

PORT STEPHENS News Of The Area

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Visitor numbers highlight traffic troubles



By Simon EKINS

THE summer holiday season has once again brought hordes of visitors to Port Stephens, sparking debate over ways to better manage traffic congestion.

As it has previously, the Tomaree Headland Heritage Group (THHG) set up "help desks" at Tomaree

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Visitor numbers spark traffic congestion debate

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Headland from Boxing Day into the new year, providing local information and directions to visitors.

Following these interactions, the THHG noted serious traffic problems at the Headland, which it says is exacerbated by poor driving habits and illegal camping.

Group president Peter Clough told NOTA that help desk volunteers witnessed ongoing safety risks as pedestrians and vehicles navigated the overcrowded headland site.

THHG solution suggestions include a shuttle bus to alleviate traffic congestion, or even a 'Park and Ride', as well as additional signage warning of limited parking options leading into the area.

THHG is set to meet in the near future with Port Stephens Council to discuss these concerns and other related issues.

Elsewhere, residents of Fingal Bay and Shoal Bay have once again debated the need for a bypass.

John Alexander of Fingal Bay is not supportive of the concept.

"I think the residents of Fingal Bay will deeply regret

supporting the construction of a bypass," John said.

"It will destroy the sleepy town that it currently is.

"Fingal Bay for most of the year is a quiet and sleepy little town surrounded by very busy hubs like Shoal Bay, Nelson Bay and Salamander.

"I strongly urge people to consider the impacts a bypass will bring before pushing for one."

Fingal Bay local Tori Poggioli however believes a bypass is much-needed.

"There are many events that could cause residents in Fingal Bay to be isolated, including coastal erosion at Shoal Bay, bushfires, flooding of the road at Shoal Bay.

"Even if there was a motor vehicle accident on the road at Shoal Bay it could block off the entire suburb as parts of the road are so narrow, it would make it difficult to get through."

Tori's main concern is emergency response times.

"This summer, there was one trip that took me 40 minutes to drive from Tomaree Hospital, where the traffic started to back up, to Fingal Bay, and there were so many cars jammed up in places, that even if there was an emergency vehicle close by, they would have struggled to

push through.

"A bypass would also reduce travel time to the CBD."

Pamela Smith argues that a bypass is long overdue, and has been "discussed, even planned, repeatedly over many years".

"Safety is an important issue because of the single and often congested road in and out of Fingal Bay," Pamela said.

"The road at Shoal Bay is slowly sinking into the sea and over time will require even more resources to stop that."

In a statement to NOTA on Monday, the Fingal Bay Community Association (FBCA) expressed serious concerns that Shoal Bay Road - the only road access to Shoal Bay and Fingal Bay - has been threatened recently by "significant erosion opposite Shoal Bay Avenue."

"A recent survey of the Fingal Bay community (167 responses) showed that this issue is of the highest priority and is, therefore, a major concern for our community," said FBCA President Heather Noonan.

"FBCA supports the actions of Tomaree Ratepayers and Residents Association and THHG in principle.

"Whilst a permanent access solution is required in the medium to long term,

a more urgent issue is access to Shoal Bay and Fingal Bay for emergency services in the event of an emergency or disaster.

"FBCA believes that the development of a contingency plan identifying alternate routes for emergency services, possibly using fire trails through the National Park, is the immediate priority."

Success of tourism Help Desks

"Help Desks" were set up by the THHG at Tomaree Headland for 12 days from Boxing Day into the new year, staffed by volunteers.

"The help desks have become more and more

popular and important particularly since the introduction of the Tomaree Coastal Walk which extends 27kms to Birubi Point," said Peter Clough, President of the THHG.

"Information on the Tomaree Headland summit walk and the appeal of the WWII military history including the gun emplacements are also extremely popular for visitors.

"Many people are fascinated by the opportunities for the future uses of the Tomaree Lodge particularly following the recent establishment of the Community Engagement

Committee by the NSW State Government which will provide an advisory role for future use of the Lodge particularly regarding the long term planning.

"The Tomaree Headland Group has welcomed the opportunity of being represented on this committee. The Help Desks will continue to provide an invaluable source of information for the new Community Engagement Committee, the NSW State Government, Destination Port Stephens, the Tomaree National Park authority and Port Stephens Council.

