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Groups share vision for Tomaree Lodge site as submissions draw to a close on January 6

By [Ellie-Marie Watts](#)

January 2 2023 - 12:00pm

Tomaree Lodge operated as a residential disability centre from 2001-2021. **Submissions are open until January 6 for the community to share its ideas on how to repurpose the lodge site.**

An arts precinct, a world class education and tourism hub, accommodation for the homeless, a casino - there's been no shortage of ideas over the years about what to do with Tomaree Lodge.



But now some of those ideas could, potentially, become a reality after the Land and Environment Court rejected a Worimi land claim on the Shoal Bay site and the NSW Government said it would retain it for community use.

A number of Port Stephens community groups told the *Examiner* that they would be making a submission when the NSW Government opened consultation for ideas on repurposing the "historic and iconic site".

"The Tomaree Headland is one of the most iconic sites on the eastern seaboard of Australia, and the most visited attraction in Port Stephens. It therefore deserves special attention when determining its future," **Tomaree Headland Heritage Group** president Peter Clough said.

"We should be aiming for something world class which will inspire people by attracting their interest and attention." Mr Clough said the nine-hectare waterfront site on the Tomaree Headland has "boundless opportunities", but the group's vision is to transform it into an education and tourism precinct.

The [group wants the site to house a marine research centre](#), museum and interpretive centre showcasing the area's rich WWII military history, visitor information centre and perhaps a restaurant or cafe with oyster-tasting tours on the side.



Tomaree Headland Heritage Group members:
Peter Clough, Nigel Dique and Geoff Washington.

Meanwhile, the [Tomaree Cultural Development Group has a vision to transform the lodge](#) into an arts and cultural hub with theatre, performance and exhibition spaces, artists studios and meeting rooms.

"Nothing comes to Port Stephens. No theatre, no touring exhibitions - Taree receives The Archibald Prize - no... ballet, music, art groups. They don't have anywhere to hold functions," the development group's chairwoman, Kathie Barnes, said.

"The headland presents the opportunity of a lifetime and if developed with style would be the envy of the east coast. No other site apart from the Opera House site could rival Tomaree."



*Tomaree Cultural Development Group members:
Christopher & Kathie Barnes, Bev Carver & Fran Diggers
Photo: Alanna Tomazin*

Shoal Bay Community Association (SBCA) has also welcomed the NSW Government's commitment to retain Tomaree Lodge site for community use.

"The future of this land now rests with the community, including the Worimi land council. With proper consultation a great plan can be put in place to enhance this iconic site," association chairman Chris Bastic said. "SBCA will be preparing a submission to the state government for the adaptive re-use of the site and encourage as many residents as possible to have their say."

"Ideally the management of the site should be undertaken by the community via a Community Trust model once a full plan of management has been agreed for the site."



Port Stephens MP Kate Washington speaking with attendees to a rally at Tomaree Lodge in September 2022, calling for the site to be turned into short-term housing crisis accommodation. Picture by Henk Tobbe.

Port Stephens MP Kate Washington has [advocated for the lodge facilities to be reopened](#) to temporarily house the area's increasing homeless population. "There are many local homeless families who desperately need a place to stay," she said.

"The purpose-built units at Tomaree Lodge should be used for crisis accommodation on a temporary basis, until we decide as a community how to use the site in future."

Ideas for the future of the site would need to embrace the **existing structures as they are heritage listed** and **"can't be knocked down"** said long-time Nelson Bay resident and **Destination Port Stephens** board member Frank Future. "Army gunners manning the wartime armaments at **Fort Tomaree** lived in the waterfront villas. You can't knock those down," Mr Future said.

"I think the site lends itself to research, marine studies and accommodation, particularly for groups of children visiting the area."

According to the [NSW State Heritage Register](#), **Tomaree Lodge is a state significant heritage site due to its historical significance** - it was used as an Army Garrison Camp during WWII - high archaeological research value, representative value and for being a landmark at the entrance to Port Stephens.



*At the site of the old Tomaree Lodge wharf in Shoal Bay 2021
Tomaree Headland Heritage Group president Peter Clough,
Teresa Charchalis from Port Stephens Ferry Service and
Frank Future from Imagine Cruises*

Mr Future and Mr Clough floated the idea of **reinstating the wharf outside the lodge** when it was first closed in 2021.

The pair believe a floating pontoon, so ferry services could be used for transport, could go a long way towards addressing the parking and traffic management issues on Tomaree Headland.

The construction of a new wharf where a previous timber structure stood for some decades before being demolished in 2007 for safety reasons was [a "no brainer" to Mr Future](#).

Another [idea floated for Tomaree Lodge in 2012](#) was to turn it into a tourist development complete with casino, a five star, multi-storey resort and helicopter pad.

Tomaree Lodge began operating as a large residential disability centre in 2001.

It was slated for closure in 2013 when the NSW Government moved to shut all of the state's large residential centres - including the Stockton Centre and Kanangra at Morisset - at the same time as the NDIS was beginning.

The last Tomaree Lodge residents were moved out in May 2021.



The community is being invited to have their say about the future of the Tomaree Lodge site after a Worimi land claim was rejected in the Land and Environment Court.

RELATED READING

- [Worimi lose Tomaree Lodge claim, government opens community consultation on future use](#)
- [OPINION: Need for a roadmap now lodge is out of limbo](#)
- [Headland visitors not happy with lack of loos: survey](#)

Have your say

The Department of Communities and Justice is **now seeking comments and ideas from the community on the future use of the Tomaree Lodge site**.

Submissions are open for public comment until January 6, 2023.