

Tuesday November 14, 2023



By [Michael Parris](#)

November 14 2023 - 5:30am



State spending \$1.8m a year on vacant Tomaree Lodge site

BUDGET ESTIMATES Taxpayers pick up the tab as state government weighs up future of site

THE NSW government is spending \$1.8million a year on security and maintenance at Tomaree Lodge while it weighs up the future of the former disability centre.

Minister for Disability Inclusion Kate Washington told a budget estimates hearing last week that the heritage-listed lodge was costing taxpayers \$1 million for security and \$800,000 for maintenance.

The *Newcastle Herald* reported last week that Tomaree Headland Heritage Group, which represents a host of business and community organisations in Port Stephens, had called on the government to hasten a decision on the nine-hectare site's future.

The group has asked the government to "advise the community on the status of the transition of the Tomaree Lodge site to Port Stephens for community use, including the outcomes from the community consultation process conducted almost 12 months ago".

THHG has proposed transforming the former disability care centre into an education and tourism precinct. It has recently embraced a proposal from retired CSIRO insect scientist Reginald Roberts to open an ecology centre at the site describing the Hunter environment from coastline to rainforest.

One of THHG's member organisations, Tomaree Cultural Development Group, wants

to see a performance venue and art exhibition space on part of the site.

Liberal MP Natasha Maclaren-Jones quizzed Ms Washington in budget estimates on when the government would release the consultation report, which she said the minister had received in May.

The Port Stephens MP replied that her department would release the paper "when we have done the work that's necessary that makes it a productive piece of work, which includes the work that we are doing to understand what the actual constraints are on the site".

"The consultation that you referred to and the paper that went to my community asking them for their ideas, what it didn't do was discuss the constraints on the site," she said. "You had a significant time when you knew that this was closing and you did nothing to create a plan".

The former government began removing residents from Tomaree Lodge in 2015 before closing it in 2021.

The *Newcastle Herald* reported last week that the University of Newcastle was "committed to working with all stakeholders" on the future of the Tomaree Lodge site. The *Herald* had been told the university had shown interest in operating a campus on the picturesque site, possibly accommodating marine science and hospitality students.