



5 December, 2008

Mr Peter Gesling
General Manager
Port Stephens Council
P.O. Box 42
Raymond Terrace 2324

Dear Mr Gesling,

As you are aware, there is an increasing incidence of anti-social behaviour, vandalism and graffiti throughout the country and the local government area of Port Stephens is not isolated from these unfortunate occurrences.

The scourge of graffiti has become intolerable on the Tomaree Peninsula seriously degrading our urban landscape and damaging public facilities to the extent that residents are disgusted and visitors must think they have come to a slum rather than the "Blue Water Paradise" which is the image we promote through our tourism literature. Residents of Nelson Bay were very much encouraged by the initiative of the Town Management Committee to install security cameras but when these were stolen from their mountings before they even became operative, we believe that things have now tipped into crisis.

The Nelson Bay Business Chamber, Nelson Bay Town Management and the Tomaree Ratepayers and Residents Association have recently held meetings to discuss these issues and have carried out investigations with other area groups and individuals as to a methodology to minimise and hopefully eradicate this ever-increasing problem.

TRRA is aware that the Nelson Bay Business Chamber, in desperation, is planning its own initiative to commission the immediate removal of graffiti from private property in the CBD. While this is to be commended it only addresses the problem on properties which contribute to the scheme. It does not extend to Council and other public property such as Energy Australia boxes, National Parks or RTA signs. It must also be accepted that vandalism and graffiti damage extends to all areas of the Peninsula and the Port Stephens LGA. We are aware that Council has a commitment to removing graffiti from its own facilities and tries to act promptly, but again this action fails to address the impact on private and other non-council sites.

It is our view that a concerted effort must be made by not only our groups, but by council, law enforcement agencies and social rehabilitation agencies to provide suitable funding, equipment, staff and possibly facilities to enable a proper and positive **action plan** to deal with this problem.

We have visited other local government areas between Lake Macquarie and Forster/Tuncurry and were impressed by the success of the approach which has been

followed for the elimination of graffiti in the Great Lakes LGA. Some of their principles are worth examination.

Interestingly, with the reduction and elimination of graffiti, there has also been a reduction in anti-social behaviour, vandalism and petty crime.

Our suggestion is, that Port Stephens Council, together with all interested parties, meet and consider how best to tackle this problem. We envisage a **comprehensive action plan** which would include the following:

1. Prevention measures
2. Public education
3. Reporting mechanisms
4. Surveillance and policing
5. Prompt removal and repair
6. Prosecution and penalty regimes
7. Social work and rehabilitation of offenders
8. Activities for youth within the community.
9. Sources of funds.
10. Staffing – short term, medium term, ongoing

This is not an insignificant problem and needs to be addressed as a matter of priority.

We are acutely aware that it will not be an easy fix, it will need a concerted effort by all stakeholders and will need the full support, in staffing and equipment as well as the financial commitment by Council for an extended period if it is to be ultimately successful.

Our organizations are prepared to assist whenever and wherever possible but we urge council to take the lead in these issues and provide the expertise and resources before the overall cost of rectification becomes insurmountable.

The Tomaree Residents and Ratepayers Association believe that this needs to be addressed as a municipality-wide action and not as an approach that simply looks at one specific location. Our reason here is that to concentrate on one area may diminish the immediate problem, but will shift and magnify the problems into other residential and business environs.

Accordingly, we believe that Council should and must be the entity taking the overall operational responsibility.

We look forward to an early meeting and discussion.

Your sincerely,

Robert Young
Chairperson
Tomaree Ratepayers and Residents Association