

18TH June 2023

OPINION PIECE

WHERE TO NEXT for the ICONIC TOMAREE LODGE SITE PORT STEPHENS

Tomaree Headland Heritage Group Inc (THHG) is now in its fifth year and continues to work with the community to ensure the Tomaree Lodge site is transitioned to Port Stephens for appropriate community uses. We also continue to represent 10 very diverse community organisations which in turn are representative of many thousands of Port Stephens residents. Our key objectives are to repurpose the site to an educational, cultural and tourism precinct ensuring it always remains accessible to the public.

We also continue to support the establishment of a Management Trust as the future managing authority with broad community and government representation and of course relevant expertise such as (but not limited to) tourism, education, heritage, and business. We also believe Port Stephens Council should play a lead role in the transition process. There are many good examples of this model managing similar Heritage listed sites in NSW including the Hungry Point Reserve in Cronulla.

Over recent years we have spent an extensive amount of time and engagement canvassing and listening to the community including but not limited to:

- Formal presentations to over **40 community organisations**
- Established periodic '**Help Desks**' at:
 - Salamander Bay Shopping Centre
 - The Tomaree Headland
- Engaged with the media to ensure the wider community is informed and to seek out views

The outcomes from this engagement are overwhelming in support of our objectives and that the people of Port Stephens are passionate about the future of this iconic heritage listed site.

It is important to also recognize that the Tomaree Headland is the most visited attraction in Port Stephens and during 2018 recorded over 200,000 visitors. It serves to emphasize the appeal of the site's unique natural beauty, environmental and historical significance and why it needs to operate under the stewardship of the Port Stephens community.

In fact, with the financial support of Port Stephens Council we engaged a group of Architects to develop a Strategic Concept Plan based on extensive community input to not only whet the appetite of the community but also to demonstrate the opportunities to the authorities. It also identifies the constraints but at the same time provides a framework for the future potential of this iconic heritage listed Tomaree Lodge site and this includes a Matrix for assessment of site suitability for potential uses.

Following the resolution of the Land Claim application late last year, the Government agreed for the site to be transitioned to Port Stephens for community use which was welcomed by the Port Stephens community. A Community consultation process was then implemented by the Department of Communities and Justice (owners of the site) to gauge the views of the Port Stephens residents, and we look forward to the outcomes and options being made available. Nevertheless, we have continued our community engagement to cement the strong and influential relationship we have developed with Port Stephens residents.

THHG has recently written to the responsible Minister and local member The Hon Kate Washington MP seeking a meeting to be updated on the Government's plans for the site.

The Tomaree Headland is one of the most iconic sites on the eastern seaboard of Australia and therefore we should be shooting for something world class which will inspire people by attracting their interest and attention and hence many organisations and people in the Community are looking forward to the decision by the NSW Government.

KEY OPPORTUNITIES PUT FORWARD BY THE PORT STEPHENS COMMUNITY

We feel it is appropriate to seek out a way forward which includes highlighting the significant opportunities identified by the Port Stephens community over the past five years. These have also assisted in the development of our set of objectives and a snapshot of these opportunities are outlined below:

1. An Ecology Centre	2. A Marine Discovery Centre	3. Marine Science and Research Centre
4. Marine Fauna Rescue Centre	5. Boutique Conference Centre	6. A Performing Arts Centre and Art Gallery
7. An Interpretation Centre / Museum	8. An Aquarium	9. A small University Campus for marine related & hospitality studies & school excursion & field study accommodation
10. A Memorial Walk connecting all the WWII remnants on the Headland		

In the end, we encourage the early commencement of the Master Planning process which will be the guiding light in identifying the future uses of the site.

We are also seeking the support and assistance of Port Stephens Council in determining a road map for the future of this iconic site which we believe should be under the stewardship of the Port Stephens community.

KEY MEMBER ORGANISATIONS

• Business Port Stephens Inc.	• Nelson Bay RSL Sub-Branch Inc.	• Destination Port Stephens Inc.
• Port Stephens Historical Society Inc.	• Shoal Bay Community Association Inc.	• EcoNetwork-Port Stephens Inc.
• Marine Parks Association Inc.	• Tomaree Museum Association inc.	• Tomaree Cultural Development Group Inc.
• Tomaree Ratepayers & Residents Association Inc.		



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KEY OBJECTIVES

of the **TOMAREE HEADLAND HERITAGE GROUP Inc.**

(Formerly the 'Friends of Tomaree Headland')

- 1) **To Protect** and interpret the outstanding natural and heritage, including indigenous heritage, assets of Tomaree Headland
- 2) **To Retain** the site of the Tomaree Lodge in public/community ownership with appropriate public access
- 3) **To Create** a nationally significant tourist attraction based on Tomaree Headland
- 4) **To Complement** the existing and planned improvements to the adjoining Tomaree National Park, in particular the recently announced Tomaree Coastal Walk which commences at the base of Tomaree Headland
- 5) **To Optimise** visitor experiences and enterprise opportunities leading to economic sustainability of the site and to ensure its long-term sustainability
- 6) **To Facilitate** the establishment of a Museum/Interpretive centre to conserve and showcase the natural and cultural history of Port Stephens and Tomaree Headland
- 7) **To Realise** the potential use of the site for educational and research facilities relating to marine science, nature conservation, indigenous culture and more recent historical events
- 8) **To Strengthen** the appeal of the Tomaree Peninsula which is recognised as a strategic tourism hub
- 9) **To Ensure** that the future use and development of Tomaree Headland is guided by an integrated Masterplan
- 10) **To Examine** the need for an appropriate administrative authority to oversight the planning and management of Tomaree Headland
- 11) **To Develop** concepts for the adaptive reuse of the assets of the Tomaree Lodge Heritage site
- 12) **To Enhance** the public's appreciation of the vital role of the Tomaree Headland and Port Stephens in the defence of Australia during WWII