

Assessing the visitor experience at Tomaree Headland

By Marian SAMPSON

MEMBERS of the Tomaree Headland Heritage Group (THHG) hosted a help desk at the entrance of Tomaree Headland from Boxing Day until 2 January to assist tourists, assess visitor numbers and provide feedback to National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), Port Stephens Council, Destination Port Stephens and the Department of Communities and Justice (and their consultants, Umwelt), who have responsibility for the Tomaree Lodge site.

President of the THHG, Peter Clough told News Of The Area, "It would be fair to say our attendance was extremely welcomed by the visiting public and in fact we received much the same response in September 2022 when we provided a similar service and we felt that it enriched the visitor experience."

The primary reason for setting up the 'Help Desk' was to provide information as there is no current information and very limited directional signage at the entry point.

THHG's help desk assisted the visiting public with information about the Headland, provided directions to people and sought feedback on the visitor experience at the site; as well as attempting to understand visitor perceptions and expectations.

Visitor numbers over the

eight days of the operation of the help desk were extremely high - with an estimate of up to 1000 visitors per day, primarily families with children.

"There was good reason to understand why the Tomaree Headland is the most popular visitor attraction in Port Stephens," Mr Clough said.

NPWS recorded visitor numbers of 200,000 during the 2018 year, which most likely has grown significantly.

A short survey on the visitor experience which was completed on by some of the tourists and sightseers.

"The key outcome was that the Headland continues to provide a 'wow' factor for visitors," Mr Clough said.

Visitors noted the limited signage at the entry point to both the Headland and Tomaree Lodge, with the small existing signage being obscured by vehicles.

"In fact directional signage to the Headland is totally inadequate and accordingly is not meeting visitor expectations and there is no sense of arrival," Mr Clough said.

The THHG favours the installation of friendly welcome signage designed to

enrich the visitor experience, including direction signs to Zenith Beach, the upper parking area and the southern entry to Zenith Beach and no-dog signs at the entry points for the National Park.

The lack of amenities and toilets was also noted and Clough believes that this is by far the highest level of need once people have completed their excursion.

THHG also believes that there is a very strong need for a 'visitor information facility', particularly relating to the Headland and Lodge grounds.

Mr Clough also holds concerns over access to the tourist destination.

"There is an urgent need for vehicle turning facilities at the entry point to prevent existing traffic snarls which could be achieved by extending the parking footprint at the entry.

"It is not only a safety issue.

"It is inadequate and drivers are not aware that there is a 'No Through Road' when they enter from Shoal Bay."

On a positive note, THHG understands that a water station will be installed and that garbage disposal units are also scheduled for installation at key points on the Summit Walk.