

REPORT

‘HELP DESK’

27 Sept 2025 to 12 October 2025 (School Holidays)
Tomaree Headland Entry Point - Enriching the Visitor Experience
9.00am until 12.30pm daily

WHAT WE DID

We conducted a **Help Desk** at the Tomaree Headland entry over a 15 day period from the 27 Sept until 12 October 2025 inclusive. We have done this for the last three(3) years generally over the key Holiday periods. We had at least **2 to 3 volunteers each day**.

Primarily we provided the following services to visitors:

- Bus Timetable on the Tomaree Peninsula - information for Tomaree Coastal Walk users
- Maps of the Tomaree Coastal Walk
- Maps of the Summit walk
- Parking and traffic information
- Updates on the future of the Tomaree Lodge
- Provided a friendly ‘**Sense of Arrival**’ for Visitors which included Way Finding and directions
- Lots of information about the Military History of the Headland which was a strong point of interest
- We conducted a number of exit interviews and ‘vox pop’ a few on our Facebook page
- We provided a FIRST AID KIT for minor injuries



KEY OUTCOMES AND VISITOR FEEDBACK

We recorded on average 1200 each morning (about 300-400 each hour-about **15,000 over the 15 days**) with our ‘counter device’. We have been told that the Tomaree Headland is still the most popular visitor attraction in Port Stephens and growing

- Most visitors by far were:
 - Family groups generally with young children
 - Young adults aged 15yrs – 30yrs
- Most visitors were from Sydney (90%+)



- Also many International Visitors primarily from European countries who became aware of the Tomaree Headland on such
- platforms as Lonely Planet, TikTok etc. **Their expectations were met and exceeded as we also conducted a number of exit interviews.**
- We also did a number of extremely **popular video clips which were posted on our Facebook page** (Tomaree Headland Friends) which now has a very strong following
- There were numerous enquiries about the future of the Tomaree Lodge and numerous requests for information about the WWII remnants on the Tomaree Headland and how they can be accessed. However, most of the remnants are not able to be identified as they do not have interpretative signage (**we recommend that the Tomaree Lodge Information Centre be opened on weekends to meet Visitor demand**)
- Tomaree Coastal Walk continues to grow in popularity and we **handed out numerous Maps**. Most interest was for the sections to Fingal Bay and One Mile beach
- Strong need for **Bus Information** from Tomaree Coastal Walk users or introduction of a Shuttle Bus service which is currently being considered by Council
- Very strong need for an '**Information and Food & Beverage Kiosk**' at the entry point which would also be an outlet for the Tomaree Coastal Walk users, information and maps as well as directions and information about the key WWII remnants particularly in the National Park
- **Paid Parking** arrangement continues to be confusing at the Headland as it is not clear whether payment is required (this requires a major reset as Council is missing out on extensive revenue). Our estimate is that 3 out of 4 parkers at the Headland are unaware of the paid parking requirement and therefore not paying the required parking fees. Firstly the **signs do not say Paid Parking** and the Parking **meter is partly obscured**
- **Toilets** at the entry to the Tomaree Lodge site (managed by Council) receive many complaints:
 - Messy and unpleasant
 - Regularly running out of paper
 - No Hand dryers
 - No soap dispensers
- '**Box Beach**' signage required on Tomaree Road at Garden Place and Marine Parade – requested to NPWS on a number of occasions
- **Garbage receptacles** - need for a more welcoming 'Sense of Arrival' as visitors are greeted with old wiz bins, (without covers) out of date signage and a prominent brick wall. The whole 'Sense of Arrival' at the most popular Visitor Attraction in Port Stephens needs addressing and accordingly substantial improvements are required to bring it to International standards as we believe visitors to Port Stephens deserve a higher (and safer) standard particularly as they are the people paying the parking fees
 - Also a need for at least one covered garbage bin at the entry/exit to the summit walk

- **Other suggestions were:**

- **Seating and Tables**-More seating and tables on the summit walk and the Tomaree Lodge foreshore
- **Disposal Bags for dogs** along the Tomaree Lodge foreshore
- **Water Station** at the northern extremity of the Tomaree Lodge site
- **Bike Rack** at the northern extremity of the Tomaree Lodge

TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT and PARKING

Traffic Management and Parking continue to be a major safety and logistical issue at the entry to the Tomaree Headland. Also the area around the Shoal Bay Boat Ramp adds to vehicle congestion particularly at busy times and therefore requires attention as it has become a ‘pinch point.’

Trailers, Jet skis, pedestrians all interact etc and crossing Shoal Bay road in an unstructured and ill-managed way. This is a priority. Council has recently advised that design and planning is underway. If it is not ready by Christmas then we encourage Council to erect PR signage advising what they are and propose doing.



It was disappointing that the only Carpark in Shoal Bay was closed during the holidays and no alternatives were offered.

Also the toilets at the Shoal Bay Boat Ramp were closed and again no alternate options were offered such as Portaloo's.

We should be looking after our visitors (who pay the parking fees) to avoid 'reputational damage' to Port Stephens and the Council.

PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Council Signage** – As Council has commenced undertaking the design and planning for parking and traffic management we encourage Council to undertake Public Relations including such suggestions as signage and Help Desk type activities. **We need to mitigate 'Reputational damage'** to Port Stephens and the Council
- **Paid Parking** - As reflected in this report there is a need to address this matter at the Tomaree Headland entry area. Revenue is being lost.
- **Public Transport must be considered**

There is no doubt Public Transport must be part of the solution for people and vehicle management in Shoal Bay and the Tomaree Headland.

- **Shuttle Bus** – Currently being considered by Council. As you know Council is considering a Shuttle Bus Service – very important
- **A Trolley Bus** - A service between Shoal Bay CBD and the Tomaree Headland using the roadway could be both a Tourism product and a transport service. This could be most suitable for a commercial operator
- **Access by Water** –
 - Revamping the Shoal Bay jetty making it accessible to a ferry service as well as cruise operators
 - Reinstatement of the Jetty at the Tomaree Lodge

- **Upgrading the Traffic and Parking management between Shoal Bay CBD** and the Tomaree Headland - Council is currently undertaking the design and planning
- **Signage in Shoal Bay CBD** relating to ***No Through Road*** and limited parking at the Tomaree Headland
- Need for **substantial increased parking in Shoal Bay CBD**
- **A strong need for a café and information service at the Entry Point to the Tomaree Lodge** particularly for users of Tomaree Coastal Walk, the Tomaree Summit Walk and a future Tomaree Lodge as well as Zenith and Shoal Bay beach users
- **E Bikes** – This is the first holiday period that there was evidence of high usage E Bikes along Shoal Bay road into the Tomaree Lodge and to access Zenith Beach. Mostly children and at high speed and most without helmets. We believe this needs to be addressed ASAP
- **Cameras** – Maybe CCTV cameras at the entry to the Tomaree Lodge facing outwards
 - i.e south facing could be advantageous for a number of reasons including E Bikes, identifying traffic and parking management related issues such as safety peaks, data gathering etc

SUMMARY

The **reality is that visitation will continue to increase in the Shoal Bay/Tomaree Headland precinct** which has been evidenced since we started the Help Desk program 3 years ago. We therefore in particular regard Parking and Traffic Management matters require most urgent attention i.e

1. **The Tomaree Coastal Walk is increasingly attracting more users**
2. **The continued interest and growth in the Summit Walk**
3. **The potential future uses and activities on the Tomaree Lodge site**
4. **The ongoing and increasing popularity of Shoal Bay CBD**

Port Stephens is being actively promoted which is excellent for local employment and the economy but there are all sorts of 'consequences' including infrastructure etc which we believe Port Stephens Council needs to urgently address.



Peter Clough

President - Tomaree Headland Heritage Group Inc.

12 October 2025