



TRRA SUBMISSION

on

NELSON BOAT BAY

HARBOUR FORESHORE

REVITALISATION

PROJECT:

DRAFT CONCEPT PLAN

Draft

April 2011

OVERVIEW

TRRA appreciated the approach adopted by Ardent Leisure and LPMA in developing a draft Concept Plan through a process of consultation with the community and stakeholders. Options for different configurations of the land uses and functions within the study area were brought up in the workshops. The Workshops also identified possible significant negative outcomes or constraints in implementation of the various options.

TRRA's representatives reported back to our members on these proceedings. These representatives (and our membership at large) were anticipating a much more comprehensive reporting of the workshops than has been exhibited. Readers are simply presented with the proposed six land use precincts with no explanation as to the business, operational, aesthetic or environmental reasons for this 'zoning'. The document and plans do not include sufficient detail of the functions and possible location of facilities in each precinct. Stakeholders in the course of discussion did raise strong opposition and queries as to the desirability and/or practicality of some elements, but with a couple of exceptions these issues are absent from the text.

TRRA on first sighting the 5 page "Concept Plan Paper" assumed that it was just an "introduction" or "executive summary" with the substantive report to follow.

In the interests of facilitating a wider public review through the exhibition, participants accepted the majority vote to exhibit. Those attending had the understanding that they were not committing their organizations to the content of the draft plan and that the organization would be making its views known on the exhibited draft.

A number of TRRA members have expressed their dissatisfaction with the decision to abandon the final public meeting which was offered at the outset of the consultation process. Such an open forum would allow a useful exchange of views on the opportunities and constraints. A public meeting may help to resolve some broadly based community concerns and identify the aspects on which opposition is unlikely to be overcome.

We note that it is intended to undertake detailed planning for the various precincts, market analysis and presumably, environmental, social and economic assessment of the major components at a later stage. We believe that there should have been an initial review of these aspects even if it was limited to acknowledgement of the issues involved. For example TRRA believes that the implications for the function and future planning of Nelson Bay CBD, traffic, parking and pedestrian management are so important as to necessitate comment in this Draft.

TRRA urged its members to make individual submissions. The following submission is based on the comments which have been received and on our representatives recollection of the discussion at the stakeholder workshops.

The site is wholly within the zone covered by the Coastal Planning Policy and Guidelines issued by the NSW Government. **There is no reference to these important overarching policies** which set clear parameters on building scale and height as well as environmental impacts for developments adjacent to the ocean and estuaries.

SUBMISSION

1. Purpose of the Project (Page 1)

TRRA notes that the primary purpose of the project is **“to facilitate private and public investment at this strategic location to support the long-term growth of Nelson Bay.”**

We accept this as a desirable objective but also believe that the LPMA underlying principles listed (a) to (e) on page 1 must not be ignored in the planning process. In particular, TRRA and the community as a whole attach great importance to the following Principles:

(b) to strengthen the natural and economic attributes of the site and its physical and economic integration with the greater Nelson Bay CBD;

(c) to ensure that the future use of the site is sustainable in environmental, social and economic terms ; and

(d) to improve community access to the foreshore

TRRA considers that the draft plan fails to address these underpinning principles in presenting its proposed land use precincts. Equally disturbing is the strong possibility that some proposals that follow from the precinct definition, such as the relocation of the commercial fishing facilities to the Eastern Groyne and the suggestion of a boardwalk to replace the Harbour beach, will detract from the natural values of the site and reduce rather than enhance public access.

Although there was considerable discussion at the workshops of the options to strengthen the linkage between the Nelson Bay CBD and the Harbour, (enhanced pedestrian pathway and possible bridge over Teramby Street and extension of Yacaaba Street) these are not mentioned. No mention is made of the future of the Tourist Information Centre which many at the workshops considered should be relocated to the approach road to Nelson Bay.

2. An Overall Vision for the Project (Page 3)

During the consultations there was considerable discussion on the overall vision for the future of the Boat Harbour and its associated reserves. TRRA would have expected the consensus which on this should to have been reported early in the

draft as a guiding philosophy for the specific proposals which are recommended. The core vision which was supported by the community included:

- The essential need to protect the natural qualities of the site and its surroundings including the iconic blue water vistas, sandy beaches and green backdrop which symbolize the attraction of Port Stephens
- The retention of the relatively low key coastal town ambience of Nelson Bay (rather than the dense high rise character that has emerged in other locations such as the Gold Coast and Foster)
- The desirability of retaining a maritime/ fishing port function within the marina precinct
- The need to improve the interaction with the Nelson Bay CBD without destroying its viability.

3. Integration of the Concept with Nelson Bay 2030 Strategic Plan

In “Purpose” (b) cited in 1. above the draft claims to be attempting to strengthen the physical and economic integration with the greater Nelson Bay. There is little evidence of this throughout the document which reflects the apparently limited consultation with those responsible in Port Stephens Council for the 2030 Strategy. This strategy is not even mentioned despite the fact that we understand it is due to be recommended to Council for adoption on 19 April 2011.

4. Traffic and Parking Implications

In all workshops participants emphasized the critical importance of making plans to manage traffic through and within the site and to make specific recommendations for parking. These aspects are not included and are presumably left to be addressed at a later stage.

TRRA believes that the practicality of the entire concept plan hinges on a solution to the problem of through traffic on Government Road and Victoria Parade and augmentation of parking in an overall strategy for the Boat Harbour and the Nelson Bay CBD. These issues are too critical to be left until later.

In the absence of strategies for traffic and parking it seems futile to propose a resort hotel at the western end of Teramby Road, consolidation of the tourist boat activity as proposed (where do the coaches drop-off and park?); relocation of the fish co-op

(necessitating truck access to the eastern groyne) and removal of parking east of the existing marina building.

TRRA representatives have advocated an early implementation of a by-pass for through traffic, retention of the existing parking east of the marina building (with provision for shared use for events) and augmentation of the parking capacity in the Nelson Bay CBD (which can still serve the Boat Harbour in peak times). We also proposed parking overflow provision on the fringe of town with shuttle coach transfers in peak holiday seasons and for major events.

5. Climate Change and Sea Level Rise

Maps of projected sea level rise over the next 50 and 100 year periods are now available showing that with the exception of precinct 3 and Apex Park the entire site is ultimately threatened with inundation. This constraint is not mentioned notwithstanding that it was raised on a number of occasions in the workshops. The attitude of the proponents was that there are “engineering solutions” to this threat.

TRRA argues that this issue is of sufficient importance to require acknowledgement and some discussion of its possible impact on future uses as well as the cost implications of the “engineering works necessary to combat the problem”. Would the protective measures be necessary at the outset of construction or could they be retro-fitted? Who would be responsible?

6. Comments on the Masterplan Precincts and Proposed Land Uses

a. A Marine Precinct

TRRA raises no objection to this designation or to the suggestions for possible reconfiguration of the berthing to optimize boat numbers.

This would be subject to assurances that the requirements of the commercial fishing fleet and the charter and tour boat operators are adequately catered for.

There was considerable discussion of the future of the boat slipway and servicing facility west of the current marina building. Workshop participants considered that such a facility was an essential component of a marina of this scale. In the absence of a practical alternative location, TRRA believes that this facility must be retained. Members’ observation is that the occasional transfer of boats across the boardwalk matters little to pedestrians and in fact adds to their enjoyment of a marine experience.

Provision for accommodation of the existing marine rescue, police and maritime services facilities and associated parking is not mentioned.

Discussion also focused on the pros and cons of inserting a flushing hole in the Western Groyne. This is not mentioned.

b. A Tourism and Commercial Precinct

The workshops acknowledged the potential of this area to accommodate some additional commercial and tourism development.

TRRA believes that the implications of displacement of the Fisherman's Co-op, the fishermen's carpark, the boat servicing area and public parking on the western groyne, should be raised and suggestions made as to alternative accommodation of these uses.

Many members of TRRA and the public at large question the proposal to relocate the fishing industry facilities to the Eastern Groyne. They fear that this will inject unsightly industrial style buildings on a site which is at the gateway to Nelson Bay and interrupt views from the CBD, and the Marina precinct generally. They oppose the loss of foreshore open space now used for recreation and the annual game fishing event. Further concerns are: the need to accommodate large trucks at this site, noise, waste discharge and the capacity of the eastern Groyne to berth the whole fishing fleet.

Serious questions have also been raised as to the suitability of the current Co-op site for a resort hotel. These relate to the limited space available especially for parking and tourist coach access, and the likely pressure to allow unacceptable high rise development to achieve business viability.

TRRA notes the proposed variation of allowable building heights from the east "so as not to adversely impact on views from properties within the vicinity of the site" to the west where heights could "reflect the adjacent escarpment".

While this principle is welcome, residents of Laman Street and adjacent areas are very concerned that this proposal may still impact unacceptably on their views and that it would need to be more precisely defined. The "Bridle Path" is heavily used by visitors and the community and the current vista across the marina is a major attraction which is enjoyed by many thousands each year. TRRA believes this needs to be protected as part of the Tomaree "tourist capital".

c. A Fisherman's Precinct

TRRA strongly supports the retention of a viable commercial fishing facility within the Harbour. This has historical significance and contributes importantly to the ambience of the site as well as its economy.

TRRA's comments on the proposed relocation to the eastern Groyne are made in (b) above.

Although the draft plan refers to special discussions with the Fisherman's Co-op (and Tourist Charter Boat Operators) the outcomes of these discussions are not reported. The relocations proposed for these two groups would seem to raise major considerations both in terms of operations and cost. The community needs to be assured that such issues have been taken into account and do not impose any constraints on what are core proposals of the concept plan.

Wherever the fishing industry base is ultimately located, TRRA supports the introduction of a much enhanced fisherman's wharf retail and restaurant complex. This has the potential to become a major attraction for Nelson Bay generally and to the revitalized boat harbour. Although discussed at length in the workshops there is no reference to this in the draft.

d. A Public Domain and Passive Recreation Precinct (3)

TRRA and workshop participants were unanimous in their support for the retention of the existing open space reserve for recreation. This provides a green backdrop to the Boat Harbour and its associated business area.

The rejection of earlier Port Stephens Council proposals to insert 5 storey buildings on Apex Park on the grounds that this would serve to improve the linkage to the Nelson Bay CBD is especially welcome. However, no reference is made to the much discussed proposal for enhancing the walkway linking to Stockton Street and the option of bridging Teramby Road.

A serious omission is discussion of the proposed extension of the boardwalk (designated as a public walkway on the map for precinct 3) to replace the beach inside the harbour. Earlier polling of TRRA members resulted in a 97% support for retention of the beach as an iconic visual and recreational feature of Port Stephens and Nelson Bay. Its appeal is demonstrated by the thousands of visitors, especially those from overseas who photograph the beach and blue water on arrival in Nelson Bay. Families, especially those with children, find the combination of the grassed picnic area, playground, recently installed sea wall, and sandy beach a relaxing and child friendly experience. On the other hand a boardwalk is not child friendly with parents needing to constantly restrain children from the danger of falling over the

edge. The problem is exemplified by the existing marina boardwalk which has no guardrail or lifesaving equipment.

The plan for Precinct 3 refers to “access to public wharf” but does not designate a location for a ferry terminal/public which is an important harbour facility. Where will this be located? LPMA has indicated that it might be considered to be placed on the boardwalk proposed to replace the beach. TRRA questions the suitability of this site as it would add to the congestion along this strip and require associated buildings, considerable dredging and parking bays for feeder buses and cars, thus further reducing the recreational area.

A further omission is the prospect of locating an underground car park on the reserve south of Victoria Parade. The pros and cons of this were discussed in the workshops. TRRA made the point that insertion of parking at this location would add to the traffic management problem on Victoria Parade and draw more retail customers away from the CBD. Augmentation of the existing parking in the CBD is the preferred option.

A plan prepared for a residents group adjoin the reserve south of Victoria parade proposed that this slope be landscaped and provided with formal pathways to improve pedestrian linkages across this space. No mention is made of the option.

e. A Charter Boat Precinct

TRRA supports the consolidation of Tour Boat operations and berthing if that is possible and acceptable to the owners. We note that there is room for confusion in this Precinct description. The function actually includes charter operators (eg. hire craft, tourist fishing charters), dive and sport rides, major tourist boat operators such as Moonshadow and the whale/dolphin watch boats.

TRRA questions whether there is room for all these businesses to be located in the designated precinct and whether the associated traffic would be safe with the refueling point located at the tip of the berthing finger. Were all of these operators included in the consultations?

TRRA also queries whether the tour operators were consulted on the practicality of a concentration of coach drop off at one point and the associated conduct of visitors to departure points on the designated finger wharf. Our information is that the majority of coaches have a driver only who is responsible for directing his tourists (often non English speaking) to their tour boat. If we make it too inconvenient for these tour operators they will seek alternative departure points to Port Stephens.

f. A Public Entertainment Precinct (5)

The plan provides only limited detail as what is envisaged for this land use.

It is the obvious location for intensive recreational and leisure uses such as children's play equipment, picnicking, events, periodic art exhibitions, displays, markets and gatherings of special interest such as vintage cars. TRRA believes that the carpark east of the marina building should be retained but that its configuration be modified to enable the multiuse of the space for all of the above uses. Temporary relocation of parking to the urban fringe with shuttle buses may be necessary for periods when other uses are present.

The proposal that this precinct be the location for an amphitheatre and concerts is questioned given that it is surrounded by residential properties. The residents already complain about the noise from the carnival and concerts are likely to seriously conflict with the residential land use.

There are many who question the lease of the area for long periods in peak season to carnival rides and sideshows which reinforce a downmarket tourist image for the whole area and present an ugly visual image to the visitor arriving along Victoria Parade.

No reference is made to the future use of the current Tourist Information Centre which is included in this Precinct. This is a significant issue which should have been raised. The current location has limitations in that it draws visitors to a location with very limited parking and poorly located to intercept visitors at the gateway to the tourist destination as whole. Alternative uses such as heritage/marine life interpretation and a cafe were discussed at the workshops.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

TRRA SUBMISSION

On

NELSON BOAT BAY HARBOUR FORESHORE REVITALISATION

PROJECT: DRAFT CONCEPT PLAN

OVERVIEW

TRRA was disappointed by the superficial nature of the draft concept plan. It was anticipated that there would be a substantial description of the proposals. We also expected discussion of the options and constraints on some of the key suggestions raised in the workshops.

Instead the draft plan simply designates six broad land use precincts with no explanation as to the business, operational, aesthetic or environmental reasons for the zonings.

The absence of a parking and traffic for the Whole of Nelson Bay and the failure to acknowledge and discuss the potential impact of rising sea level are major omissions.

We note the Paper's statement that it is intended to undertake detailed planning for the various precincts, as well as market analysis and presumably, environmental, social and economic assessment of the major components at a later stage. We believe that there should have been an initial review of these aspects even if it was limited to acknowledgement of the issues involved.

The site is wholly within the zone covered by the Coastal Planning Policy and Guidelines issued by the NSW Government. **There is no reference to these important overarching policies** for developments adjacent to the ocean and estuaries.

Those attending had the understanding that they were not committing their organizations to the content of the draft plan and that organizations would be making their own views known on the exhibited draft.

TRRA's submission raises a number concerns and queries both in respect of some of the core recommendations for movement of land uses and issues posed by the detailed proposals omitted from the draft.

SUBMISSION

1. Purpose of the Project (Page 1)

TRRA notes that the primary purpose of the project is **“to facilitate private and public investment at this strategic location to support the long-term growth of Nelson Bay.”**

We accept this as a desirable objective but also believe that the LPMA underlying principles listed (a) to (e) on page 1 should have been addressed in the draft concept plan. In particular, TRRA and the community as a whole attach great importance to the following Principles:

- **to strengthen the natural and economic attributes of the site and its physical and economic integration with the greater Nelson Bay CBD;**
- **to ensure that the future use of the site is sustainable in environmental, social and economic terms ;**
- **to improve community access to the foreshore**

2. An Overall Vision for the Project (Page 3)

During the consultations there a consensus was achieved on an overall vision for the future of the Boat Harbour and its associated reserves. This should have been reported early in the draft as a guiding philosophy.

The core vision included:

- The essential need to protect the natural qualities of the site and its surroundings including the iconic blue water vistas, sandy beaches and green backdrop which symbolize the attraction of Port Stephens.
- The retention of the relatively low key coastal town ambience of Nelson Bay (rather than the dense high rise character that has emerged in other locations such as the Gold Coast and Foster)
- The desirability of retaining a maritime/fishing port function within the marina precinct
- The need to improve the interaction with the Nelson Bay CBD without destroying its viability.

3. Integration of the Concept with Nelson Bay 2030 Strategic Plan

The draft claims to be attempting to strengthen the physical and economic integration with the greater Nelson Bay. There is little evidence of this throughout the document which reflects the apparently limited consultation with those responsible in Port Stephens Council for the 2030 Strategy –which is not even mentioned.

4. Traffic and Parking Implications

In all workshops participants emphasized the critical importance of making plans to manage traffic through and within the site and to make specific recommendations for parking. TRRA believes traffic and parking should have been addressed.

5. Climate Change and Sea Level Rise

Maps of projected sea level rise over the next 50 and 100 year periods are now available showing that with the exception of precinct 3 and Apex Park the entire site is ultimately threatened with inundation. This constraint is not mentioned. Would the protective measures be necessary at the outset of construction or could they be retro-fitted? Who would be responsible?

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TRRA raises no objection to this designation or to the suggestions for possible reconfiguration of the berthing to optimize boat numbers. This would be subject to assurances that the requirements of the commercial fishing fleet and the tour boat operators and maritime and emergency services are adequately catered for.

b. Tourism and Commercial Precinct

TRRA questions the proposal to relocate the Fishing industry facilities to the Eastern Groyne. This will inject unsightly industrial style buildings on a site which is at the gateway to Nelson Bay and interrupt views from the CBD, and the Marina precinct generally. They oppose the loss of foreshore open space now used for recreation and the annual game fishing event.

TRRA questions the suitability of the current Co-op site for a resort hotel due to the limited space available especially for parking and tourist coach access, and the likely unacceptable high rise development. TRRA notes the proposed variation of allowable building heights from the east to the west where heights could “reflect the adjacent escarpment”.

Residents of Laman Street and adjacent areas are very concerned that this proposal may still impact unacceptably on their views and that heights need to be more precisely defined. TRRA believes that views from the Bridle path must need to be protected as part of the Tomaree “tourist capital”.

c. Fisherman’s Precinct

TRRA strongly supports the retention of a viable commercial fishing facility within the Harbour.

TRRA has serious reservations based on :

- The insertion of unsightly industrial buildings and functions at the entrance to the harbour Interruption of views from the
- CBD and the marina precinct
- Noise and waste discharge
- Loss of valuable open space for recreational use.

Wherever the Fishing industry base is ultimately located TRRA supports the introduction of a much enhanced fisherman’s wharf retail and restaurant complex.

d. A Public Domain and Passive Recreation Precinct (3)

TRRA supports the retention of the existing open space reserve for recreation and as a green backdrop to the Boat Harbour.

No reference is made to the proposal for enhancing the walkway linking to Stockton Street and the option of bridging Teramby Road.

A serious omission is discussion of the proposed extension of the boardwalk to replace the beach inside the Harbour. Earlier polling of TRRA members resulted in a 97% support for retention of the beach.

Families especially appreciate the combination of play equipment, picnic facilities, the grassed recreational area and the adjacent beach.

A boardwalk (as on the current marina) is a safety concern for parents.

TRRA questions the suitability of the suggested siting of the public wharf on this boardwalk where it would add to the congestion along this strip and require associated buildings, considerable dredging and parking bays for feeder buses and cars..

A further omission is the prospect of locating an underground car park on the reserve south of Victoria Parade. TRRA considers that insertion of parking at this location would add to the traffic management problem on Victoria Parade and draw more retail customers away from the CBD. Augmentation of the existing parking in the CBD is the preferred option.

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The plan provides limited detail as what is envisaged for this land use.

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TRRA questions the suitability of this precinct for an amphitheatre and for concerts given the close proximity to residential land uses. Residents can be expected to complain about noise.

No options are included for the future use of the current Tourist Information Centre should it be relocated. At workshops possibilities raised included heritage and marine life interpretation and a cafe.