

Save National Treasure

OLIVIA SHYING

BARWON River's historic aqueduct would become a tourist drawcard comparable to the iconic Sydney Harbour Bridge and Opera House if restored to its original condition, supporters say.

The newly formed Friends of Barwon River Ovoid Sewer Aqueduct community group strongly opposes Barwon Water's plans to demolish four of the 14 spans of the heritage-listed aqueduct in Breakwater and instead say it should be saved and preserved.

The 100-year-old aqueduct was inspired by a Scottish rail bridge design, the steel Firth of Forth Bridge, which opened in 1890.

The aqueduct was decommissioned in 1992 and replaced by a new sewer main but its degrading structure was retained.

Barwon Water announced earlier this year it was moving to open up safe access along a section of the Barwon River and surrounding land by demolishing part of the aqueduct due to safety concerns.

Under plans recently submitted to Heritage Victoria, spans immediately adjacent to the north bank of the river would be removed to allow kayakers to paddle from Buckley Falls to Barwon Heads.

But Friends of Barwon River spokesman David Le Lievre said the heritage aqueduct must be saved.

"It's an iconic structure," Mr Le Lievre said.

"With the Sydney Harbour Bridge and the Opera House, I

become the third iconic man-made structure in Australia."

In March, Barwon Water managing director Tracey Slatter said partial demolition of the aqueduct was the only safe option.

possible options for improving, stopping or slowing the aqueduct's natural degradation, particularly across the river," Ms Slatter said.

"But technical advice has made it clear that it is simply not viable from a safety and

But Mr Le Lievre said there were "engineering solutions" to provide safe public access under and around the aqueduct without any demolition.

Mr Le Lievre said the group preferred an option proposed in 2017 by engineering firm

ation of culverts to allow safe access for cyclists and pedestrians.

The community group has launched a website to advocate for the conservation of the aqueduct.

Barwon Water said the full

estimated at between \$20 million and \$30 million. The cost of removing the five spans is estimated at \$3.6 million.

Submissions regarding the planning application can be made to Heritage Victoria

KEEP IT STANDING: Jan Calaby, David Le Lievre and Jennifer Banto — from Friends of the Barwon River Ovoid Sewer Aqueduct — in front of the aqueduct. PICTURE: PETER RISTEVSKI



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