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DEER FENCE NO DEFENCE

**St George and Sutherland Shire Leader
By Murray Trembath 1st February 2011**

NEW, two-metre high fence designed to keep deer off railway tracks could thwart one of the benefits of a new national park on Sydney's southern fringe. The fence runs along the Illawarra line south from Engadine, with a new seven-kilometre section completed late last year.

State Opposition Leader Barry O'Farrell has promised to make Dharawal State Conservation Area into a national park, and it would be linked to the Royal National Park by bushland around Helensburgh-Otford.

Independent candidate for Heathcote, Greg Petty, claims the fence has closed a wildlife corridor which is essential for the biodiversity of the two areas.

He rejects RailCorp's assurances that a 160-millimetre gap as been left at the bottom of the newest section of the fence.

A random inspection at various points showed this requirement had not been consistently met by the fence builders, he said.

Gary Schoer, secretary of the southern Sydney branch of the NSW National Parks Association, supports the claim.

"We don't disagree with the intention of the fence, but it should be designed in a way to allow small animals, such as bandicoots, wombats, possums and even little swamp wallabies to get through", he said.

"There should be an opening with a minimum height of 500 millimetres every few hundred metres".

He said the next government should arrange talks between the groups involved with a view to modifying the fence line.

A RailCorp spokesman said adjacent landowners and National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) had been consulted before the newest section of fence had been installed.

"At the request of NPWS, the two-metre high fence was build 160 millimetres from the ground to allow smaller native animals to continue to move within the area", he said.

"A flora and fauna survey was done in 2009 to assess the environmental impact ... with no significant impact reported on the habitat of any threatened plant or animal species".

The spokesman said a collision with a deer was not a safety risk for any passengers, but was likely to injure or kill the animal and also damage a train.