

'BETTER ACCESS' Call for public to join committee

How to get involved in the future of Tomaree Lodge

Matthew Kelly

PORT Stephens residents will be invited to become directly involved in planning for the future use of the historic Tomaree Lodge.

The state government has committed to ensuring the site is retained for community use and public enjoyment.

It follows the release on Thursday of a report containing the findings of community consultation into potential future uses for the disused disability centre.

In the short term, site access and amenities will be improved as part of a plan to enhance the community and visitor experience. A Community Engagement Committee will be established in the coming weeks, with a call for members of the public to join via an Expression of Interest.

"This site is an incredible piece of Port Stephens, and I know how deeply the local community cares about its future," Minister for Families and Communities and Minister for Disability Inclusion Kate Washington said.

"These immediate improvements will mean that local families and visitors can enjoy better access to amenities when they visit the Tomaree Headland. We are committed to working with local stakeholders regarding the future use of this significant site, and we are ensuring that the community is involved throughout the process by having members of the public join the new Community En-

gagement Committee."

Department of Communities and Justice, which conducted the community consultation, identified a range of improvements following a recent site visit with the Worimi Local Aboriginal Land Council, the Tomaree Headland Heritage Group, the University of Newcastle, Port Stephens Council and the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

They include:

- || new signage to improve wayfinding for people accessing the numerous walking trails
- || Improving community access and amenity, including the installation of two beach showers
- || A vibrant new mural at the entrance of the site to welcome visitors
- || Improving information on site, including sharing the history of this unique location
- || Identifying areas that may be used for key community events
- || Investigating the potential to open access to parking on site

Ms Washington said any decisions made about the site's future must be carefully considered and preserve the site's integrity, as well as protect the adjacent marine and national park.

"There are so many exciting opportunities ahead for the Tomaree Lodge site, and I'm looking forward to working with our community to ensure we realise the full potential of



The community has been invited to have a hand in planning the future of Tomaree Lodge at Port Stephens.

this special site," she said.

"By working together, we will ensure everyone continues to appreciate and enjoy this spectacular destination."

Taylor Martin MLC welcomed the report's release.

"I hope that the government moves in a hasty manner to allow Tomaree Lodge to once again be a positive community asset," he said.

"I will be maintaining a watching brief regarding the future use of Tomaree Lodge and I expect the government to act in a timely manner."

The *Newcastle Herald* reported last December that the government was spending \$1 million a year on security and maintenance at the site.

Port Stephens Council has also expressed an interest in taking a strategic leadership role in the site's future.

A motion, moved by mayor Ryan Palmer last year, said the council would "explore operational options and future management options that do not negatively affect council's finances, with the community, the Tomaree Headland Heritage Group and any other interested groups".