



# **DRAFT HOLIDAY PARKS PLANS OF MANAGEMENT**

**Halifax, Shoal Bay & Fingal Bay**



**Submission by  
Tomaree Ratepayers and Residents  
Association (TRRA)**

**30 September 2009**

# Introduction

TRRA seeks to represent the interests of ratepayers and residents on the Tomaree Peninsula. Accordingly, the Association considers planning and policy initiatives which may impact on the local economy, the integrity of the environment or the lifestyles of residents. It offers comment where it identifies matters of concern or where it believes that it is able to make a positive contribution to the planning process. Details of our organization and objectives are provided in our website [www.trra.com.au](http://www.trra.com.au).

TRRA includes members with a wide range of professional skills and experience including local government, business management, marketing, town planning, environmental science, heritage conservation, public policy, economics, tourism, property development and social science. TRRA has made submissions on major planning initiatives over the last two years including:

- Nelson Bay 2030 Strategy
- Port Stephens Futures Project
- Nelson Bay Foreshore Plan
- Waterfront Masterplan (Corlette to Shoal Bay)
- Tourism Strategic Plan
- Port Stephens Cultural Plan

Copies of our submissions on these key strategies and plans are available on our website.

TRRA has decided to make this submission on the Draft Holiday Park Plans because:

- We believe the three caravan park sites involved are at the top of the list of iconic locations on the Tomaree Peninsula. These deserve planning which takes into account regional and even national values. Put simply, these sites are out of the ordinary in terms of their physical beauty, access to the “Blue Water Paradise”, and their potential for the Port Stephens tourism industry.
- We seek to ensure that the planning for the future of the sites takes into account the “big picture” opportunities which are emerging from the Port Stephens Futures Plan, the Waterfront Masterplan and the Tourism Strategy.
- We are concerned that the proposed developments on the sites, including substantial investments in “Holiday Park” cabins and associated infrastructure are not supported by costings or financial analysis which demonstrate an acceptable rate of return to Council, the State government or in the eyes of the community.
- We have received complaints from affected neighbours and concerned citizens in the vicinity of the parks, particularly relating to the proposed take-over of public parklands.

# Our Submission

## Plan of Management Objectives

TRRA questions who is setting the objectives for these three plans, the NSW Department of Lands or Port Stephens Council?

Community comments were invited by a press release issued by the Department of Lands and it is understood that the costs for retaining the consultants to prepare the plans were met from a grant from that Department.

While no specific objectives are included in the draft plans, there is a list of “outcomes” in the introduction.

We note that a key “**outcome**” is “**enhanced turnover and profits for the caravan parks which can be returned to the trust manager and the Crown.**” From our review of the plans it appears that this is the driving motivation for the management plans and for the proposed increase in allocation of space to cabin accommodation in place of caravan and camping sites.

TRRA’s understanding has been that a significant objective for the allocation of prime coastal Crown land to caravan parks has been to provide affordable holiday options for the less well off in our community, particularly families. The majority of our community would see this as reasonable. This objective is not given prominence in the Draft Plans which, to the contrary, propose a shift in the balance of allocated space to favour cabins with tariffs pitched at the higher end of the market.

It is claimed on page 1 that “a co-ordinated management strategy will deliver better outcomes to the region”. TRRA asks that this claim be backed up by some economic and financial evidence. TRRA concludes that the Draft Plans focus almost entirely on the business future of the three parks. There is no recognition of the critical importance of the parks and, in particular, the prime sites they occupy, to the tourist industry generally and the economy of the Tomaree Peninsula. For example, no serious analysis is provided as to the long-term contribution of the proposed developments to the economy and employment base of the region.

On page 1 reference is made to the creation of a “Regional Crown Reserve” which “will better balance the public enjoyment of Crown Land in the area with the protection of environmentally important areas”. In this regard TRRA believes that the balance is already too heavily weighted in favour of caravan parks occupying prime coastal sites. The proposed take-over of a public park for holiday park cabins to the east of Halifax Park further weighs the balance against public enjoyment of Crown Lands.

The Plans fail to show how the substantial increase in allocation of space to cabins helps to “protect environmentally important areas”. The proposed take-over of the parkland East of Halifax Park would have a serious negative impact as many trees would need to be removed and the site would be covered by buildings and associated hard surfaces. No reference is made to the management of visitors’ movements to adjoining beach areas or to traffic and parking implications.

## Consultation

Appendix A details the consultation undertaken for planning process. This was limited to:

- **The NSW Department of Lands**
- **The Port Stephens Council Holiday Park Advisory Council ,and**
- **The Port Stephens Caravan and Campers Association**

TRRA is of the view this consultation is confined to those with a specific interest in occupying the park sites or extracting profits or revenue from associated businesses in caravan parks.

We contend that the consultation should have included:

- **Port Stephens Tourism Ltd**
- **Environmental interests**
- **The Shoal Bay and Fingal Bay Section 355 B Committees**
- **Local residents**
- **TRRA**
- **Nelson Bay Chamber of Commerce and the Town Management Committee**

This wider consultation could have revealed:

- the potential of these sites beyond the current use as caravan/holiday parks and
- the serious concerns of neighbouring residents and environmental interests.

## Other Strategic Planning Initiatives

The three Draft Plans of Management have been written without reference to other major planning initiatives commissioned by the Department of Lands (DOL) or the Port Stephens Council (PSC) which have been completed or are nearing completion.

The DOL **Waterfront Masterplan** has been in preparation over the last two years and relates to all “public lands” from Corlette to Shoal Bay. Halifax and Shoal Bay Parks were subject to this planning process and significant recommendations were made in relation to options for future land use and/or business opportunities at or adjacent to these sites. TRRA did not support a suggestion that the triangular reserves east of Halifax Caravan Park might be used for commercial development. In the case of Shoal Bay the eastern end of the caravan park and adjoining Crown Land was identified as a site for possible commercial development

(page 39). TRRA has suggested in its submission to the tourism strategy that this could be considered as a site for a resort hotel.

The PSC **Futures Strategy** planning cites the Lower Hunter Development Strategy which envisages an (almost) doubling of the population on the Tomaree Peninsula by 2031. TRRA questions the wisdom of this without much expansion of local employment and nominated the tourism industry as the only obvious possibility to generate these jobs. We contend that caravan park/cabin development on our key waterfront sites won't deliver the optimum economic and job outcomes.

Why not wait for the Futures Strategy visions on how the region's assets are to be developed before committing our key sites to Holiday Park development?

Council has expert consultants working on a **Tourism Strategy** due in November 2009. TRRA is hopeful that this report will provide detailed market analysis and recommendations on the tourist facilities which are best suited to optimise the region's potential.

Why not wait for this report before committing to management plans conceived without the benefit of this professional tourism advice?

## **Financial Benefits**

The Management Plans do not provide any detail as to the current profitability of their operations or of the projected returns from the proposed significant investment in cabins to replace caravan and camping sites. On page 2 of the Halifax Park draft plan reference is made to the preparation of a "business plan" for each of the three parks that "outlines the integrated and consolidated approach to achieving the outcomes recommended in the Master Plan". TRRA assumes that these plans include financial feasibility assessments of the three parks including a comparison of rates of return on the various uses of land within the parks ie. cabins, on-site vans, caravan sites and camping sites. The analysis should also examine the rates of return on proposed new development of up-market cabins and of new areas proposed on existing public parkland adjoining Halifax Park.

Most importantly, any financial analysis should impute a market rental for the prime land occupied by the parks based on a freehold land value. Without this, no sensible comparison can be made in relation to alternative uses and it is impossible to assess the extent of "unfair" competition with private investors in tourism projects.

TRRA requests that these business plans be made available to enable public scrutiny of potential Council investment.

TRRA notes that the Crown Lands Act requires that the proceeds of commercial undertakings on reserved Crown Land be spent on the management of reserved Crown Land. TRRA understands that the bulk of revenue from the three parks either goes to the NSW

Consolidated Revenue (5% of turnover) or is ploughed back into the caravan parks. Some revenue has been invested in improvements to crown reserves. **TRRA believes that the details of the expenditure of these revenues over the past decade should be made available to the public and to councilors to enable a sensible judgment on the likely benefits from the proposed future developments.**

**In the absence of this information TRRA believes that Councillors, the State Government, the private sector tourism industry and the community are not in a position to make an informed decision on the Draft Plans.**

If there had been consultation with the wider private tourism interests, the issue of unfair competition may have been raised. TRRA queries whether it is appropriate for Council to significantly increase the proportion of higher quality cabins on public lands in the choicest locations which directly compete with the private sector providers. This must discourage private investors in commercial resort/hotel/ motel and caravan park developments who face high land acquisition costs and rigorous planning compliance.

## **The Plans**

Until the broad objectives for the caravan parks are clearly stated and accepted by the council and the community TRRA does not believe that it can comment usefully to the specific draft plans as exhibited.

If there is to be a strategy to plan the future of the three parks as an integrated whole there should be consideration of the pros and cons of striving to group the various classes of accommodation together. The proposal seems to make Halifax mainly cabins and Fingal the caravan and camping centre, although the area assigned to camping appears minimal.

The large areas of holiday van sites (mostly long-term occupants) should be carefully assessed in relation to the overall objectives and issues of equity. Where such sites border public roads and spaces, e.g. on the eastern boundary of Shoal Bay park, the visual amenity of the tourist precinct is degraded by the poorly maintained and jerry built annexes etc.

**In the case of Halifax Park, TRRA wishes to register its strong opposition to the proposed take-over of the triangular public reserve to the East for the construction of cabins.** Apart from an in principle objection to alienation of public parkland in urban areas, TRRA is aware of the significance of this land for nature conservation. We draw attention to the Flora and Fauna Assessment of Anzac park , April 2005, Ref. GFF 05076 recommending that this particular area be preserved as a wildlife corridor. This open space provides an essential buffer between the intensive activity of the caravan park and the residential apartments to the east. It also provides a pleasant recreational/picnic area in a very heavily used recreational zone.

**TRRA opposes the proposed sale of land adjoining Shoal Bay caravan park “to generate capital to provide additional on-site accommodation”.** We believe that all public land in this prime location may be critical to longer term development plans either within the park itself, or in any scheme to radically reconfigure land use in this area already identified as having commercial potential in the DOL Waterfront Masterplan.

## **Planning Policies and Controls**

On pages 7-10 the Draft Management Plan provides details of a number of State and Port Stephens Council planning policies and controls.

TRRA considers that the proposed developments for the parks are inconsistent with many of the objectives of these documents for example, SEPP 71 items (j), (k), and (l); the objectives of the Port Stephens Local Environmental Plan 2000, for the General Recreation “A” zone.

TRRA would expect that the scale and nature of the proposed developments should be subject to a development application and questions whether Port Stephens Council should be the determining authority in this case due to its pecuniary interest.

## **Community Objections**

Apart from discussions at its regular meetings, among its executives and with local residents TRRA has not at this stage sought to canvass public opinion generally. A number of individual written objections and comments have been handed to TRRA and these are attached below.

Geoffrey Washington  
Acting Chairman  
Tomaree Ratepayers and Residents Association  
30 September 2009

## Attachments

1. General Tone of Proposal

Date: .....

To: Mr. Phil Buchan  
Manager Commercial Enterprises  
Port Stephens Council  
PO Box 147  
Nelson Bay, NSW, 2315

Subject: Proposed Development of Halifax Caravan Park.

Dear Mr. Buchan,

We wish to register our very strong objection, to the proposal by Council, to expand the Halifax Caravan Park, to absorb, and enclose the Crown Land Reserve, referred to as 'Lot 424', in the Draft Plan of Management documents.

This small Reserve, is situated between the existing boundaries of the Halifax Caravan Park and the two blocks of home units named, 'Intrepid' and 'Shoreline'.

We have been regular visitors for many years, always choosing to stay in the 'Intrepid' block of units, because of its unique peaceful position and outlook. Our children play safely in the tree covered reserve, and we can easily watch over them.

If this proposal is allowed to proceed – all public access will be denied to residents, and visitors alike, and only available to paying customers of the caravan park.

As the caravan park is generally pretty empty most of the time, why is there a plan to expand anyway ?

This area has been enjoyed by so many, for generations, and is designated as 'Crown Land', to be used for 'Public Recreation', not to be fenced off completely, and solely for the financial gain of the council.

So much will be lost, if you approve this plan. The existing sand dunes, well established trees, and shrubs, which are homes to so many native birds and animals. We even have a resident koala. They cannot survive on the concrete slabs of a caravan park.

Please do not allow this very unfair, and unnecessary, destruction, of this well loved area to proceed any further.

We hope we can count on your understanding in this very important matter.

Yours Sincerely,

*L.P. Lehn Shoal Bay*

Everyone you know.

Name & address.

*76 RIGNEY ST SHOAL BAY. 2315.*

Note: Please add your own thoughts and suggestions – all are relevant.

**THESE LETTERS MUST BE RECEIVED BY 5.00PM 11<sup>th</sup> SEPT. 2009**

**AT THE LATEST**

*I am a long time resident of Shoal Bay - We have a special part of the world here and need to protect everything - There is no need to take any more area for the Halifax Caravan Park. - Public Space & Land Dunes etc are very important along there - (Soil problem there too)*  
*L.P. Lehn*



Date: 10/9/09

To: Mr. Phil Buchan  
Manager Commercial Enterprises  
Port Stephens Council  
PO Box 147  
Nelson Bay, NSW, 2315

Subject: Proposed Development of Halifax Caravan Park.

Dear Mr. Buchan,

We wish to register our very strong objection, to the proposal by Council, to expand the Halifax Caravan Park, to absorb, and enclose the Crown Land Reserve, referred to as 'Lot 424', in the Draft Plan of Management documents.

This small Reserve, is situated between the existing boundaries of the Halifax Caravan Park and the two blocks of home units named, 'Intrepid' and 'Shoreline'.

We have been regular visitors for many years, always choosing to stay in the 'Intrepid' block of units, because of its unique peaceful position and outlook. Our children play safely in the tree covered reserve, and we can easily watch over them.

If this proposal is allowed to proceed - all public access will be denied to residents, and visitors alike, and only available to paying customers of the caravan park.

As the caravan park is generally pretty empty most of the time, why is there a plan to expand anyway?

This area has been enjoyed by so many, for generations, and is designated as 'Crown Land', to be used for 'Public Recreation', not to be fenced off completely, and solely for the financial gain of the council.

So much will be lost, if you approve this plan. The existing sand dunes, well established trees, and shrubs, which are homes to so many native birds and animals. We even have a resident koala. They cannot survive on the concrete slabs of a caravan park.

Please do not allow this very unfair, and unnecessary, destruction, of this well loved area to proceed any further.

We hope we can count on your understanding in this very important matter.

Yours Sincerely, Milton + Joy HAINES  
1/15 MURRAWA CLOSE  
NELSON BAY, 2315  
J Haines

JANIE HARDAERE  
6 JAMES CRES  
ENT  
NELSON BAY, 2315

MICHAEL + MARGO  
RYAN "INTREPID"  
INTREPID CLOSE  
NELSON BAY, 2315

Everyone you know  
Name & address. M. Jordan

Note: Please add your own thoughts and suggestions - all are relevant.

E L Symons 3 MURRAWA CL  
Nelson Bay  
E Symons

To Port Stephens Council  
Regarding Draft Plan.

SHOAL BAY HOLIDAY PARK

This Holiday Park is a long standing  
& valuable resource for the local Area  
& the STATE. (200 accommodation sites)

Beautiful area close to SHOAL BAY BEACH.

We have a Marine Park - Natural  
Wetlands to the South - Natural Coastal  
Vegetation + Tomaree National Park -  
great recreations for residents + tourists.

(The changes inside the PARK sound OK)

BUT. D LOT 3 - DP. 716089 - Council Freehold  
Land at back should be kept for use later  
on (not rezoned, subdivided + sold) adjacent  
to SHOAL BAY AVE (not ST. as on plan)

② Make sure Cycle Track access + public access  
via EAST-WEST pathway at rear of the Shoal  
Bay Holiday Park.

③ Reduction access along SHOAL BAY RD  
forage for residents + tourists for safe  
linkages to the BEACH + our Shops etc.

Page 2

④ Most important (Lands Dept) front <sup>LAND.</sup>

7C - LOT 508 - DP. 729026

Shoal Bay Rd + Government Rd (corner)

North - South parallel RESERVE - 77930.

for some years used for informal car  
parking - for Shoal Bay Shops etc.

- should now be used as carparking because  
of lack of enough carparking in Shoal Bay.

Brown Land Act 1989 - Council  
may enter into lease or licence with this  
plan for this Brown Reserve.

In the Public Interest - I consider  
this a good idea for this land  
for the community and our area + me  
personally.

Yours Sincerely  
L.P. Leds

for Robert Leds

76 RIBNEY ST

SHOAL BAY N.S.W.

2315.