Andrews Labor Government have a planning bent. They want to make Victoria and Melbourne a vibrant liveable city and have reached out into time to try and see what they can do.

Has the AGE applauded their vision? Their get up and go approach? Not a bit of it.

Every article I have read about the "Big Build" in Victoria seeks to condemn, to vilify and to denigrate.

The classic article which demonstrates this attack dog approach is fomented from the release of another major project Labor has had the foresight to actually do. The Suburban Rail Loop. SRL for short.

This project was announced by Daniel Andrews on 28<sup>th</sup> August 2018 as an election pledge. On the following day a Hawker Britton media release expanded the concept and had some costings. I am informed by media that the Hawker Britton release wasn't a government sanctioned media statement, even if it was the costing given in it were conditional on a lot more work being done.

I have since looked at about 20 sequential media release by the Andrews government from 28 Aug 2018 and not once have those media releases mentioned the cost of the Suburban Rail Loop. They do mention a \$300 million allocation to plan the project but not the cost of the project.

On 19<sup>th</sup> August 2021, the Andrews government released the business case for the Eastern and Northern portions of the Loop. At 12 noon the embargoed report was given to the press and at 1.30 pm the report was made public on the relevant website. At the same time Jacinta Allen gave a press conference about the business case.

At 1.30pm the AGE posted an article claiming that the original total cost of \$50 billion was now doubled. The article had three Quotes from interested parties, The union (driverless trains), The business lobby (increased land Taxes) and the opposition spokesman on Transport. The major report was 402 pages long and the attached important documents made the whole bundle 1108 pages to read in 1.5 hours?

Ladies and gentlemen introducing Wonder journalist.

The final part in my Media Monitor has been the attacks against Public servants

I refer specifically to articles written by Age journalists called

*The chosen few: How Victoria is really governed*

*Exodus from Premier's private office as staffers look past election*

*Thrown in a loop: How Daniel Andrews' biggest project was cooked up behind closed doors*

*And*

*Jeroen Weimar: From 'trainspotter' to Victoria's COVID-19 commander*

The last one is particularly nasty.

Firstly it seems that public servants are no longer respected as individuals who are above politics.

Secondly the article about Weimar claims his skill set has no Health based component. Looking at his extensive resume, it is clear that he has always been involved in logistics and people and what more would you want for a testing commander in a time of crisis. The trainspotter is a particularly snide headline, In the UK where he was brought up it is a term of ridicule, adopted by the journalism profession in the AGE who would not have any idea about the senior management jobs he has been in, because they just wouldn't cut it. He also went to a prestigious University and obtained two degrees, one as a Bachelor of Science and one as a Master of that discipline.

The article also criticises him for mentioning a religious affiliation and claims this could have been a Media Storm (perhaps in their very small tea cup), yet names him as a Dutchman and brought up in the UK. That didn't cause said Media Storm either, but it did show the hypocrisy of the article in Question.

I am searched fruitlessly for the Qualifications these journalists have to write these stories. Do they have the same breath of understanding obtained in the studies that Jerome Weimar has undertaken?

And before you call me a hypocrite, I know about evidence having been in the police, I know about tenders and contracts having sold capital equipment and negotiated contracts and suitable contract clauses, I know about detail having been a Product Manager.

I can't write a puff article in an hour and a half. I need to read and digest 1108 pages over a couple of days. Even though I have a bachelor's business degree.

Has the Age Aged?

Can we herald the Herald?

I will let you be the judge.