

## Forum – Narrabeen Lagoon Catchment

### Tramshed, Narrabeen Lagoon

Thu 6 Nov 2008

#### Presentation by Andrew Cox, NPA Executive Officer

##### **Bio - About Andrew Cox:**

*Andrew Cox is Executive Officer of National Parks Association of NSW, a position he has held for eight years. In this role he has had extensive experience in campaigning for the expansion and improved management for the NSW national parks system. He is on the board of the Environmental Defenders Office and worked for NPWS for over four years until 2000.*

##### **Values**

The Narrabeen Lagoon Catchment is one of those exceptional places that have survived almost by accident.

Right here in the midst of suburbia we have an oasis of bushland. It serves as the filter that keeps Narrabeen Lagoon relatively clean.

What do we know about the bushland?

There are a number of threatened species and several threatened ecological communities.

When NPA conducted a biodiversity survey in part of the catchment, we found the powerful owl, the heath monitor, *Eucalyptus camfieldii* and *Tetratheca glandulosa* for instance. The survey by the Dept of Lands identified several threatened ecological communities such as Bangalay alluvial forest, Water Fern swamp and Palm Woodland.

There are many important bird species including the Osprey and a number of migratory species.

The scenic beauty of the natural bushland areas is valued highly by the community as recorded by a number of community surveys. In fact, Warringah Council has notices on their walls in their administrative offices acknowledging what the community values the most: i.e. the area's bushland and beaches.

There is high Aboriginal Heritage. Over 450 recorded sites of significance in the area.

[Refer to maps and show tenure and level of protection. Describe the catchment area of Narrabeen Lagoon: the area bounded by Mona Vale Rd, Forest Way, Warringah Rd and the coast. There is a large section of Garigal National Park within the area that if it is significantly enlarged can form a large viable patch of bushland. The area or bushland also linked to Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park, with Wakehurst Parkway and Mona Vale Rd being the only real barriers for wildlife movement. The whole of the Narrabeen

Lagoon Catchment including Warriewood Valley and its wetlands drain to Narrabeen Lagoon.]

## **Threats**

### a) Mismanagement of public lands

Department of Lands are investigating selling off its lands for housing. Already, since the gazettal of the Oxford Falls Regional Crown Reserve they have sold off 1 lot. While we don't support the sale of all but one or two lots, the proceeds from the sale were meant to be used to manage the lands. We have not been able to confirm if the proceeds of the sales have been retained for this purpose.

There is no clear management plan to conserve the conservation values of the lands managed by Department of Lands. Nowhere in NSW have Department of Lands been able to demonstrate that they are a credible land manager.

Department of Lands use a management model that requires its land to generate funds for management. In the case of Oxford Falls Regional Crown Reserve, it means that it needs to sell off parcels of the land in order to fund the management of the rest of the Crown Reserve. With these sorts of pressures and the ability of Dept of Lands to sell off any of the land parcels in the Crown Reserves, it doesn't inspire confidence that all the bushland will be retained in public ownership and permanently protected.

### b) Extra citizens:

Warringah Council has been under pressure from the State Government to provide extra housing.

Sydney Metro strategy – North East Subregion plan says:

“There is no necessity for the development of non-urban lands (not already identified on the metropolitan development program) to meet the dwelling targets for the North East Subregion to 2031.”

That's enough land for the next 23 years!

[Refer to map of the North East Subregion land release areas, noting that the main land release area is Ingleside that has been flagged for a long period and that Narrabeen Lagoon catchment is designated as non-urban land not required for future housing]

### c) Landholders as developers

Most of the land is not zoned for housing. Large areas are zoned as rural residential (2b). This hasn't stopped landholders trying to maximise their economic return by putting forward major housing proposals.

[refer to development map with these five areas marked]

There are five major areas with active development proposals

1. Syd Londish is proposing an entire village for 1600 dwellings, complete with a shopping centre and restaurant in Oxford Falls Valley
2. The Catholic Church is seeking to develop land at Red Hill in the Wheeler Creek Valley for 240 town houses.
3. Cromer Golf Club is proposing new houses on 13 ha of its land
4. The Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council intends to build 430 houses on part of their land
5. RSL Retirement Village adjacent to Jamieson Park seeks to extend its existing retirement village. This together with the asset protection zone for bushfires will mean the clearing of tracts of bushland between the retirement village and Narrabeen Lagoon.

The first four of these proposals are proceeding under the streamlined Part 3A approval process. Items 2, 3 and 4 are zoned rural residential 2b, meaning they would normally not be permitted under the local environmental planning and would be rejected by Council unless the plan was changed.

There are also proposals for other new retirement villages at Red Hill and Cromer Heights.

d) Siltation, erosion and pollution:

Housing and commercial developments have already been permitted in the catchment, particularly along the higher sections of the land. Erosion, siltation and nutrient runoff will accumulate for each further development.

e) Recreational pursuits:

Modern lifestyles are resulting in people having more leisure time and more money to spend on recreational pursuits. This has resulted in severe impacts on the bushland from 4WD vehicles, trail bikes, horses and mountain bikes.

Once the land is permanently protected, there is a need to develop tracks and other facilities for sustainable recreation. This can be complemented by an education program to educate the public on how to care for natural bushland to ensure it is still available for recreation for coming generations. There is an urgent need for rangers to be employed to specifically work within the catchment of Narrabeen Lagoon to put in place and maintain the visitor facilities and enforce the rules.

f) Invasive Species – weeds and feral animals

This is a major challenge for the bushland suffering from years of neglect and refusal to take responsibility. Significant parts of the bushland have major infestations of highly invasive exotic weeds, especially on the urban interface and along the creeks draining from urban catchments.

Warringah Council and the community has shown real leadership in this area by tackling some of the worst areas and restoring a weed-free bushland.

The level of weeds has been used as an excuse not to protect the area in national park. What happens if nobody takes ownership of the problem and refuses to manage the area? We can't let this happen.

Foxes and cats pose a threat to small mammals and birds. Their control is necessary to allow the small mammals such as bandicoots to repopulate the area.

## **Promises**

In April 2005, the Minister for the Environment promised that 72 percent of the Crown Land between Cromer and Belrose would be conserved forever for environmental protection and community purposes.

Warringah Council has been talking for several years of putting in place incentives for private landowners to conserve natural bushland on their properties. This has yet to become a reality but maybe the newly elected council will bring this into reality. Pittwater Council would do well to do likewise.

## **Solutions**

### Public land

The simplest thing is for the NSW Government to order the transfer of land from Department of Lands to NPWS and reserve it as an extension to Garigal National Park. This is the preferred option because as a national park there are binding management principles that require management for conservation. The national park designation, even if it's just removing a metre, cannot be revoked except with an Act of Parliament. You cannot get much stronger than that!

Another option is to create it as a Regional Park, also under the National Parks and Wildlife Act and is just as secure as a national park, but has broader management principles that focus more on recreation.

This could involve a joint Aboriginal management model. There are a number of examples to draw on from around NSW and Australia. In NSW there are specific provisions that allow Aboriginal ownership and joint management. Examples of good models include Mutawintji NP that is Aboriginal owned and jointly managed by a board that includes Aboriginal traditional owners, Willandra National Park that has a special advisory committee and Arakwal State Conservation Area at Cape Byron. The arrangements should be determined in consultation with traditional owners.

How is a national park created? To put this into effect the legal process is actually simple. The Minister for the Environment gains Cabinet approval and a notice is published in the NSW Government Gazette describing the area to be added to the park.

In reality, this requires all arms of Government to agree. This includes Department of Lands, Treasury, NPWS/DECC, Planning Department, Emergency Services, Primary

Industries (including the mineral resources and fisheries arms). The views of the local government are also important.

NPA has had much experience in removing the impediments to national park creation – 51 years experience in fact!

We cannot wait for the Government departments to come to agreement. It is extremely unlikely they will do this on their own. NPWS make this even harder because they are unwilling to receive the land since they see the conservation values as too low and the management issues as being too problematic.

Government will act when there is a loud and clear voice from the community, despite what anybody in a Government department tells you. This is the opportunity for you. Mobilise and push on every direction you can. Engage anybody that has influence on Government.

### Private land

Council can rezone the land for environmental protection. The currently proposed E3 rating is not a sufficient level of protection for areas of high conservation value such as most of the bushland we are discussing tonight – E2 would be more appropriate. This will require the cooperation of the NSW Planning Minister.

The NSW Government can offer support for Voluntary Conservation Agreements. NPA already has an agreement in place for the 5 ha of land it owns in the Wheeler Creek catchment. The agreement is entered into voluntarily, but once entered, the landholder, and future landholders, are bound to manage that part of their land for conservation.

This can apply to the Local Aboriginal Land Council land too.

DECC can purchase key areas of private land for addition to the national park estate. This will be expensive and may cost many millions of dollars, but has been done before. It could be targeted to key blocks of land and complement other measures.

For the Local Aboriginal Land Council, it provides them with needed financial support and removes the need to develop their land.

### **Wrap-up**

What to do next...

Support the Friends of Narrabeen Lagoon Catchment and the Sydney Branch campaign to permanently protect all of the bushland as an addition to Garrigal National Park and to put in place protection for the private lands.

This is the only way that we will be able to rest easy knowing that Narrabeen Lagoon will stay healthy and the bushland catchment can be an important oasis long into the future.