



ANNUAL REPORT

'A Great Lifestyle in a Treasured Environment'

Thank you ladies and gentlemen.

On behalf of your 2009 Committee I thank you for your attendance tonight.

I also thank you for the support you have given us by your attendance at many forums and meetings, where we have endeavoured to communicate the Tomaree community view to councillors, council and state government across a broad range of issues and concerns.

By virtue of the fact that you are members of this Association, you are clearly demonstrating your interest in the community and the environment in which we live. You are interested in its future growth and development, both in the public and the private sectors. You are seeking a forum for discussion and a representative voice, of your values, opinions and concerns.

COMMITTEE – 2009

Your Committee has been fully committed to achieving the aims and objectives of the Association and, whilst at times we have all felt that our voice has fallen on deaf ears, we have achieved some excellent results and made some significant inroads into ensuring that council is more responsible in responding to community input.

This has not always been easy, particularly where we have a very public dispute between councillors, where the Mayor has changed the rules, where decisions are made without referring matters to the whole council, where our assets can be sold without full public scrutiny and where payments are made that subsidise poor or inappropriate development.

Only public interest and effort can put things back on the rails and your 2010 Committee will face many challenges in the year ahead. I am certain they will embrace those challenges and continue to demonstrate that this Association is accepted as a driver in key areas of economic, social, cultural and environmental processes and remains non political, non aligned and an independent voice for our members and the community at large.

As Chairman, I personally thank the outgoing Committee for their support, knowledge, expertise and guidance over the past 12 months. They have all made some significant contributions and their unstinting effort has cemented TRRA into the future of Tomaree. Without each and everyone's involvement, we would not have achieved the results we have, not only in the interests of our members, but for all ratepayers and residents of the Peninsula.

Whilst this years Committee stands down at the end of this report, most are standing for re-election. This demonstrates their ongoing level of commitment to the Association and to this community.

Keith Brabham, Warren Parkinson and Judy Washington have decided not to stand due to personal commitments and I would particularly like to thank and congratulate them for their involvement over the past term.

12 MONTHS OF ACTIVITY

As an Association we have been exceptionally active. We have finalised a number of detailed reports, attended numerous council and councillor meetings and forums and participated in many discussions with council planners.

This does not come without our own internal management and planning and to give you some indication, we have concluded: -

- 11 TRRA general monthly meetings
- 15 Committee meetings
- 10 Sub-committees (with associated planning sessions)
- 38 Special Group committee meetings
- 12 Meetings with council and/or councillors
- 6 Direct discussions with the Department of Local Government and
- 5 Consultations with the Department of Planning and Department for the Environment and Climate Change.

We have also continued to build our relationships with other local community groups. We strongly supported and extended the Nelson Bay Business Chamber in its Graffiti initiative, and have recently joined with the Business Chamber, Nelson Bay Town Management, Port Stephens Tourism and the Eco Network to form the Nelson Bay Advisory Group. This Group has been formed so that we can unite together in correcting the critical issues surrounding the survival of the Nelson Bay Town Centre and the push for growth in the Marina precinct.

It is also pleasing to note that a significant number of our members are also on the council Residents Panel.

It is through these avenues that we all hope the views and opinions of the community are heard, and acted upon, by all our councillors and council staff.

MEETINGS/DELEGATIONS

There have been a significant number of meetings and representations, made on your behalf.

We have been consistent in getting the message through that our expectations are for better and improved infrastructure, more attention to detail and planning, better quality development, a proper understanding of all environmental and ecological impacts and a sound and thorough process that takes fully into consideration the future of Tomaree.

CONSULTANTS/FORUMS

We have also ensured that the TRRA position has been clearly articulated by attending the 3 Futures Forums and have had further input directly with council as to the strength and direction of such a vital strategic document. These discussions are ongoing.

We spent a full day with the Nelson Bay 2030 Strategy planning consultant and, as you are all aware, have now raised some significant concerns as to the proposals contained within his report. Following this AGM, this matter will be open for further discussion.

Likewise, we have met with, and passed detailed comment to, the council appointed Tourism Consultant, attended all Business Chamber Breakfasts and have delivered presentations to the local branch of the Liberal Party and the Port Stephens 'Open Forum', which included both our Federal and State members, other parliamentarians councillors and local business executives.

MEDIA AND PUBLIC RELATIONS

We continue to receive growing media coverage and to this end Judy Washington, as our outgoing PR Officer, has ensured that the Association has been kept at the forefront with leading edge and provocative Press Releases.

Yes, some have labelled us as a 'minority group' and sometimes comment by others has been made on the basis that we are anti development, drama queens, or a bunch of cranky old men. Nothing could be further from the truth and, as we have told our critics, our position remains unaltered...we expect and will continue to insist on... proper planning, transparency, full public consultation and a decision making process that is in the best long term interests of this community.

TRRA has and will support *quality* development that delivers benefits to all sectors of the community. We have been labelled as 'aggressive', which, if we have to be to achieve the best end result, we will continue to do so.

Our position and acceptance by the media is demonstrated by their many calls for comment and, as I stand here today, TRRA has become the 'Tiger of Tomaree' by questioning many directions of council that do not necessarily deliver the best long term benefits, but more so are very short term, quick fix and potentially financially irresponsible decisions.

www.trra.com.au

At our 2008 AGM, I announced that our Website would be up and running by Christmas.

This target was achieved and, since its inception we have had numerous enquiries, as to our activities, from other similar Community Groups. We have also had contact from residents at Medowie, Lemon Tree Passage, Raymond Terrace and Fern Bay to assist them in their dealings with council, as our website and media coverage has shown them that we are a united, organised, professional and pro-active Association.

There is a ground swell out there as to how council is being managed and how ratepayers' money is being invested or spent. Most are not happy!

Credit must go to Louise French, our Webmaster for the superlative job she has done in keeping the site fully up to date. It is arguably the best Community Group Website to be found on the Net.

MEMBER MONTHLY MEETINGS

Your Committee has also deliberated and arranged for a number of significant speakers to address our monthly meetings. Again, not an easy task, as we have sought to provide members and guests with speakers and topics that would engender community awareness and debate across a broad range of issues.

We filled the house when we invited the newly elected Mayor to address the Association. His election platform was to *'bring the council back to the community'*.

He re-iterated this at our meeting and has since failed to meet that commitment. In fact, he has divided his fellow councillors, council and the community and accuses councillors of :

'acting on behalf of us (TRRA) and 'other folk'. Or:

'As far as I'm concerned (Cr Ward) can go jump in the creek'

This is a man who has twice been investigated by the Department of Local Government during his colourful council career, this is a man who states councillors were:

'behaving like school children" and could 'piss off'.

Such comments, in any other council, would constitute a breach of their Code of Conduct – apparently not at Port Stephens.

Superintendent Charles Haggart was well received with his address on the future and structure of the Port Stephens Police Command, Crime and Vandalism,

Our Graffiti evening, *'The Good, The Bad and The Ugly'*, certainly opened the floor for some heated discussion.

In the second half of this year, and following councils' appointment of a Tourism Consultant, we invited the Chair of Port Stephens Tourism to present a paper on the Future and Growth of Tourism in Port Stephens.

Another 'house filler' was the presentation by the council holiday parks manager on the future planning and development options of the community owned caravan parks. Because these parks occupy iconic beachfront locations, TRRA consider they deserve careful planning to ensure protection of the special values of these sites and that any changes are in the best interests of Port Stephens tourism.

We have called upon Port Stephens Council to defer finalizing plans until it received the recommendations of the Tourism Strategy and have also requested council to make available, to the public, financial feasibility studies justifying the investment. Representations have also made to Council and the Minister for Lands opposing the alienation of the public parkland adjoining Halifax Park.

REPORTS

I must congratulate everyone who provided views and input into the various detailed Reports we have finalised and submitted. I can assure you they were well received by council staff as being professional, well researched and documented, with sensible, achievable concepts and outcomes.

Congratulations specifically should go to Geoff Washington who was the final 'scribe' for the Nelson Bay 2030 commentary, the Futures Strategy, the Waterfront Masterplan and the Port Stephens Tourism Report.

Also, Sue Leach Maxwell took the lead on our response to the Port Stephens Cultural Plan, which was considered '*superb*' and where Councillor Tucker stated publicly, on at least two occasions, that:

'as far as I am concerned, council should trash theirs and adopt the Strategy submitted by TRRA'.

We were also committed to provide detailed comment on numerous 'other' issues that occurred during the year. I will not go into detail but the list on the screen is indicative of those that needed to be addressed. Otherwise, this community and the future community would have been severely short changed.

I must thank Peter Quirk for his valued assistance to research, formulating some of these commentaries and attendance, with me, at many meetings and discussions.

And to Geoff Bassar, through his involvement with Nelson Bay Rotary, who are working toward an upgrade of Gan Gan Lookout. Again, there are the 'usual' frustrations and delays with council, but some work has commenced - albeit unfortunate that we enter another peak tourist period without this iconic location being properly presented, managed and patrolled.

We have, last week, submitted on the proposed subdivision and land sale surrounding Salamander Shopping Centre. Let me re-iterate, we do not oppose any sale culminating in improved commercial, retail and service outlets. In fact we welcome it! But, we do expect proper consultation where the sale of public assets is concerned, transparency in the selling process and an understanding of just how and what community facilities will be provided, enhanced and located.

We have itemised a series of objectives that ought to be fully considered prior to any DA approval and support Councillor Nell's call for a Masterplan to be completed for the precinct as being the only proper way that this area should be developed.

THE BIG TICKS

So where have we been successful in 2009?

Its good news on many levels, but to me it's also a great motivator, a spur and a reminder that we need to set ourselves up and maintain the momentum we have carried since our inception just two years ago. I believe we are entering another stage and holding a light to our council and councillors for better, more transparent, management of community affairs and assets.

We've come a long way, and we are starting to turn it on its head, not only to achieve change for Tomaree, but also to change the *perception* of Tomaree and we are certainly attracting the interest of larger sections of our community.

There was a massive undercurrent within the community surrounding the New Years Eve 'Rave' party at Fly Point. TRRA representations were strong and, although we did not object to an alternative venue, it was our position that Fly Point be fully available for community activity and more family oriented New Years Eve entertainment.

Council were prepared to allow full road development fronting Port Stephens Drive. TRRA achieved a vegetated buffer so that unsightly industrial development is screened and that a vegetated koala corridor to both sides of the road is retained.

You will be aware of the upgrading to the foreshore at Nelson Bay and we will continue to push for these works to continue through to Little Beach. The catalyst for this was a damning report sent to council, by TRRA, as to their ongoing neglect to our beach and waterfront locations.

Out of frustration, due to a lack of a proper Graffiti Plan of Management and initiative by council, Keith Brabham, in conjunction with Councillor Dover, has implemented the Port Stephens Graffiti Action Group. This is a force of primarily TRRA members and is working conscientiously toward reducing the massive graffiti problem throughout Tomaree.

We continue to be frustrated by the Nelson Bay 2030 Strategy and the Port Stephens Futures Plan, but we can say that this organization has prompted both these strategies to be properly investigated, debated and, prior to any implementation, be agreed fully, by the community.

And, we were approached mid year by council, to meet with their Executive staff, on a quarterly basis, to table and resolve many of the issues of concern *before*, rather than *after* the event. So we have managed to get our feet in the door at council, although it is somewhat difficult to obtain the same with all our councillors, some of whom see us as a thorn in their side, rather than a committed group who are only wanting to work closely to achieve, with them, the best outcomes for all.

We also, aggressively, opposed council's ambition for high-rise development, particularly in Nelson Bay and their questionable move toward Public Private Partnership development. This has now, not proceeded or at least been put on the 'back burner'.

We sent an 'Open Letter' to councillors as to their responsibility to their community, the need for proper and transparent process, particularly in planning decisions, and made the Department of Local Government well aware of the frustrations and very public criticism of our councillors, by the Mayor, when they are doing nothing else than the role they were elected for, and that is to look after the proper interests of their constituents.

Finally, we supported council with a TRRA submission on the Duralie Mines expansion near Stroud, in as much as, all contaminated water must be contained and not discharged into the river system that will eventually enter Port Stephens, with its associated environmental and ecological impacts.

As an aside, we lost on our submission relating to a DA approval for a resort development on land (or I should say, sand dunes) at Gan Gan Road, Anna Bay. I won't go into details on this application or our submission, as it is available on our website. It was brought to our attention, after receiving calls from concerned residents, as to what exactly was happening at Anna Bay. We were told the Mayor had mentioned at the Futures Forum that a Resort Application at Anna Bay would be approved within 6 weeks.

They raised concerns, because an Application had been rejected previously, not only by council, but also by the Department of Planning. It was also indicated that land worth around \$300,000 would be worth about \$3 million with an approved DA, and surely a rushed process, with scant attention to detail and without the knowledge of councillors and I might add, senior council executives, was totally inappropriate.

Again, let me state, we do not object to a quality development at Anna Bay of resort style facilities. We raised our concerns as to why the Rural 1a land had not been re-zoned to correctly support an intense tourism usage; the need for this development to be integrated with an entire Birubi development plan and questioned why a similar previous Application was not supported by the Department of Planning.

We also questioned why, when we asked our councillors for detail, they knew nothing about it and discovered it was being processed internally by council planning staff under delegated authority. Over Christmas last year, land opposite, for similar rental style accommodation was also approved under delegated authority - no advertising, no public opportunity for consultation or comment, and without the knowledge of our councillors.

Now, if you examine the minutes of the council meeting when we managed to have it brought before our councillors, you will find that the Applicant was number 4 on the West Ward Group A Electoral Team of now Councillors Jordan and Maher. Approval for the Application was moved by Jordan and seconded by Maher. We contend they should have abstained from voting and in fact when this was under discussion and voted upon, should have left the council chamber entirely.

This is just one example of the ethics we currently have to endure under this current council and, the Department of Local Government might yet still intervene, as well they should.

EVENTS/ACTIVITIES

We also actively promoted and participated in the annual 'Clean Up Australia Day' as well as the council run Stockton Beach clean up, raised some \$600 for the Victorian Bushfire Appeal and, to assist in the operational costs of the Association, arranged for members and guests to attend two movie premiere evenings at the Nelson Bay Cinema.

SUB COMMITTEES – OPERATIONAL

As I mentioned earlier, this does not all happen without the 'behind the scenes' planning and implementation for which we have four standing 'Operational' Sub-Committees and seven current 'Issues' Groups.

Naturally these 'issues' groups change as needs arise and, apart from the total involvement of your Committee, who have taken the running of these, there has been some significant involvement from many members who have provided their knowledge and expertise in the preparation of our correspondence, reports and agendas for discussion.

I should specifically thank both Nigel Waters and Simon Brooke who have brought their professional expertise and planning experience to assist with all of our submissions and reports.

Our thanks are also due to Minutes Secretary, Fran Digges, for her accurate recording of both our general and management meetings.

We welcome your involvement and for any member, who wants to put forward ideas or detailed comment, please contact any of your Executive Committee.

THE 'COMMON SENSE' TEST

The end question is this.

Once all the consultants' views and opinions are put, once council has assessed and made its recommendations, no matter how good it all looks on paper, how wonderful it appears to be or whether it might win or lose valuable votes at the next election, we ask of our councillors:

– Does it Pass the Common Sense Test? –

If it doesn't, then why go down the road of rushed and not properly investigated approvals with potential future frustration, future litigation, future environmental issues and future financial impacts on the ratepayers of our community?

The focus should be, not only to get it right in the first instance, but also to embrace the future and position Tomaree uniquely, as a desirable place to live work and play.

FINALLY,

On behalf of the outgoing Committee, I thank you for your support and involvement, as well as your considered views and opinions, which assisted us to act on your behalf throughout the past 12 months.

Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you. It has been a busy and eventful year and I suspect that the next 12 months will be no different.

Robert Young, Chairman, 2009