

31<sup>st</sup> August 2023

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **TOMAREE COASTAL WALK which is linked to the ICONIC TOMAREE LODGE SITE SHOAL BAY**

The formal opening of the NPWS Tomaree Coastal Walk to take place **on 1 September 2023**. We congratulate the NPWS on this initiative which the Tomaree Headland Heritage Group (THHG) believes will trigger a major increase of visitation to the Tomaree Headland precinct and the Tomaree Lodge site. The Coastal Walk terminates (and commences) at the Lodge site and actually traverses portions of that site. We believe that this influx of visitors will highlight the urgent need for a Government decision on the preferred future uses of the Lodge site and on its management responsibility. However, the increased visitation will also create a need for much improved wayfinding signage, security, interpretation and restoration of the WW11 remnants, parking, public transport and visitor information facilities.

As these pressures mount, we anticipate that there will be a strong uptake in public expectation for the State Government to take a lead in commencing the planning for the future of the Tomaree Lodge.

The Tomaree Lodge has now been vacant for well over two (2) years at a very heavy cost to the State. The weight of the community expectations continues to grow and has become particularly evident at our periodic Help Desks at the Salamander Bay Shopping Centre. The community is seeking direction. We therefore believe that the transition process needs to commence as soon as possible for many reasons not the least being:

- Current huge Security costs – Our estimate is based on the current security market charge-out rate for this type of service which we assess would be in **excess of \$600,000pa**. This does not include maintenance which we believe could be as high as **another \$300,000/400,000pa**.
- Significant concerns are held relating to the vulnerability of the site and its heritage assets to vandalism, fires and squatters. The site is wide open and therefore very accessible and hence the recent significant graffiti incident. The risks are high and accordingly is important for this iconic site to be adequately protected

We therefore believe there is an urgent need for the Government to enter into further dialogue with Port Stephens Council and with key elements of the community to discuss the way forward **remembering that community engagement ensures better outcomes.**

We believe that as soon as possible there is a need to establish a Management Group, ideally a Management Trust – similar to Hungry Point Reserve in Cronulla - to include Council, State Government and Community representatives as well as relevant experts. Maybe an interim working group would be helpful and desirable in developing the way forward.

#### **Request for a Budget for the transition of the Tomaree Lodge to the Port Stephens Community**

Until a decision is made on preferred uses for the Lodge site and its management arrangements it is not possible to develop a Business Case for the potential adaptive re-use of the site. We therefore believe the **Strategic Concept Plan** will provide guidelines to assist in the assessment of costs and a platform for the eventual financial sustainability of the site. Therefore, having regard to the current heavy security and maintenance financial burden on the State and the site vulnerability to vandalism, fire and squatters, we believe it is now appropriate for the transition costs to a responsible manager

such as the Port Stephens Community be included in the upcoming NSW Government Budget Estimates, i.e:

- Development of a Master Plan and related costs including staffing and consultants
- Funding for administration such as an interim Management Trust for say up to five (5) years so that the site can be effectively managed
- Funding for works/upgrades which will be required for the site to be secure and safe and to ensure that all services/buildings etc meet current regulations

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**Potential Grabs**

1. THHG fully supports the inauguration of the Tomaree Coastal Walk and its positive impact on visitation to Port Stephens providing the opportunity to showcase the many assets we have to offer and to have a positive impact on the local economy including employment
2. We are anxious to know when it is proposed to complete the Coastal Walk particularly at the Tomaree Headland which still has a poor sense of arrival and already attracts over 200,000 pa
3. Do we have the infrastructure and services to cater for the growth in visitor numbers . For example, parking, signage, public transport , security, visitor information facilities and interpretation of the extensive WW11 remnants on the Tomaree Headland ?