

Parks & Playgrounds Movement Inc.

47th Annual Report 1999

Ladies and gentlemen,

In presenting the 47th Annual Report of the Parks and Playgrounds Movement I am mindful of the vast efforts that have been made by so many people in an effort to protect the Hunter environment. Will the next generation have an environment worth living in and can we hand on an environment that has a better chance of survival than when we inherited it?

When we look at the gains and the deluge of propaganda produced by all stakeholders especially those wishing to garner the public domain it is obvious that it is becoming more difficult to protect and promote the public interest.

Last year the Movement identified the regionally important conservation issues that needed urgent action at state and local level as we enter a new wave of planning initiatives. Small gains were made but we were generally unsuccessful and we need to redouble our efforts.

- That the promised Stockton Bight National Park be proclaimed and dedicated,
- That the natural values of the Hunter Water Corporation lands at Port Stephens be protected.
- That the Nine Mile Beach and Jewells Coastal Wetlands be proclaimed and added to the Lake Macquarie State Recreation Area.
- That the State Government reconstitute the Wallarah Peninsula Urban Buffer Zone between Wyong and Lake Macquarie and that the Munmorah SRA be extended to Swansea.
- That proposed Mt. Karuah & Fame Cove reserves on the northern shores of Port Stephens be dedicated.
- That the extension of Kooragang Island Nature Reserve be proclaimed and the ventilation of the Hexham Swamps be carried out forthwith.
- That the Coal River Historic Site be established at Newcastle to. Celebrate the Founding of Newcastle and our Aboriginal, Convict, Military, Maritime and Mining Heritage and that the Site include Nobbys Is., Macquarie Pier, the Convict Lumber Yard and Fort Scratchley and the Convict mining area beneath the Fort.

These are not new proposals its just that they have defied resolution in the flaccid planning

system we have.

The importance of these proposals is that they reflect the fact that the Lower Hunter is a sensitive estuarine environment and coastal location and that it has a rich convict and coal mining heritage and that it is absolutely essential that we understand our heritage as we face a new century with a mature outlook.

Almost half of our coastline from Port Stephens to Wyong is not in a reserve system that can yield a sustainable future. This is an appalling situation that must be remedied. Stockton Bight, Port Stephens, Nine Mile Beach Redhead to Blacksmiths, Pinney Beach and headlands.

People have been looking to Port Stephens along that magnificent sandy coast since early settlement and thinking how lucky we are, but this beauty is being torn apart now.

There are no reserves in place to manage the area in the interests of the public or the future. Just the 100 metre strip for wheeled vehicles that was previously a Reserve for Coal. The Stockton Bight National Park is needed now and is the only way to legally manage the area to ensure that the natural and recreational values survive.

Our endangered koalas are threatened along with their habitat. Port Stephens has not been able to approve its koala management strategy even after 10 years and will it be implemented if gazetted? Would you like to be a koala waiting for the strategy.

The reserves and proposals in last year's manifesto need statutory recognition now. How can an obviously speculative concept like a major airport on Kooragang island be treated seriously? The Kooragang Nature Reserve should have been extended to protect the estuarine ecosystem. Regional parkland or National Parks are the only effective way to curb development pressures. Sydney's National Parks show the way. The Environmental Planning and Assessment Act is not the appropriate machinery for the protection of the environment. It is primarily a facilitation law.

Kooragang airport proposal

The Hunter River estuary is the last place that should be considered for an airport. The proposal has been developed as a distraction to the Badgerys Creek which is supported by the EIS as the best site for Sydney's next airport.

A case could be made for the location of a major international airport near Canberra with a fast surface connection to Sydney and Melbourne or for the expansion of Newcastle's Williamtown Airport. But neither would be a second airport for Sydney.

The Kooragang Airport recently unveiled in the Newcastle Herald is a bad joke, it has no status and is not supported by the people of this region as expressed by two huge public meetings.

The project would not survive a rigorous impact statement. Scientific data regarding the migratory wading birds, flooding and aviation dangers and bird strikes, (also earthquake risk) make the concept environmentally unsustainable and speculative in the extreme.

Kooragang is too close to residential suburbs and would affect the significant wetlands and an

essential floodway. It is also too close to the existing Williamstown RAAF Base and Newcastle's existing Airport. Furthermore the devastation caused by engineering works needed to raise the wetlands above flood level not to mention the areas destroyed to obtain the quantities of fill needed, make the proposal impossible to contemplate in practical terms.

Ecologically Sustainable Development

Much of the public relations hype promotes ecologically sustainable development . There is plenty of verbiage and lots of paper but too little sustainability.

Altruism and ethical imperatives make it essential that the conservation movement is clear on what is needed to create Ecologically Sustainable Development. We need to argue the ESD argument with good solid logic and not just leave it to public relations experts.

A simple check list derived from the Protection of the Environment Act 1991 is a start:

- The effective integration of economic and environmental considerations in decision making.
- The use of the precautionary principle to prevent environmental
- degradation.
- Practice the ethical necessity of intergenerational equity
- Promote conservation of biological diversity and ecological integrity
- Consider the real value of the environmental resources

Nobbys a Newcastle Icon

Transparency, fairness and attention to the public interest is crucial when considering important heritage matters like Newcastle's famous Nobbys. It is Newcastle's most easily identifiable and unique heritage icon. Newcastle without Nobbys would be like Sydney without the harbour bridge.

We had to lodge a complaint with the Ombudsman that Newcastle Council had wrongfully accepted the proposal for a wind generator at Nobbys which is a prohibited use in an open space zone and that Council had failed to consider the heritage importance of the Nobbys and that it had allowed itself to be intertwined with Energy Australia and the Port Authority to the detriment of the ratepayers and their environment in assessing the DA.

A professional conservation study and conservation management plan for Nobbys and the Macquarie Pier is urgently needed against which development proposals could be assessed. This is especially important given the long standing Coal River Historic Site Proposal which includes Nobbys the Convict Breakwater and the Fort Scratchley.

Furthermore the Parks and Playgrounds Movement does not want to see our parks, historic sites and open spaces unnecessarily opened to the erection of wind generators and Helicopter facilities.

The wind generator farm recently established at Crookwell is an appropriate location.

Objection to Heliport for Wybay Gumba Nobbys

The Movement was concerned at the way the Port Authority brought forward the Nobbys

helicopter proposal. Newcastle is desperately waiting for the State Government to acknowledge Newcastle as a real place with a history heritage and a future. You can get a tourist brochure for just about anywhere in the state but tourists won't find one inviting them to Newcastle.

Nobbys with its rich history is the most precious symbol of Newcastle's convict beginnings and is an historic artefact in its own right. With the 200th anniversary of the founding of the township of Newcastle just four years away it is essential that the State acknowledge Nobbys and the Coal River Historic Site as the historic focus of Newcastle, built literally on the backs of our convict forebears.

Permanent helicopter facilities on Nobbys would have been contrary to Open Space and Recreation Zone and be destructive to the image of the Newcastle and would have lead to noise and increased vehicular traffic on the Breakwater which is Newcastle's most popular promenade.

Parks and Playgrounds Movement had no objection to the helicopter facilities and Marine Pilot Transfer operation for Dyke Point. Parks and Playgrounds congratulates Newcastle Council decision to reject the Nobbys Heliport.

Harbour Foreshore

It was appalling to note the Newcastle Council approved extensions to a nonconforming use on the harbour front for a restaurant and seaplane office. The development is contrary to the principles of the 1981 Harbour Foreshore Urban Design and can only worsen the views from the public promenade and foreshore area for the general public and lead to further alienation. We resolved to investigate how this matter was given consent under planning law.

Community Perspective on Planning

The Movement together with the Civic Association sponsored a 4 hour workshop to identify the essential character of Newcastle and recommend a planning framework. The Lord Mayor Cr Greg Heys must be thanked for making the workshop possible. An excellent document was produced but a further workshop needed. Future action identified was:

- The public domain must be given priority within statutory planning.
- Newcastle's unique character respected
- Open space and parkland protected
- Retain the essential character of the suburbs with sensitive in-fill.
- Strengthen constraints regarding the green belt and ecological and heritage values.
- Emphasises on landscape quality of foreshore, ocean front rural and natural areas.
- Encourage human scale development and reject over development.
- Apply planning policies consistently.
- Immediate action needed
- More resources spent on public amenity fewer resources on expensive administration.
- Concentrate on core activities parks playgrounds recreation areas and roads.
- Create the Coal River Historic Site to celebrate the establishment of Newcastle.
- Add the former Adamstown Rifle Range to Glenrock SRA.
- Establish a Regional Environmental Development Fund
- Extend the Hexham and Kooragang Nature Reserves.
- Promote the creation of the Stockton Bight National Park
- Regional Environmental Improvement Charge

The Movement resolved that the Hunter Water Environmental Improvement Charge should be managed by an authority with a broad input from the community to ensure that moneys are directed to the Environmental Improvement of regional parkland and for specified environmental projects.

Currently the charge is forty dollars per annum but was as high as \$69.00 prior to July 96. Moneys collected are matched by the Government and used for the Hunter fringe area Sewerage Project. The \$310M project to serve 20 000 properties generates in the order of \$15,500 subsidy per fringe property. Each 1989 ratepayers will have paid over \$900 to the scheme. The environmental improvement scheme is now ten years old and should be reviewed. The funds collected should be equitably distributed to the various Council areas for environmental improvement (not just sewers). We would have liked to see the Lake Macquarie Premier's Task Force levy included in the Fund.

Honeysuckle

The Movement has been critical of developments at Honeysuckle and we requested that the Minister for Urban Affairs and Planning prepare a Regional Environmental Plan as was done at City West in Sydney. We were disappointed that the Newcastle Council did not allow for open space zonings in their Local Environmental plan.

The original Masterplan unveiled by the Greiner Government in 1991 proposed an imaginative and generous array of plazas and open spaces along the waterfront. These are not reflected in the current schemes. Our chief objection to the original Masterplan was that it had been predicated on cutting the railway to the Historic Newcastle Railway Station. This part of the plan was bitterly opposed by the majority of Newcastle people. We believe that future planning strategies must include the greater use of the passenger rail system for commuters and tourists and a use of railway stations as nodal points for development to give greater strength and sustainability to the Region's urban structure.

There was a push to remove the railway from the city fifty years ago when trains were coal fired and smoky. The rapid spread of private motoring after WWII gave mobility to the majority but extended the edges of the city and debilitated our central commercial area.

In early Newcastle the trains brought coal from the mines and goods to the marshalling yards. The next generation of railway trains will be for passengers and tourists and be faster, quieter and more comfortable connecting historic Newcastle directly with the Hunter hinterland and the Central Coast and Sydney.

Parks and Playgrounds Movement wants the highly successful harbour foreshore landscape and promenade which evolved from the Urban Design and Landscape Competition in 1981 to be continued through the Honeysuckle development to Wickham.

Wharf Road was closed this year and all traffic redirected between the heritage buildings to allow for the ill conceived Flinders Cove proposal. The Cove was costly and impractical. Its removal from the revised strategy must now allow Wharf Rd to be reopened and continue through the area on a sensible alignment. Action by motorists is needed to force the reopening of Wharf Rd.

This improved alignment could allow the heritage area to be more pedestrian friendly and provide extra space for the integration of good sympathetic development. We don't want a mausoleum like heritage area.

Ultimately the foreshore must be given over to the people and maritime activities, the railway become the principal people-mover and the heritage workshop buildings be filled with activity reflecting an honesty relationship with their working past. A modest practical honesty is desperately needed for the Honeysuckle of the future.

Adamstown Rifle Range Land.

Parks and Playgrounds Movement is conscious of the predicament caused to the former Adamstown Rifle Range land in 1997 when Newcastle Council resolved to place on exhibition a Draft LEP to rezone part of the land from openspace to residential without any consideration of the open space zoning. Council should have understood that their action would not progress the implementation of the statutory plan scheme for any part of the Rifle Range land to bring the land into appropriate management by dedication as park, reserve or SRA.

Newcastle Council in the last four years has destroyed more zoned open space in the city than any council since the beginning of planning in Newcastle in 1948.

We were thankful that Council did belatedly respond to the public outcry and halt the rezoning action. This allowed the Movement to take positive steps to review the situation and make representations to have the land in Lot 2/827809 acquired and added to the adjacent Glenrock State Recreation Area.

On this matter we were lucky that the RTA was desperate to identify a parcel of high quality conservation land in the area as compensatory habitat for the destruction being caused by the construction of the West Charlestown Bypass. We trust that the Council now expedites the acquisition and transfer of Lot 2 to the NP&WS for inclusion in the Glenrock State Recreation Area without further delay.

Lake Macquarie Strategy

The Movement made a submission in response to the recently displayed the Lake Macquarie Lifestyle 2020 A Strategy for Our Future draft.

We believe that if the strategy is to be effective it must state clearly how Council will maintain and protect the Public Domain lands and the Lake for which it is the trustee and custodian.

We have requested that Council create a specific strategy for the public domain lands. The public domain would include those areas of primary responsibility to Council, community lands, parks and reserves. The success of the 2020 Strategy will largely be determined by the way the public lands are protected and managed into the future. Planning strategy needs to be directed to healthy growth and a sustainable maturity for the future Lake Macquarie city. We acknowledge the value of the "Enquiry by Design" process as a test overview for particular proposals. However we regard it as producing a simplification of the dynamic real life situations that is faced by Councils and that it should not be used as a justification for arbitrary removal of public parkland.

The strategy should clearly establish the principles of Ecologically Sustainable Development and provided procedures for the effective integration of economic and environmental considerations as well as proposing strategies for conservation and intergenerational equity in preparing Local Environmental Studies and Local Environmental Plans and for future decision making processes. The danger is that the document is being used to lock council into propositions for development that will obliterate the public open space and parklands needed for the future.

The Movement hasn't been able to respond to the individual concept proposals from the workshops which will have to await the preparation of the LEP.

It is important that Councillors, when deciding the future planning strategy, positively protect the existing natural and cultural advantages. Public amenity and quality of life provided by Council over many years must not be thrown away in the name of planning.

Community Land

Important moral and ethical issues are being given scant attention by Councils as they move to reclassify Public Reserves as Operational Land.

The 1993 Local Government Act obliged Councils to divide Council's public land into Community (parks and Reserves with a plan of management) or Operational, (Council chambers or garbage depots ,for sale or alienation without restriction they are no longer Parks).

Community classified lands, are parks and reserves, and are required to be managed for the community by adopted Plans Of Management. To use the Community Lands provisions of the Act to destroy parkland is a misuse of the Act.

Land classified as Operational Land has no protection it becomes a category of vacant land.

The Government introduced the concept of Community Land to bring a higher standard of management to public lands through exhibited plans of management but Councils are bypassing the act by changing their lands to Operational.

Public lands that are currently Parks and playing fields or bowling greens are being placed on the slippery slide to oblivion when they are placed in the operational category.

Cams Wharf

The magnificent Cam's Wharf Bushland Public Reserve is Community Land but Lake Macquarie Council intends to change it to Operational land by Amendment 154 to LEP 1983.

It should be retained as a Bushland Reserve Community Land and be managed by a Plan of Management. If this fails the land should be given to the NP&WS for addition to the Lake Macquarie State Recreation Area.

The ethics of acquiring land for public reserves and later reclassifying them for sale or alienation defies description and will open the floodgates for further alienation of community lands.

Parks and Playgrounds Movement calls on the Councillors of the Lake Macquarie Council to halt the declassification process that will destroy parklands at Windale, Charlestown, Toronto

and Cams Wharf in the near future. Candidates for Local Government elections should inform the voters whether they intend to protect the community lands.

Your Committee made many submissions during the year including the following:

- RAF Park community land numerous letters and submission to Public Hearing
- Honeysuckle DCP 40 submission to City Council
- Lake Macquarie Community Land Public Hearings
- Minmi Tank Paddock Coal & Allied Operations P/L conservation subdivision objections
- Opposition to Government's attack on the Legislative Assembly
- Victoria Theatre Heritage Office.
- Old vertical slab cottage in Selwyn St Glebe request for report.
- Aboriginal Land Rights appeal re Maroota decision.
- Bedminister Co-composting and the Solid Waste to Fuel project various Councils.
- Green Point Committee and opening of Sea Eagle picnic ground and lookout at Cardiff Point.
- Newcastle Draft LEP for the whole City.
- Charlestown Bypass and need to lift eastern road zoning.
- Liddell Co-burning of waste Is the power Station to become an incinerator?
- Fame Cove and the possible Mt Karuah purchase.
- BHP Belmont Sands Public Meeting and letters to Council.
- Cardiff Coal Coy letters to Attorney General re need to wind up of old companies.
- Weakley's Drive and need to interchange with New England Highway.

Your committee has worked hard and I have relied heavily on my fellow committee members. I thank you for your support.

Doug Lithgow, President
Parks and Playgrounds Movement Inc.
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