

‘THE FIX IS IN’

How the environmental approval process for the
Barrambin stadium has been engineered to fail
— *and what we can do to stop it*

Bottom Line

The Queensland Government has spent the past 18 months systematically dismantling every legal protection that stands between Barrambin now, its desecration, and a 63,000-seat concrete stadium.

They are now down to the **last one**: a federal environmental approval process under a law called the EPBC Act (the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* — the main federal law protecting threatened species, heritage, and ecosystems).

That process is now open for public comment. GIICA — the *Games Independent Infrastructure and Coordination Authority*, the Queensland Government body building Olympic venues — has filed a referral asking the federal Environment Minister to rule that this project is ‘**not a controlled action.**’

In plain language: no further environmental assessment required. Free pass. Bulldozers start 1 June.

The referral has been open for public comment for approximately two days.

What follows in these posts is what I found when I anxiously worked through the 700+ pages they submitted (it’s a bastard) — and why the whole process has been set up so that the answer is ‘Yes, go ahead and bulldoze’ before the question is asked.

How the Fix Works: Five Moves

Move 1: Strip Away Every State Protection

In May 2025, the Queensland Government passed amendments to the BOPGA Act (the *Brisbane Olympic and Paralympic Games Arrangements Act 2021*) that exempt the stadium from **15 Queensland laws**, including the Planning Act, the Heritage Act, and environmental protection legislation. Any development related to the Games is now deemed lawful even if it conflicts with existing law.

The Queensland Heritage Register listing? **Overridden.**

The Environmental Protection Act? **Overridden.**

Community rights to challenge in court? **Removed.**

This was not incidental. It was the first move.

By removing state-level protections, the government ensured that the only remaining scrutiny would come from the federal EPBC Act — a process designed for a quick yes/no gatekeeping decision, not for the kind of deep assessment that state planning and heritage laws would normally provide.

Move 2: Convert the Land to Freehold Behind Closed Doors

On the evening of 12 February 2026, the Queensland Parliament passed amendments to the Land Act 1994 that converted Victoria Park / Barrambin from **trust land** (held by Brisbane City Council for park purposes — meaning it could be leased but never sold) into **freehold title** vested in GIIICA.

The entire 64-hectare park. Not just the stadium footprint.

The amendments were not debated, bypassed committee procedures, and were passed without public comment.

A 150-year trust arrangement — the legal guarantee that this land would remain public parkland — was extinguished in a single evening sitting.

Move 3: Frame the Referral So the Answer Is ‘No Impact’

GIICA’s EPBC referral is a masterclass in framing.

The 683-page environmental report, prepared by a private consultancy called 28 South Environmental, builds its entire argument on one premise: *that Barrambin is a ‘highly modified urban parkland’ of minimal ecological value* — essentially an old golf course with some landscaping.

From that premise, every finding flows predictably toward ‘not significant.’

But the report’s own data contradicts its own conclusion:

- **4,536 trees** within the disturbance zone. 3,472 are native species. 200 are large mature specimens.
- A nationally protected species — the **Grey-headed Flying-fox (Vulnerable under the EPBC Act)** — was **confirmed present at multiple locations**, feeding on winter-flowering trees during periods of food scarcity.
- Three EPBC-listed **threatened plant species** were found on site, including 18 individuals of an **Endangered** species (Small-leaved Tamarind). The report dismisses all three because they were ‘planted.’ The EPBC Act contains no such exemption.
- **64 vertebrate species** recorded. 88 habitat features mapped.
- **The disturbance footprint** listed on page 15 of the referral form is **99.73 hectares — the entire park.**
- **Not 12–13%, which is what the government has publicly claimed. One hundred percent.**

Every one of these facts comes from GIICA’s own documents.

And every one of them is then argued away through careful framing:

- the flying-fox habitat is ‘only 0.026%’ of the regional total;
- the trees are ‘landscaping’;
- the endangered plants were ‘planted’;

- the site is too ‘urbanised’ for koalas despite food trees being present and a population living 3km away.

Move 4: Erase the Sacred Site from the Environmental Record

This is the most consequential move.

Across 700+ pages submitted to the federal government, the entire Aboriginal cultural heritage of Barrambin — the Dreaming stories, the sacred waterhole, the songline, the potential ancestral remains, the 200–700 year old trees, the history of the 1846 massacre and forced dispossession — is reduced to **one database entry** (Site LB:N62) and ***a note that two Statutory Aboriginal Parties exist.***

What the 700+ pages do not mention:

- The **three active federal applications for permanent legal protection** of Barrambin under Section 10 of the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Protection Act 1984*.
- **Filed by Traditional Custodians. Sitting on the federal Minister’s desk right now. Unresolved.**
- The federal Environment Minister’s own **January 2026 statement** acknowledging Barrambin is of ‘particular significance to the Turrbal and Yagara people in accordance with their traditions.’
- The sacred waterhole, the Rainbow Serpent Dreaming story, or the songline.
- Elder statements that there may be **ancestral remains** in the ground GIIICA wants to excavate.
- The documented history of colonial violence at this site.

The referral depends on an artificial bureaucratic separation: ‘environment’ goes to one department, ‘heritage’ goes to another, and nobody is required to connect them.

GIICA has exploited that separation to file a 683-page environmental document about a sacred site that says nothing about why it’s sacred.

In essence, **the ecology of Barrambin *IS* its cultural heritage.**

The ancient trees, the waterhole, the flying-foxes in the canopy — they are not separate from the Dreaming.

But the referral needs them to be separate, so that's how they're presented.

Move 5: Promise Plans That Don't Exist

The referral's entire environmental assurance framework consists of management plans that **have not been written.**

- No Construction Environmental Management Plan.
- No Vegetation and Fauna Management Plan.
- No Landscaping and Rehabilitation Plan.
- No Erosion and Sediment Control Plan.

These are not minor omissions — they are the entire basis on which the referral claims impacts will be managed.

The federal Minister is being asked to approve environmental clearance based on documents that do not exist. This is a blank cheque dressed up as a risk assessment.

The Contradiction the Federal Government Must Answer

In January 2026, the federal Environment Minister **formally acknowledged that Barrambin is of particular significance to the Turrbal and Yagara peoples.**

Three applications for permanent heritage protection remain active and unresolved.

In April 2026, a different arm of the same federal government is processing GIIKA's request to wave through environmental clearance for the destruction of that same place — using a referral that doesn't even mention the heritage applications exist.

The federal government cannot simultaneously assess whether Barrambin deserves permanent legal protection **and** approve the environmental clearance for its destruction.

It is being asked to do both. That is the contradiction your submission should name.

What To Do: Submit in the Next Few Days

The public comment portal is here:

<https://epbcpublicportal.environment.gov.au/open-for-comments/project-decision/?id=98ff6052-2632-f111-88b4-7c1e5262e9e4>

This is Referral 03373. You must ask the Minister to declare it a CONTROLLED ACTION — meaning the project must undergo a full environmental impact assessment before it can proceed. That's all.

Not 'cancel the Olympics.' Not 'no stadium ever.' Just: do the assessment properly.

What GIICA Is Claiming vs What Their Own Documents Show

Claim 1: “Only 12–13% of the park will be affected”

What their own referral says: The disturbance footprint is 99.73 hectares — which is the **entire park**. Page 15 of the referral form shows a map with the whole park shaded as the project area. Page 19 of the environmental report states: ‘the full extent of the Site (approximately 99.5 ha) is conservatively assessed as the disturbance footprint.’

Claim 2: “The park is basically just an old golf course with no real environmental value”

What their own report found: 4,536 trees (77% native species). 64 vertebrate species. 88 mapped habitat features. A confirmed population of Grey-headed Flying-foxes

(a nationally protected Vulnerable species) feeding at multiple locations across the site. Three nationally protected threatened plant species growing on site. This is not an ecological wasteland.

Claim 3: “No nationally important species will be significantly impacted”

The problems: Grey-headed Flying-foxes are confirmed present and rely on winter-flowering trees on the site for food during scarce periods. Three Endangered/Vulnerable plant species are dismissed because they were ‘planted’ — but the law doesn’t contain that exemption. Koalas live 3km away and the report admits their food trees grow on site. Every management plan promised to prevent harm (erosion control, vegetation management, fauna protection) **has not been written yet**. The Minister is being asked to trust that everything will be fine based on plans that don’t exist.

Claim 4: “We’ve consulted extensively with the community”

The reality: 140 emails and 50 meetings in 12 months. Compare that to Brisbane City Council’s own Victoria Park master plan, which engaged 80,000 people over four years. That master plan, which had 78% community support, **envisioned the park as green space — not a stadium**. GIIICA’s ‘consultation’ is overwhelmingly one-way: media releases, postcards, and factsheets telling people what’s happening, not asking what should happen.

Why This Moment Matters More Than Any Other

Here is the uncomfortable truth: the Queensland Government has systematically removed every state-level mechanism that would normally apply to a project like this.

The Heritage Act, the Planning Act, the Environmental Protection Act — all exempted by the BOPGA Act.

In February 2026, the government converted the park's land tenure from trust land (which could only be used as a park) to freehold (which can be used for anything), and did so **without debate, bypassing committee procedures and public comment**.

The EPBC Act referral is the **sole remaining environmental safeguard**. If the federal Minister says 'not a controlled action,' then construction begins with zero statutory environmental oversight from any level of government. No environmental impact statement. No enforceable conditions. No independent review. Nothing.

That is why the public comment window on this referral is so important. It is not one opportunity among many. It is **the only one left**.

What We Can Do — Concrete Steps

Step 1: Submit a Public Comment (Takes 10–20 Minutes)

Go to the EPBC Public Portal and submit a comment on Referral 03373. The direct link is:

<https://epbcpublicportal.environment.gov.au/open-for-comments/project-decision/?id=98ff6052-2632-f111-88b4-7c1e5262e9e4>

You do not need to be an environmental scientist. You do not need to write a legal brief. A clear, factual comment from an ordinary person carries weight in this process.

Below is a draft template of what to say; customise as you wish!

Template for Your Submission

I am writing to request that EPBC Referral 03373 be determined a controlled action requiring full environmental assessment. My reasons include:

1. The referral's own documents identify a disturbance footprint of 99.73 hectares — the entire park — contradicting the government's public claim that only 12–13% will be affected.
2. A nationally protected Vulnerable species (Grey-headed Flying-fox) has been confirmed present at multiple locations across the site. Removing its food trees during winter scarcity periods could have significant impacts that have not been properly assessed.
3. Three nationally protected threatened plant species were found on site and dismissed because they were 'planted.' The EPBC Act does not exempt planted specimens.
4. Every environmental management plan promised in the referral (vegetation management, fauna protection, erosion control) has not yet been written. The Minister is being asked to accept assurances with no supporting evidence.
5. This is the sole remaining environmental safeguard. Queensland legislation has exempted this project from all state planning, environmental and heritage laws. If this referral is not assessed as a controlled action, there will be no environmental oversight at any level of government for a \$3.8 billion project.
6. Three applications under the federal Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Protection Act 1984 seeking protection of this site remain unresolved. The federal Environment Minister has formally acknowledged Barrambin is of particular significance to the Turrbal and Yagara people. Elders have stated there may be ancestral remains on site. The EPBC referral does not mention these active federal applications. A determination should not be made until these are resolved.

7. Barrambin is a sacred site. The ecology GIIICA is asking to disturb — the ancient trees, the waterhole, the wildlife corridors — is inseparable from the cultural heritage of this place. The referral treats ‘environment’ and ‘heritage’ as separate categories. First Nations understanding of Country does not make that distinction, and neither should this assessment.

You can personalise this with your own experience of the park, your concerns about trees, wildlife, heritage, community space, or whatever matters to you. Personal testimony is powerful.

Step 2: Share This with Others

Every individual submission counts. The more submissions the Minister receives, the harder it becomes to wave this through.

Share this guide. Ask friends, family, neighbours, workmates, and anyone who cares about Brisbane’s green spaces to submit. It genuinely takes only 10–20 minutes.

Step 3: Talk About the 99.73 Hectares

The single most powerful fact in this entire process is the disturbance footprint. The government says 12–13%. Their own federal filing says 100%. That’s a fact, it’s in their own documents, and it’s impossible to spin. Use it in conversations, on social media, in letters to the editor, wherever.

Step 4: Contact Your Federal MP

This is a federal decision. Your state MP cannot influence it.

Contact:

- **Madonna Jarrett MP** — Federal Member for Brisbane (if you’re in the Brisbane electorate)
- Or **your own federal member** if you’re in a different electorate

Ask them one question:

“Will you support a full environmental assessment of the Victoria Park stadium, given that every state safeguard has been removed?”

Common Questions

“Is this really the last chance?”

For environmental protection, functionally yes. There are ongoing legal challenges and the Section 10 heritage applications, which are separate processes. But the EPBC referral is the last process specifically designed to assess environmental impact before construction. If it’s waved through, any future legal challenges would be fighting against a project already underway.

“Does my submission actually matter?”

Yes. The Minister is legally required to consider public comments when making the determination. A large volume of substantive submissions makes it politically and legally difficult to determine ‘not a controlled action’ without proper justification. If the determination is later challenged in court, the court will look at what the public raised and whether the Minister adequately considered it.

“I’m not against the Olympics. Can I still submit?”

Absolutely. Requesting a full environmental assessment is not the same as opposing the Olympics or even opposing a stadium. It is asking that the project go through the same environmental scrutiny that every other major construction project in Australia is expected to undergo. You can be pro-Olympics and pro-environment at the same time. In fact, the IOC’s own sustainability framework calls for host cities to protect ecological values.

“What about the Aboriginal heritage side of this?”

This is not a side issue. **It is the heart of the matter.**

Victoria Park is Barrambin — one of the most significant Aboriginal cultural sites in the Brisbane region. For thousands of years before colonisation, up to 1,000 people lived here at different times of year. It was a place of corroboree, ceremony, trade, marriage, funerals, and Bora initiation. The waterholes were sacred — connected to Dreaming stories about the Rainbow Serpent creating the Brisbane River. The site lies along a songline. Some trees still standing are estimated at 200–700 years old.

It is also a site of documented colonial violence. In 1846, police attacked and killed Aboriginal people at Barrambin and burned their camps. By the 1860s, most had been forcibly removed. The sacred wetlands were drained and filled.

Three formal applications for permanent federal legal protection of Barrambin under the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Protection Act 1984* have been lodged and remain unresolved.

In January 2026, the federal Environment Minister formally acknowledged the site’s particular significance to Turrbal and Yagara peoples. Elders have stated there may be ancestral remains. The Yagara Magandjin Aboriginal Corporation has described this as an act of caring for Country to ensure a cultural legacy for future generations.

GIICA’s 683-page environmental report reduces all of this to a single database entry.

It does not mention the Section 10 applications, the sacred waterhole, the Dreaming stories, the songline, the potential for ancestral remains, or the history of colonial violence.

The referral’s environmental framework treats trees as habitat features and waterholes as drainage infrastructure. It does not recognise that the ecology of Barrambin is its cultural heritage — that they are the same thing.

You can and should name this in your submission.

“What happens if the Minister **does declare it a controlled action?”**

The project would then have to go through a formal environmental impact assessment — a rigorous, public process where impacts are properly studied, alternatives are considered, and legally enforceable conditions are set.

It doesn't necessarily stop the project. But it means the project would have to prove it can manage environmental impacts properly, with real plans, real data, and real accountability. That's all anyone is asking for in terms of response to the engineering of this fix on the environmental bypass being deployed to crush the heritage value of Barrambin..

Remember: the portal link is

<https://epbcpublicportal.environment.gov.au/open-for-comments/project-decision/?id=98ff6052-2632-f111-88b4-7c1e5262e9e4>

Add-ons:

Use any or all of the following points. In your own words is strongest.

1. **The heritage contradiction.** Three federal heritage protection applications are unresolved. The Minister acknowledged Barrambin's significance in January 2026.

The referral doesn't mention any of this. No determination should be made while those applications are live.

2. **The 99.73-hectare lie.** GIIICA's own referral says the disturbance footprint is the entire park.

The government publicly says 12–13%.

Their own federal filing contradicts their own public messaging.

Page 15 of the referral form. Page 19 of the MNES Report.

3. **The confirmed protected species.** Grey-headed Flying-fox (Vulnerable) confirmed present and feeding on site. Three threatened plant species found and improperly dismissed.

The EPBC Act does not exempt 'planted' specimens of Endangered species.

4. **The non-existent management plans.** Every environmental protection the referral promises is a plan that hasn't been written.

The Minister is being asked to sign off on blank paper.

5. **The last safeguard.** 15 state laws have been exempted.

This EPBC referral is the only environmental process left.

If it's waved through, there is zero oversight when construction starts on 1 June.

6. **Ecology is heritage.** The trees, the waterhole, the wildlife — they are not separate from Barrambin's cultural significance.

First Nations understanding of Country does not separate 'environment' from 'heritage.' The referral depends on that false separation. Your submission can refuse it.

Personal testimony matters. If you walk in that park, if your kids play there, if you've watched the flying-foxes at dusk, if that place means something to you — say so.

Bureaucrats read submissions. Human stories stick.

Share This. Act Now.

The comment window has been open for approximately two days.

We do not know when it closes. The construction start date is 1 June 2026. Every day that passes without submissions makes it easier for the Minister to tick the 'not controlled' box and move on.

Every individual submission is counted. Volume matters. Substance matters more. Both together are what create the political and legal conditions where waving this through becomes untenable.

The government has spent 18 months engineering a process where the answer is pre-determined.

The public comment window is the one part of that process they couldn't engineer away, because it's required by federal law.

Use it.

Portal: <https://epbcpublicportal.environment.gov.au/open-for-comments/project-decision/?id=98ff6052-2632-f111-88b4-7c1e5262e9e4>

Referral number: 03373

What to request: 'Controlled action' determination requiring full environmental impact assessment