

Progressing Tourism in Port Stephens

**Submission for the
Port Stephens Tourism Strategy**

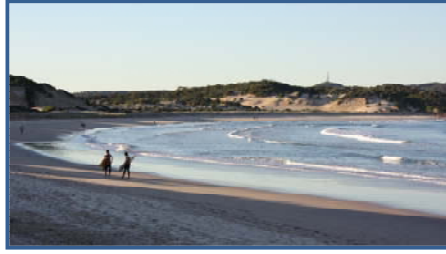


**From
Tomaree Ratepayers and Residents Association**

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TRRA



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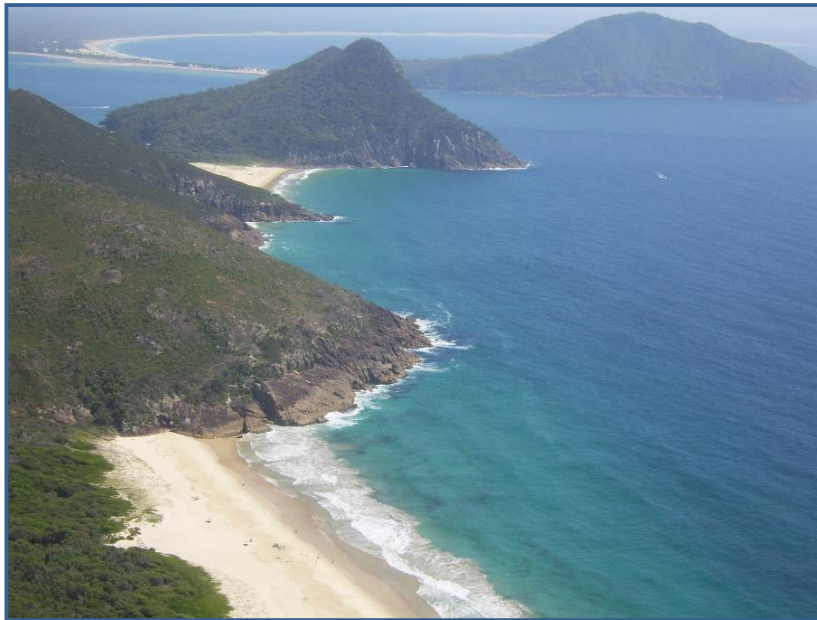
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SUMMARY



Introduction

TRRA fully endorses Mayor MacKenzie's introductory remarks in the October 2008 Futures Project Issues Paper. He said:

'Port Stephens is a unique and beautiful area. We boast wonderful beaches, unique residential areas and tourist attractions, rare and endangered wildlife, dynamic and robust industries and agricultural pursuits.

It is Council's role to ensure that we, as a community, are able to plan for and ensure a future for Port Stephens that preserves these great elements and manages challenges so that Port Stephens remains a great place to live'.

TRRA has welcomed Port Stephen Council' recent strategic planning initiatives and it has made submissions on:

- The Futures Project
- The Draft Nelson Bay 2030 Strategy
- The Port Stephens Waterfront Master Plan
- The Port Stephens Cultural Plan

In all of these submissions TRRA frequently acknowledges the significance of tourism and recreation as an economic driver for our locality. We have also cited many deficiencies in planning, infrastructure, misjudged private investment (especially in accommodation),

facilities maintenance and our overall vision as to our 'sense of place'. We have highlighted these challenges for those charting the future of sustainable management of tourism on the Tomaree Peninsula. We have identified opportunities to optimize the potential of tourism through new attractions and improved interpretation of our natural, heritage and cultural assets.

In each of these submissions emphasis has been given to the critical need to protect the unique natural attractions of the area for residents and visitors. We have endorsed the conclusions of the Port Stephens 2007 Economic Development Strategy which called for a Tourism Development Strategy based on reliable statistics and market analysis. We commend Council and Port Stephens Tourism Ltd for recognizing the need and initiating this tourism strategy and commissioning this consultancy.

The natural features of Port Stephens and the Tomaree Peninsula have been the basis for a significant tourism and recreational industry. The Economic Development Strategy stressed the competitive nature of the tourism market and drew attention to recent problems being experienced on the Lower North Coast. The Strategy identified tourism as a 'Key Sector'. However, it pointed to a lack of information on the sector and its market composition and preferences (page 90). Its major recommendation for strengthening the Sector and planning for its future was the preparation of a long-term strategy for the development and marketing of the industry (page 91).

Other successful tourist destinations such as Cairns, Alice Springs and Port Macquarie all had the benefit of comprehensive plans along these lines.

TRRA believes that this industry has a sound longer-term future if its development and marketing is based on sophisticated market research and quality development of visitor facilities and the general urban environment. Every effort must be made to ensure this industry is sustainably based and that it does not destroy the attractions that bring visitors to the area.

Tourism also requires the goodwill and support of its permanent resident population. To counter any negative opinion from this quarter, there needs to be a pro-active effort to highlight the benefits of the industry, including employment, stronger business environment, improved transport options, better services, more diverse social interactions and enhanced recreational options and entertainment.

Comment on Project Aims and Objectives

In researching for its submissions on the various long-term planning initiatives mentioned above, TRRA searched for statistical data on the tourism industry for Port Stephens and the Tomaree sub-region. State and National data were helpful on broad market trends but no breakdowns which applied to the Tomaree Peninsula were available.

Statistics seemed to be either for the 'Hunter Region' or the 'Lower North Coast' or Port Stephens LGA. The 'Hunter' statistics are obviously influenced by the vineyards activity and the commercial business associated with the regional city of Newcastle and the mining industry. Without a finer breakdown these figures are of limited value in planning for Port Stephens. The Lower North Coast is of more relevance but again, in absence of local data, it is difficult to identify any special market niche factors which apply to Port Stephens or the Tomaree Peninsula.

It is TRRA's view that the location of the Tomaree Peninsula only three hours from the centre of Sydney and one hour from Newcastle and the Lower Hunter and forty minutes from Newcastle Airport must result in quite unique visitor profiles, visitation patterns and market preferences.

TRRA therefore recommends that considerable priority should be given to the Key Issue 5 in the study Terms of Reference: 'GAPS IN THE TOURISM INFORMATION AND MARKET RESEARCH AVAILABLE TO THE TOURISM SECTOR.' In the absence of this data it is difficult to make fully informed assessments and recommendations on many of the OBJECTIVES and OUTPUTS.

While State or National census data is deficient it is recommended that the consultants seek to fill this gap with more targeted research drawing on local records. Data should be sought from the Port Stephens Tourism Pty Ltd reservations system, real estate accommodation agencies and interviews with key tourism operators, including hotel operators, restaurants, ferry and cruise operators, Port Stephens Coaches, golf courses, clubs and retailers. In many cases the information may only be in the form of an opinion or general observation based on operational experience, but this is better than nothing. Interviews with a sample of 'inbound' agents, in the international, interstate and Sydney markets would also assist. Advice from Tourism Australia, Qantas, Jetstar and Virgin Blue could help fill the gaps.

The most difficult market segments to quantify are the 'weekender (staying in your own accommodation)' and 'visiting friends and relatives'. A very significant proportion of the Tomaree Peninsula population are retirees. It is suggested that visits from family and friends could well contribute significantly to the customer base of many tourist businesses.

TRRA endorses the general scope of the terms of Reference. We are pleased to note that the need to define the 'product' is given recognition and that the need for planning controls, infrastructure and maintenance of public facilities will be considered.

TRRA SUBMISSION

Markets

The Port Stephens tourism market differs depending on the localities across the LGA. Raymond Terrace and Karuah have a Pacific Highway 'through traveller' focus and potential in providing accommodation for Newcastle and Hunter Valley business visitors. In this submission TRRA will primarily confine its comments to the Tomaree Peninsula.

In the absence of Peninsula specific market data the following points are made from review of state and national statistics and general observations and reports from local contacts in the tourist and retail sectors.



The Tomaree tourist industry has been based traditionally on family holiday and weekend visits with the majority of visitor nights spent in caravan parks, privately owned holiday lets, weekenders or with friends and relatives. Sydney, the Hunter and Central Western NSW have been the key sources of visitors. Traditionally, these markets generate simpler demands for services and lower per capita expenditures in the local economy. The lower daily expenditure may be offset by longer stays, but self-catering and travel by private car reduces the extent of participation in commercial services such as restaurants, tours and laundry services. The potential for creation of direct hospitality jobs would seem to be lower from this market segment. Businesses such as supermarkets, take away liquor, fast food and petrol outlets, cinemas and clubs probably gain valuable trade from this market segment.

In recent years a number of more sophisticated tourist resorts have been developed offering higher standard hotel accommodation and supporting facilities. Golf and marina facilities have been associated with two or three of these resorts.

Some higher standard strata-titled managed accommodation properties have been built (some with associated restaurant facilities). These were aimed at a higher end of the market but it is understood that a number of these developments have experienced mixed success.

At the same time there has been a rush to invest in medium density strata titled apartments, especially in Nelson Bay CBD, many aimed at the holiday let market. TRRA notes that many of these units remain unsold or are empty, even in peak holiday periods. Many of these units are relatively small and offer minimal facilities. This suggests that this type of accommodation is not matched to a market preference, and rather than adding to the vibrancy of the Tomaree tourism product, its vacant face and limited contribution to CBD retail businesses detract from the appeal of the destination .

The 'grey nomad' market is a major market segment. These visitors largely use campervans or caravans, and seem to be well catered for by our caravan parks and the more modestly priced motel accommodation.

International tourists are attracted typically for short stays especially in campervans and in mid-range hotel/motel accommodation. A significant coach based visitor market has been developed out of Sydney. This business appears to be largely based on Koreans and for the most part is limited to day trips. Tomaree's attractions of wildlife, marine life, wineries and coastal scenery, surfing and golf would seem to offer an opportunity to further develop this market. An offer which also includes the Hunter wine experience could be appealing to the international market and generate an overnight stay on the Peninsula .

Although there are a small number of establishments catering for backpackers, there may be scope to expand this sector. Existing accommodation is relatively isolated from the facilities and entertainment attractive to backpackers and accessible public transport to key attractions is limited. More centralized backpacker accommodation, better public transport and organized casual employment schemes, perhaps into the vineyards, may be required.

Groups with a common interest such as Probus, golf or wine lovers, vintage car enthusiasts, bridge, ethnic groups, sports/adventure groups, kite surfing and sailing have potential worth pursuing.

With appropriate facilities and accommodation our 2 ½ to three hour travel time from Sydney must offer a major opportunity to tap the higher-end market for the short stay luxury markets. This would require specific targeted promotions to the professional, business, medical, gay and other specific customer groups.

The Tomaree Peninsula would seem to have significant potential to attract visitors with a special interest in ecotourism/education and heritage. While the natural resources are in abundance and there is a rich local heritage, significant investment in interpretation and presentation would be necessary to capitalize on this market.

Event-based tourism (game fishing, country music and food/ wine) are already successfully attracting visitors especially in the off season. There may be scope to further develop these activities. However, some tourist operators, for example restaurants, have expressed concern that they are of limited assistance if conducted over long weekends when they are typically operating at near full capacity.

The conference market is also one which needs to be explored. However, to attract large, higher level business, existing conference facilities are inadequate. Multi-use conference spaces, possibly associated with service or sporting clubs, may offer the most feasible option to tap this market.

Subject to more detailed analysis of market potential, TRRA concludes that there needs to be a concerted effort to develop a product which has appeal to markets beyond those which have traditionally attracted visitors to the Peninsula. This will be essential if Tomaree is to avoid the currently predicted erosion of the 'long annual family holiday' market. It is also critical if we aim to increase the economic gain from tourism through higher per visitor night expenditure and a boost in hospitality employment.

Competitors

Recent competition among International and domestic airlines has obviously increased the options for tourism consumers. Distant destinations are now within reach of most travellers including those who formed the traditional sources of Tomaree visitors. Of equal concern is the leakage of tourism expenditure to other consumer preferences.

There are many destinations in New South Wales and in other States which offer similar coastal holiday experiences to those in our area. Many of these competing destinations have already recognized the fundamental importance of investment in their product and have installed high quality visitor facilities in public areas, recreational facilities, interpretive centres, landscaping and addressed planning issues to ensure provision for tourist development and that their urban and rural landscapes are both attractive and distinctive.

In such a highly competitive market TRRA recommends that it is essential to make sure that our product matches standards offered by our competitors and that we identify those elements of our product which can provide a unique visitor experience. In our view a sound strategy to further develop and enhance the product we offer should be of equal importance to marketing and promotional plans.

Infrastructure and Planning

In its submissions on other various strategic planning initiatives, TRRA has repeatedly drawn attention to serious shortcomings in general and tourist specific infrastructure in the Tomaree Peninsula. For example we have cited the poor state of facilities along the foreshores, the inadequate provision of directional signs, parking, road maintenance, interpretation, walking tracks, urban centre design and landscaping.

1. Gateway Upgrade

The degradation of the visual quality of the approach road to the Peninsula has been highlighted as requiring urgent attention. Visitors are greeted (and farewelled) by unsightly farmyard junk, several untidy urban fringe service/industrial, recreational and retail businesses which detract from the rural character of the approach road. Even the final kilometer leading into Nelson Bay is memorable for its lack of landscaping and unattractive semi-industrial operations.

Port Stephens Drive and Gan Gan Road are also critical entry routes which need to be protected from degradation by uncontrolled signage and other urban fringe commercial developments. Industrial zones are necessary but should be screened by buffer zones.



Entry and Exit along Nelson Bay Road

TRRA has urged Council to exercise its planning controls to tidy up existing landholdings, businesses and signage along the approach routes and to prevent additional developments along these routes which would add to the blight.

TRRA recommends that the final kilometre approach to Nelson Bay should be landscaped with a signature species such as Gynea lillies (low maintenance).

2. Directional Signage Scheme

TRRA has also raised the need for clearer signage on the approach roads which guide visitors to their destination(s) on the Tomaree Peninsula. .

Within Port Stephens and the Tomaree it is recommended that a standard signage code be adopted, possibly bearing a signature logo. This would designate all tourist facilities, attractions, walkways etc.

3. Tourist Information

An earlier decision was made to build the present tourist information centre on Victoria Parade in the heart of Tomaree's traffic congestion. While the facility itself is of a high standard, its location is far from ideal. The vast majority of visitors access Tomaree by motor vehicle along Nelson Bay Road but their destinations are spread across the whole Peninsula. Many vehicles are towing caravans or boats which require spacious and specific parking provision which is simply not available or feasible at the site of the current Information Centre.

TRRA recommends that there needs to be a second tourist information centre located on the approach road to the Peninsula, desirably before the intersection of Nelson Bay Road and Port Stephens Drive. There are many templates for this type of introductory facility which incorporate a full information service, restrooms, accommodation and tourist activity reservations, interpretive displays, souvenir sales, and a coffee shop. With such a range of services the facility could be commercially viable. The centres at Cowra, Maitland, and Glenbrook at the entry to the Blue Mountains are worthy models.

As an interim measure a sealed parking bay together with display boards, maps, tourism business directory and free phone link to the current reservation office could be installed. At peak periods a small mobile reservations/information van could be placed at this bay.

This would not replace the existing Information Centre, but some adjustment of the function of the existing space may be required - possibly increased allocation to interpretive displays. An audio visual presentation on our marine life attractions and/or a holograph show relating to the Second World War (like that in Cowra) could be considered.

4. Public Facilities

Visitors to the Tomaree are attracted by our outstanding natural attractions - especially the beaches, the bayside reserves, the national parks and reserves, lookouts, and local flora, fauna and marine life.

In comparison with other coastal destination areas in Australia, TRRA believes that public facilities on the Tomaree are well below current standards. Deficiencies requiring investment are:

- Landscaping and maintenance of parks and reserves
- Design and maintenance of key lookout points such as Gan Gan Lookout, Birubi Point
- Walking tracks eg. Fly point to Little Beach, Little Beach to Inner Light, Shoal Bay to Tomaree Headland
- Bicycle tracks
- Children's playgrounds
- Public toilets (mainly the problem of Graffiti)
- Parking lots (eg. for Fly Point Marine Reserve, Tomaree Headland)
- Environmental management of beach accessways
- Roads and curbing and guttering (eg. Eastern end of Shoal Bay Road)
- Interpretive signage



Parking Lot, Fly Point Marine Reserve



Picnic Table, Shoal Bay Beach

5. Transport

Bus Services

The public bus system operated by Port Stephens Coaches serves the area well with a modern, clean, timely and courteous service.

There are some difficulties in co-ordination of connections with the City Rail services to Sydney and the absence of late night services especially out of Newcastle. TRRA appreciates that this may be simply a matter of patronage and viability. Consideration could be given to a route connecting with mainline XPT Rail Services at Broadmeadow.

The Tomaree/Newcastle bus service stops at Newcastle airport in each direction which provides a valuable link to the burgeoning air service through that gateway. From casual observation, TRRA questions whether this service is used to its optimum. A serious deterrent is the relegation of the bus stop to the far end of the pick-up zone at the airport which is open to the elements. Another problem is the lack of clarity as to the destination.

If the Newcastle Airport website is consulted the difficulty with our destination identity is clear to see. Under the 'Buses' Tab you are directed to the two major providers, one of which is Port Stephens Coaches. Apart from the services to Newcastle City the route/ timetable options are listed as Newcastle-Fingal Bay and Newcastle-Soldiers Point. For the Interstate or International visitor these destinations would mean nothing. What is needed is an agreed generic destination name, such as Nelson Bay or Tomaree or Port Stephens

We suggest that there needs to be better information, signage, and promotion referring to our agreed generic marketing name at Sydney/ Melbourne/ Brisbane (and at Newcastle) airports. Then our excellent bus service may be better used.

There is an existing peak period shuttle bus service linking key tourist and entertainment locations which appears to be a sound concept but this may need more promotion and route designation and signage would boost patronage.

International and interstate visitors may not be aware of the various free services provided by service and sporting clubs. These could be better promoted in information and at accommodation houses.

The possibility of 'Park and Ride' services for peak periods could alleviate pressure on foreshore and CBD parking.

Ferry Services

The ferry services out of Nelson Bay only serve Tea Gardens. They are well run and seem to be well used. TRRA suggests that there may be merit in investigation of the viability of other routes, such as The Anchorage, Salamander Shores, Soldiers Point, Taylors Beach, Lemon Tree Passage, Tanilba Bay, Karuah, Carrington and return. Such a service would add to the activities for visitors but may only be viable in peak periods.

Newcastle Airport

Newcastle Airport has experienced dramatic expansion in recent years. It opens the tourism market to interstate and international possibilities. The Melbourne market would seem to have major potential. Packages should include currently bargain airfares together with Port Stephens ground content.

There have been recent discussions touching on the potential of this site as Sydney's second airport. TRRA believes Council's Futures Plan should recognise this as a serious prospect and protect surrounding lands from conflicting urban development on flight paths. The Council needs to take action to ensure this location is kept to the forefront in state and national policy and planning circles.

Even if Newcastle is not selected as a second international Sydney airport, it still has major growth prospects as a regional airport serving Port Stephens LGA, Newcastle, the Hunter Valley and the Central Coast. It will be of increasing significance as a gateway to the Tomaree Peninsula..

6. Accommodation

Reference has already been made to the current imbalance in the supply of beds which is weighted heavily towards the caravan park/cabin private let sectors.

It is the view of TRRA that a wider range of accommodation will be necessary to optimize the appeal of the destination especially in international markets and to optimize tourism's contribution to the local economy.

Middle range motel/hotel rooms (3-4 star) and higher end resort accommodation are underrepresented. Smaller high quality boutique accommodation and bed/breakfast as well as backpacker establishments are also underrepresented.

Unfortunately there are few sites on the Peninsula with the size and strategic location necessary for a resort hotel. Spectacular views and/or direct beach access would be almost essential for such a development.



Caravan Park Accommodation



Recent CBD Apartments in Church Street



Bayside Resort Hotel Accommodation

Possible sites could be the Tomaree Headland hospital site, or some of the existing caravan park sites. We believe that these sites would be subject to serious contest from existing users and interest groups and could not be counted on to become available to bolster the top end tourist market. Significantly, the draft Waterfront Masterplan consultants identify the Shoal Bay Caravan Park as having future commercial possibilities.

Other options would be major redevelopments in or adjacent to the Nelson Bay CBD such as the Seabreeze Hotel and Marina Resort sites and the tennis courts above the Bowling club (suggestions have been made that new tennis courts could be located on the land recently acquired by Council in Fingal Street). Other possibilities could be at Soldiers Point, redevelopment of Salamander Shores or an extension of the Anchorage Resort.

Attractions



The current marketing banner 'Blue Water Paradise' appropriately sums up the key attractions of the Tomaree Peninsula. The Pacific coastline with its spectacular beaches and headlands, the port with its own white sandy beaches, aqua water and marine life, combined with extensive reserves of natural bushland are the core attractions for residents and visitors.

This underpinning natural base supports a wide range of recreational activities as well as commercial attractions such as dolphin and whale watching, marinas, charter fishing, diving, boat hire, and an aquarium.

The National Parks and wildlife Service has recently upgraded access to Tomaree Lookout, Zenith and Box Beaches and Barry Park. Council has installed paths along significant stretches of the shoreline and linking some residential areas to their service centres.

Outstanding lookouts are Tomaree Headland, Barry Park, Nelson Headland, Gan Gan Hill and Birubi Point.

Sailing, boating and game fishing are all major attractions well catered for by a number of marinas which are attractions in their own right.

The sandy soils of the area support a number of excellent golf courses which are also high on the list of attractions.

Hotels, licensed clubs and a number of high quality restaurants provide for food and wine experiences and evening entertainment. The one cinema is located in Nelson Bay.

The avocado, fig and olive farms, as well as the wineries on Nelson Bay Road offer farmgate produce and local oysters can be purchased from the producer at Cromarty Bay (Diemars Road). The Co-op and one other outlet retail local and other seafoods at Nelson Bay Marina. Local artworks and handicrafts are displayed and sold at the Port Stephens Cultural and Community Arts Centre in Fly Point Park.

Apart from the interesting but small collection relating to maritime history at Nelson Head, there are very few other displays on our rich history or heritage. Tomago and Tanilba Houses are heritage properties within easy distance of the Tomaree tourist hub.

At Salt Ash, Oakvale Farm and Fauna World have an excellent presentation of native fauna and farm animals with facilities directed to enhance the enjoyment of children. A recent addition nearby has been a children's carnival/fun park. A large traditional carnival with rides etc. visits Fly Point each Christmas holidays and a smaller carnival sets up on Victoria Parade most school holidays.

TRRA Evaluation of Attractions

TRRA recognizes the high level attraction of the natural features of the bay and its surrounding natural areas. It recommends that the highest priority be placed on the protection of the integrity of these assets.

There have been some excellent facilities installed in the past by Council, such as walking/cycle tracks, BBQs etc. and recent investment by the National Parks Service in high quality access and facilities e.g. Tomaree Headland, Zenith Beach, Box Beach and Barry Park. The Tomaree Head access track and its associated interpretive boards and photo-opportunity platforms set a standard which should be replicated throughout the Tomaree Peninsula.



However, TRRA's assessment across the Peninsula's iconic attractions revealed that many are in a degraded state due to inadequate maintenance, historically minimal levels of investment and/or sub-standard original design.

TRRA considers that, given the strength of the family market segment, there is inadequate investment in attractions for children and teenagers. There is a need for additional high quality, creative children's playgrounds and a wider range of attractions and entertainment for the early teenage groups. The latter could include additional skateboard facilities, bikeways and adventure playgrounds.

If the objective is to attract additional visitation and to reach new, more sophisticated market segments, TRRA recommends that there needs to be major investment in upgrading facilities and in their on-going maintenance. In addition, investment is required to bring new attractions into the offer.

Tourism Hotspots in Need of Urgent Attention

- **Nelson Bay - Fly Point Foreshore.** This strip is at the heart of tourist activity and subject to the highest level of stress from visitors and resident use. Lawns, landscaping, irrigation system, the beachhead, park furniture, lighting, coach parking, children's play equipment, waste collection, signage control are all issues needing urgent attention. It is understood that Council has recently allocated funding for work on the Western part of this area to be completed for the coming summer peak.



TRRA has noted that virtually all coach-based visitors are dropped here upon arrival in Nelson Bay and that they are immediately drawn to the sandy beach and blue water of the harbour for a 'signature' photo. TRRA believes that earlier proposals to replace the beach strand with a boardwalk would destroy this key element of our promotional slogan.

TRRA would hope that plans for upgrade of this area should exclude the periodic carnival which is not in keeping with such a high profile site and which unavoidably impacts heavily on the landscaping of the site. A high quality creative children's playground located away from Victoria Parade is recommended.

- **Gan Gan Lookout**

This vantage point is arguably one of the best on the entire Australian coast and it provides the visitor with an excellent 360 degree opportunity to survey the entire destination area.

Visitors are greeted by graffiti-covered signs and a forest of communication towers surrounded by ugly security fencing in various states of repair. Some enclosures have decaying equipment and refuse on the ground. Earlier attempts at landscaping and provision of a paved walkway to the lookout are now falling into disrepair and the lookout directional indicator has been vandalized.



The iconic vantage point of Gan Gan Lookout is spoiled by the dereliction of its entry point

The access road is probably unsuitable for large tourist coaches.

This iconic site needs a complete renovation. As an initial step there should be an approach to the communication providers to undertake a clean-up and landscape screening together with a renovation of the access path and signs. In the longer-term there should be consideration given to a fundamental redevelopment possibly involving a single tower shared by all communication providers such as Black Mountain in Canberra, improved road and parking suitable for coaches or alternatively a gondola similar to that installed in Cairns, together with and a restaurant/coffee shop (possibly at the base of the gondola).

Nelson Head

This is another iconic lookout point affording visitors a superb view of the Port and the heads. The historic lighthouse keeper's quarters provides an excellent site for a café and the remainder of the house is occupied by a museum display focusing on Maritime history. Adjoining is a wartime fortification.

The road access to this site is narrow and there is no dedicated pedestrian access although many pedestrians share the road with traffic. Parking is limited and must be shared with those volunteering at the Rescue Service station. The Rescue Service runs a small but well stocked souvenir shop. However it is not readily noticeable to visitors. The space and display area for the museum is cramped and probably does not do justice to the collection or the broader rich maritime history of the area.

The café is limited to breakfast and lunch and coffees. The views from the café deck are unsurpassed in Australia and it is observed to be very well patronized by international tourists. Recently vegetation threatening this view was trimmed and a cyclone fence erected across the entire café frontage. This industrial style fence may have been in the interests of safety but a visually more sympathetic or lower option should have been adopted.



Facility at Nelson Head, with unsympathetic fence

TRRA considers that this site is deserving of professional assessment and redevelopment to optimize its role in the future of Tomaree tourism. As a minimum it requires a dedicated pedestrian access path and removal or screening/lowering of the cyclone fence. Ultimately, there may be scope for a restaurant which covers the coffee shop trade and also extends its operation to more upmarket evening dining. The scope for coach based visitation could also be examined.

In the event that progress was made to establish a regional museum/heritage centre (see below) on another site, it may be that a maritime museum collection could become the nucleus for that larger facility.

Shoal Bay Road/Tomaree Head

This is another tourism hot spot which offers an outstanding Port Stephens experience. Concentrated at the Eastern end of Shoal Bay Road is

- ❖ a boat launching ramp
- ❖ accesses to Zenith Beach
- ❖ entries to National Parks walks to the top of Tomaree Headland and to the World War 2 gun emplacements, and
- ❖ a footpath to the entry to Port Stephens with heritage sites along the way, including World War 2 fortifications.

Parking for the boat ramp is east of Shoal Bay Road among mature blackbutt trees without any formality or drainage. Chaos prevails at peak times.

There is no footpath beyond the boat ramp which encourages pedestrians to walk without control through the narrow beachside reserve degrading the grass cover. Towards the northern end the only option is to walk on Shoal Bay Road itself. At this point the road is subject to serious drainage problems with major ponding after rain and severe potholing. Where the high volume of visitor traffic seeks to park before proceeding on the various walkways to Tomaree Headland and Zenith Beach there is no formal parking lot. As a consequence sand dune verges are ploughed up by

vehicles and at peak times cars are forced to park on the one way access to the southern access to Zenith Beach.



The footpath along the shoreline through the hospital is not clearly marked and many visitors are unsure if they are able to enter that area. The road/ parking arrangements are unsuited to coaches which avoid this key attraction.

TRRA again recommends that this whole precinct be subject to professional planning and a major redevelopment. The location is so important that there may be need to negotiate with the Health authorities to obtain additional land (a flat area inside the hospital gate) for parking and coach accommodation. Provision of adequate footpath and road upgrades is essential. The important national level history of the site warrants improved interpretive signage.

Heritage Assets

The 2001 Port Stephens Heritage Study, commissioned by Council, provides a comprehensive review of the LGA's history and an inventory of our remaining heritage resources. The area has a rich heritage including that of the indigenous people and was visited and settled early in the colonial era.

TRRA acknowledges that Council's LEP 2000 has heritage provisions and that parts of Raymond Terrace and Hinton are designated as 'heritage conservation areas'. However, TRRA recommends that there needs to be a comprehensive Heritage Conservation Strategy which identifies key items of heritage importance and value and sets out a plan for their conservation and interpretation. There are many individual sites which are deserving of special conservation measures such as Tomago House at Tomago and Tanilba Bay House which are outstanding examples of our early colonial heritage.

The strategy should identify appropriate responsibilities including Council, State or Federal authorities, (such as the N.S.W. Heritage Office, NPWS, State Museums) and other private bodies such as the National Trust and historical societies to implement the programs required.

TRRA in considering the heritage of the Tomaree Peninsula believes that Council's Futures Plan should acknowledge the significant heritage of the Worimi people. Subject to ascertaining the opinions of the Worimi, there could be an opportunity to incorporate display and interpretive elements explaining Worimi culture and history in the long term planning for development of the Birubi Point area and in any more centrally located interpretive centre/museum.

TRRA also recommends that recognition should be given to the nationally significant history of the use of Port Stephens and surrounding land by the Australian, American and British navies during the Second World War.

Some heritage sites associated with HMAS Assault remain and there is sufficient pictorial and other information available to support an excellent display on this theme. A fine example of such a display is that of the Albany Regional Museum in Western Australia which relates the history of its port as the final departure point of the Australian contingents to the First World War. Done well, a display on this theme in an interpretive centre could have international as well as local appeal and add further to the tourism infrastructure. Such a display could also incorporate Worimi history and culture, the history of Port Stephens as a port, its fishing industry and as a transport link to the Myall and Karuah Rivers.

A regional museum could be combined with a marine/flora/ fauna ecology interpretive display. This would be a primary visitor attraction in its own right and bring together all the various heritage collections on the Peninsula. This facility would provide a strong low season activity and be a focus for the educational tourist market. A facility of this scale would require funding contributions from both State and Commonwealth sources.

One Mile Beach

This is an outstanding surfing location which is also physically very scenic. It is a location with a thriving koala population.

Unfortunately the entry to this beach is marred by an unsightly caravan park cyclone fence and service area and the bitumen carpark is notable for its absence of landscaping. At the southern end visitors' vehicles have pushed into the adjoining

wooded area seeking shade and, in the absence of controls, impacted on the soft sandy soils.

The walkway to the beach is past a basic besser block toilet /changing facility and a kiosk building which do not complement the high level of the natural attraction.

TRRA recommends a major upgrade.



One Mile Beach

Birubi Point / Stockton Beach and Dunes

This is a unique natural and cultural attraction which has high level visitor appeal. It is a very popular coach stop. It is the entry point for high volume four-wheel drivers who engage in beach trips, fishing, and remote camping. Commercial dune rides, camel rides, horse rides and quad bike hire operate from Birubi Point. Car-based visitors enter via James Paterson Street to the Birubi Point Surf Club which offers a spectacular view along Stockton Beach and a coffee shop overlooking the beach. Whales are observed from here May to October. The area has considerable significance to the indigenous Worimi people who are owners of substantial areas of land in the locality.

The environment in this area is very sensitive, consisting of fragile sand dunes, exposed to the full force of the southerly and westerly storm winds and containing culturally sensitive Worimi relics.

Land ownership and management is split among the Worimi people, Port Stephens Council, the Lands Department, NSW National Parks and private owners.

TRRA believes that this attraction, popular as it is, is poorly managed, subject to environmental degradation and is performing well below its potential.

The entry to Birubi Point (not signposted as an attraction) is via a suburban residential street (James Patterson Street) and traffic therefore must be controlled by harsh speed bumps which are very difficult especially for coaches. At the Point parking is very limited which results in significant overflow back along the entry way in peak periods. The current surf club is cut into the dune and does not intrude into the viewline along the spectacular dunes and Stockton Beach. It is a simple brick box which can only be described as functional in design.



Current Birubi Surf Club due for second storey which will block views on approach



Inadequate landscaping at Birubi

Council has commissioned an architect to design a second storey addition for this clubhouse to incorporate a commercial function centre. TRRA questions the impact of another storey on the view from the Point and from the beach and dune areas. We also question the capacity of existing parking space to meet the increased needs, especially at weekends and in holiday seasons. TRRA also queries the financial feasibility of a function centre at such an isolated location which is also subject to frequent severe weather conditions. Certainly the existing coffee shop is very popular in good weather and serves an important purpose. An eating facility, possibly combined with an interpretation facility for the site, properly designed with materials to blend in with the surroundings, glass sides to view the scenery and whales in season, with the facility of protection from the wind in inclement weather, and built low in order to not block the views along the dunes on entering the site, would be an asset and focus for tourists and residents alike.

The camel and four-wheel drive bus tours also depart from another parking lot served by the James Patterson Street entry route. There are no shelter or toilet facilities at this departure point. TRRA expects that, subject to evaluation of environmental impact assessment, there is scope to grow this camel and dune touring attraction. TRRA considers that there is scope for involvement of the Worimi people in some form of cultural interpretation in this locality. Similarly, the unique natural features and ecology must offer an opportunity for interpretation. Currently there is no interpretive facility.

TRRA considers that Birubi Point and the Stockton Beach/dune area constitute a very significant attraction which requires an integrated plan of management which covers all the activities and involves all of the landholders and stakeholders. It has been suggested that the entry via James Patterson Drive could be closed and that all traffic be brought in via the current four-wheel drive entry road. The precinct's potential seems to be much greater than current facilities and access ways permit.



Interpretation Centre at the Pinnacles, south of Geraldton, Western Australia, which is low and blends with the landscape

Ecotourism

The marine and land based ecosystems of the Tomaree Peninsula are of great interest and very accessible. National Parks has been increasing the number of interpretive boards at key reserves across the peninsula and these are of high quality. TRRA considers that the National Parks and their public facilities could be featured more prominently in marketing.

TRRA believes that there is potential for a major interpretive centre which would be an attraction in its own right.

The Dorrigo rainforest centre is a good example of this facility. Such a centre can increase visitor understanding and respect for the ecosystems and provide a basis for educational tourism. Extension of this interpretation could include bush camps, guided night-time fauna treks, rockpool studies, aquariums to showcase our local marine life, and guided tours of the fisheries research station.

Cultural Tourism

In its submission to Council on the Draft Cultural Plan TRRA stressed that Tourism must be factored into the overall economic benefits of a cultural strategy, particularly on the Tomaree Peninsula.

Attention was drawn to the fact that visitors desire access to a broad range of cultural events and experiences. It was pointed out that tourists are attracted to community events (concerts in the park, movies in the park, festivals) art galleries and museums, local drama and indigenous displays, sporting events and local markets.

Our submission called for the establishment of a community cultural facility in Nelson Bay for the Tomaree Peninsula to include a multi-purpose performance space, visual arts gallery, museum/heritage gallery and coffee shop.

It was recommended that encouragement be given to the Worimi indigenous community to contribute to a vibrant hospitality industry as employees, business operators, and providers of sustainable indigenous cultural experiences.

TRRA believes that the enrichment of cultural activities and infrastructure would be supported through tourist customers and that tourism would also benefit through the broader range of experiences which would be added to the tourist product mix.

Some elements of the local culture are already represented in Tomaree such as markets, the CommunityArts Centre, the Nelson Head museum, major sporting competitions and the Murrook Worimi Centre on Nelson Bay Road, Williamstown. TRRA considers that there is scope to further develop and add to these activities.

Planning and Development Controls

Port Stephens Council has commissioned the Futures Project, the Nelson Bay 2030 Plan, the Cultural Plan, and is a partner in the Waterfront Masterplan project with the Department of Lands. It has also embarked on the Tourism Strategy.

TRRA has repeatedly called for these plans to be integrated and linked to ensure a consistent approach. This is essential to provide the certainty and evidence of Council and community commitment to tourism to build investor confidence. Future Councils will need the discipline to ensure that all future developments are consistent with the overall design and development strategy.

TRRA has made detailed submissions on each of these planning initiatives which are available on our website (www.trra.com.au). Our detailed recommendations will not be repeated in this submission. However, reference is made to a number of planning issues which we believe impact critically on the future success of Tourism. These are:

1. The need for a strong comprehensive Local Environment Plan which clearly defines the future appropriate land uses across the LGA, and which encourages a built form which

helps to define character and a sense of place especially in the primary tourist precincts.



2. The need for the planning scheme to incorporate sufficient control to enable Council to ensure that future development complies with the objectives and standards set by the LEP. For example, TRRA would hope that these controls will be effective in stopping the erosion of the rural character of the land along Nelson Bay Road with sub-standard semi-urban buildings and businesses.
3. It is essential that a theme be found for the future character of urban centres such as Nelson Bay and Anna Bay so that these centres can become tourist attractions in their own right.
4. The LEP should recognize the key role of tourism in the economy and address the future needs of the industry for development. In particular, areas suitable for future expansion of accommodation, attractions, recreation and supporting services (such as tourist coach parking) should be identified and protected from other non-core short term uses.
5. Recognition of the primary importance of the natural features of the area as the basis for attracting visitors must underpin the strategic plans and their implementation through development control decisions.

Built Environment

The 2008 Tourism Australia report on The Future of the Domestic Tourism Industry in Australia states:

tourists demand an aesthetically pleasing environment to visit, experience and create a memory from.... However, the environment the tourist seeks to experience is steadily being destroyed by tourism and the industry that promotes the natural beauty of the destination (p.7).

The 2003 Coastal Design Guidelines for NSW (p.17), include very specific advice on the 'desired future character' of coastal towns which encourages planners to exercise restraint, particularly in relation to built form. Two key guidelines are:

-  'Development is predominantly low scale'
-  'Generally heights of up to four storeys in town centres'

TRRA's recommendation on this key planning issue was: Residents generally support a strategy which maintains the 'relatively low key coastal town' character of Nelson Bay and which does not impact on its natural amphitheatre location between the surrounding wooded hills. The majority do not accept a plan which includes high rise buildings which would dominate view lines out to the Bay or in reverse from the Bay towards the surrounding hills.

It is considered that the **'low key Coastal town/ fishing village character' is a built form which will appeal to visitors and set the town apart from competitors.** Examples of this approach which have been successful for tourism are Byron Bay, Shellharbour, Kiama, Noosa, and Busselton in Western Australia. TRRA has emphasized the importance of ensuring the retention of sun penetration which creates a warm and inviting place for visitors and residents in winter. High rise developments would threaten this quality.

TRRA has also drawn attention to the need for attention to maintaining and upgrading the ambience of the public spaces throughout the CBD and the D'Albora Marina zone. A high standard has already been set in Magnus Street and this must be extended to the rest of the CBD as it develops. We have pointed to the need for improved streetscapes in Upper Stockton and Donald Streets. Attention should be paid to landscaping, waste collection, lighting, signage, street furniture and colour schemes. Graffiti control is a matter of concern and Council has recently put in place a strategy to deal with this.

TRRA has recommended that there should be a town square somewhere in or close to the CBD which would be a focus for relaxation and cultural activities.

Tourist Services

Retail

Discussions with consultants advising on the retail issues in the various strategies have expressed the view that the success of any town centre must depend on its support by the local population and that the 2030 Strategy needs to include proposals to attract permanent residents as well as tourists.

Retailers currently seem to experience some difficulties operating in the CBD as indicated by the number of vacant premises. There is a common view that rentals may be too high. The Nelson Bay 2030 Plan should assist with proposals to strengthen this aspect of the CBD.

The Marina Precinct

The Marina and Nelson Bay Harbour provides an important focus of activity for visitors and residents. It provides significant services for water-based activities, including ferry services, police and rescue, commercial and amateur fishing, boat anchorage and chandlery, watercraft hire, cruise and other water based entertainments.

TRRA has indicated concern that major expansion of retail space at the marina (proposed for Victoria Parade East) could seriously impact on the quality and range of tourist shopping and services in the CBD. We believe that there is an opportunity at the northwestern end of the marina to create an integrated 'Fishermans Wharf' precinct built around the existing Co-operative and fresh seafood outlets. Related cafes, retail and restaurants and waterfront-focused open spaces could link through to the present D'Albora Marina centre making better use of the existing parking lot. An uninterrupted pedestrian access along the edge of the water and a concerted effort to tidy up the facades of buildings fronting Teramby Road would be necessary.



Opportunity for a Fisherman's Wharf precinct at the north-western end of the Marina

TRRA believes there must be better links between the Marina and the CBD to strengthen both areas of activity. The upgrade of the pedestrian crossing at the end of Stockton Street will assist, however diversion of through traffic to a by-pass route will be the only long term solution.

TRRA opposes the proposal in the Waterfront plans to replace the beach within the harbour with a boardwalk. We believe that this beach brings the essence of the natural attractions of Port Stephens into the very heart of our tourism precinct. Virtually all visitors stroll along the current footpath admiring the white sandy beach and its blue green water. This is a favourite photo shoot for International and other visitors.



Popular Beach Strand within Nelson Bay Marina

Restaurants

There is a good range of restaurants throughout the Peninsula. The number at the high end of the range are limited in number reflecting the current visitor and resident demand. There may be more opportunity for focus on local seafoods and Hunter produce and wines as the tourist market is broadened and increased in line with this strategy.

Seasonality of visitation and competition from the licensed clubs are challenges for local restaurant operators.

Recreation and Sporting Facilities

There is a good range of recreational and sporting facilities across the Peninsula. Golf and lawn bowls have high quality clubs and facilities which are easily accessible to visitors. The basis of an excellent walkway/cycleway system has been installed although further provision to eliminate gaps would result in a top class attraction.

Already significant visitation is attracted through fishing, golf, cycling and bowling competitions. TRRA considers that there may be scope for further development of sporting competitions, for example in small boat (dinghy) sailing and surfing. Improvement in boat launching and parking as at Belmont Sailing Club would be essential.

Licensed Clubs

There are several large clubs located across the peninsula offering the full range of club facilities. The scale of these clubs and their multi-purpose public spaces auditoria may offer opportunities to attract increased conference business. One club has previously indicated an intention to build a major hotel facility and serviced apartments. Tourist hotel developments associated with Clubs would be a significant addition to the region's accommodation stock and attract visitors through their wider club associations. However, such developments may compete with private investments in the higher end resort sector.

Environmental Issues

Reference has been made to the many instances of visitor impact on natural assets such as foreshores, beaches, and reserves. Additional funding is essential to install the appropriate infrastructure and to maintain this equipment and these spaces.

It is anticipated that Council's Futures Project will address the limits of sustainable growth in the Peninsula both in terms of residential population growth and tourist visitation. TRRA has drawn attention to the limitations of available land and the challenges of rising sea levels for future growth.

Sewerage disposal is already an issue which has recently been addressed by investment to increase the capacity of the Boulder Bay treatment plant. This facility relies on an ocean outfall which in the longer term could begin to impact on the quality of coastal waters and marine life.

The recent action of the State to create a system of Marine Parks and controls on fishing was a response to depletion of stocks by commercial and recreational fishing. The fishing fraternity in Port Stephens, like most others in New South Wales, claim that fish catches have declined significantly in recent years. Tourist information needs to emphasise the restrictions that are in place and the importance of observing bag limits.

There is a current concern on the part of those agencies responsible for marine life relating to the impact of commercially operated tourist boats on populations of whales, dolphins, turtles and penguins. Increased restrictions on approach distances are under discussion. TRRA notes the Notice of Motion on Council Agenda papers calling for an audit of population numbers of these species in Port Stephens and a study of the impact of boating activities. TRRA is concerned that restrictions on these operations could have serious consequences for a major visitor attraction. It supports this proposal as it should provide a sound scientific basis for any decisions on any future controls that may be required.

The local koala population is also under threat from clearing, interference with migration pathways, roadkills and attacks from domestic animals. TRRA and environmental groups have been active in attempting to protect koala habitat. Although it is difficult for tourists to be guaranteed to sight koalas in the wild, their mere presence is appreciated. Oakdale Farm has an excellent koala display. However, subject to advice from the NPWS, there may be scope for a more specific attraction based on viewing koalas in their natural habitat.

Employment and Skills

There are inadequate statistics available on employment in the hospitality industry and workforce skills on the Peninsula. Anecdotal evidence is that the highly seasonal nature of hospitality employment on the Tomaree tends to discourage young people to aspire to a career in this field. In addition the current focus of the market on the less sophisticated end limits the number of positions where tourism employers need specific hospitality qualifications.

TRRA suggest that there needs to be a study of educational and training needs in the LGA and of the student educational market. Based on the results of this survey a case may be made to locate trade courses in the hospitality and building trades within the Tomaree area.

At present many of these courses are only available in Newcastle and travel is a significant hurdle.

Relationships with other Stakeholders

The State National Parks and Wildlife Service, the Marine Parks Authority, Maritime Services, NSW Fisheries, the Department of Planning and the Roads and Traffic Authority all have a significant presence in Port Stephens, especially in Nelson Bay.

Each of these agencies provides excellent service in its respective areas of responsibility. However, the focus is mainly on provision of facilities, enforcement and general administration.

It is suggested that there is scope for some of these agencies especially NPWS, the Marine Parks Authority and NSW Fisheries to provide a higher level of interpretive and public education programmes. For example the Dorrigo Rainforest Centre operated by NPWS is a tourist attraction which attracts a high annual visitation. In Port Stephens the marine and landbased ecosystems provide an excellent resource for an interpretive centre which could for a significant component of its tourist attraction inventory.

The Fisheries Research Station at Taylors Beach has significant visitor appeal and a visitation programme could be investigated.

The extensive landholdings of the Department of Lands and NPWS are scattered across the LGA and each administration has landholdings in locations of critical importance to tourism. While it is understood that there is considerable interface with the Council there are instances where the liaison and co-operation seem lacking. For example, there appears to be a problem with the provision of parking for vehicles using the boat ramp east of the Shoal Bay Resort. A co-ordinated plan of management and investment in the area at the Northern end of Stockton Beach/ Birubi Point also seems to require more co-operation among agencies.

The Port Stephens Brand

TRRA considers that there is currently some confusion inherent in the use of 'Port Stephens' as the major brand name. It is appreciated that the Council need to include the whole LGA in its promotional umbrella, yet the focus of tourist activity and business is on the Tomaree Peninsula. Traditionally visitors from the main market source have tended to identify with 'Nelson Bay' as the brand and destination and the headline descriptor 'Blue Water Paradise' is largely confined to the Tomaree Peninsula..

TRRA does not offer a view on the most appropriate brand as this would seem to require careful market research. Once a brand is settled it raises the question as to what name is placed on directional signs say on the freeway approaches and on the approach roads.

Existing Tourism Structure

TRRA not being directly involved in the tourist industry is loath to offer suggestions on this issue.

We have nonetheless formed a view that there seems to be considerable fragmentation of responsibilities among the various organisations involved in promotion of tourism, organisation of events, and promotion of the business centres.








We have also noted that the existing tourism organisations appear to be almost solely focused on marketing in the narrower sense of publicity and promotion. The important issues of product and product development appear to have been neglected. Perhaps this is why so many of our facilities and attractions are not competitive with other destinations.



SUMMARY



- TRRA fully endorses Mayor MacKenzie's remarks that 'Port Stephens is a unique and beautiful area. We boast wonderful beaches, unique residential areas and tourist attractions, rare and endangered wildlife, dynamic and robust industries and agricultural pursuits. It is Council's role to ensure that we, as a community, are able to plan for and ensure a future for Port Stephens that preserves these great elements and manages challenges so that Port Stephens remains a great place to live'.
- TRRA believes that the tourist industry has a sound longer-term future if its development and marketing is based on sophisticated market research and quality development of visitor facilities and the general urban environment. Every effort must be made to ensure this industry is sustainably based and that it does not destroy the attractions that bring visitors to the area.
- TRRA endorses the general scope of the terms of reference for the Strategy. We are pleased to note that the need to define the 'product' is given recognition and that the need for planning controls, infrastructure and maintenance of public facilities will be considered.
- Subject to more detailed analysis of market potential, TRRA concludes that there needs to be a concerted effort to develop a product which has appeal to markets beyond those which have traditionally attracted visitors to the Peninsula. This will be essential if the Tomaree is to avoid the currently predicted erosion of the 'long annual family holiday' market. It is also critical if we aim to increase the economic gain from tourism through higher per visitor night expenditure and a boost in hospitality employment.
- In such a highly competitive market TRRA recommends that it is essential to make sure that our product matches standards offered by our competitors and that we identify those elements of our product which can provide a unique visitor experience. In our view a sound strategy to further develop and enhance the product we offer should be of equal importance to marketing and promotional plans.
- TRRA has repeatedly drawn attention to serious shortcomings in general, and tourist specific, infrastructure in the Tomaree Peninsula.

-  TRRA has urged Council to exercise its planning controls to tidy up existing landholdings and businesses along the approach routes and to prevent additional developments along these routes which would add to the blight.
-  Within Port Stephens and the Tomaree it is recommended that a standard signage code be adopted, possibly bearing a signature logo. This would designate all tourist facilities, attractions, walkways etc.
-  TRRA recommends that there needs to be a second tourist information centre located on the approach road to the Peninsula, desirably before the intersection of Nelson Bay Road and Port Stephens Drive. There are many templates for this type of introductory facility which incorporate a full information service, restrooms, reservations, interpretive displays, souvenir sales, and coffee shop.
-  In comparison with other coastal destination areas in Australia, TRRA believes that public facilities on the Tomaree are well below current standards. Deficiencies requiring investment are:
 - ❖ Landscaping and maintenance of parks and reserves
 - ❖ Design and maintenance of key lookout points such as Gan Gan Lookout and Birubi Point
 - ❖ Walking tracks e.g. Fly Point to Little Beach, Little beach to Inner Light, Shoal Bay to Tomaree Headland
 - ❖ Bicycle tracks
 - ❖ Children's playgrounds
 - ❖ Public toilets (mainly the problem of Graffiti)
 - ❖ Parking lots (e.g. for Fly Point Marine Reserve, Tomaree Headland)
 - ❖ Environmental management of beach access ways
 - ❖ Roads and curbing and guttering (e.g. Eastern end of Shoal Bay Road)
 - ❖ Interpretive signage
-  Port Stephens Coaches provides a modern, clean, timely and courteous service. However better co-ordination with rail services, provision of a later night service and closer positioning at Newcastle Airport would increase its appeal. Better information, signage and promotion of this and other transport services (including park and ride services in peak periods) at Sydney/Melbourne/ Brisbane and Newcastle Airports in conjunction with use of an agreed generic marketing name are desirable.
-  The viability of additional ferry routes in peak periods stopping at various points along Port Stephens as far as Karuah should be investigated as an addition to the tourist product.
-  It is the view of TRRA that a wider range of accommodation will be necessary to optimize the appeal of the destination, especially in international markets, and to optimize tourism's contribution to the local economy. Middle range motel/hotel rooms (3-4 star) and higher end resort accommodation are underrepresented. Smaller high quality boutique accommodation and bed/breakfast as well as backpacker establishments are also underrepresented.

- The current marketing banner 'Blue Water Paradise' appropriately sums up the key attractions of the Tomaree Peninsula. The Pacific coastline with its spectacular beaches and headlands, the port with its own white sandy beaches, aqua water and marine life, combined with extensive reserves of natural bushland are the core attractions for residents and visitors. This underpinning natural base supports a wide range of recreational activities as well as commercial attractions such as dolphin and whale watching, marinas, charter fishing, diving, boat hire, and an aquarium. TRRA recommends that the highest priority be placed on the protection of the integrity of these assets. If the objective is to attract additional visitation and to reach new more sophisticated market segments, TRRA recommends that there needs to be major investment in upgrading facilities and in their on-going maintenance. In addition, investment is required to bring new attractions into the offer.
- There are a number of iconic tourist 'hotspots' or attractions on the Peninsula in urgent need of attention. These include:
 - ❖ Nelson Bay/FlyPoint Foreshore
 - ❖ Gan Gan Lookout
 - ❖ Nelson Head
 - ❖ Shoal Bay Road/ Tomaree Head
 - ❖ One Mile Beach
 - ❖ Birubi Point, Stockton Beach and Dunes
- Ecotourism and Cultural Tourism have an important part to play in providing variety in the tourist product. TRRA recommends that there needs to be a comprehensive Heritage Conservation Strategy which identifies key items of heritage importance and value and sets out a plan for their conservation and interpretation. TRRA also recommends that recognition should be given to the nationally significant history of the use of Port Stephens and surrounding land by the Australian, American and British navies during the Second World War.
- TRRA believes that there is potential for a major interpretive centre relating to the ecology and marine life of the area, which would be a non-seasonal attraction in its own right. Our Cultural Plan submission called also for the establishment of a community cultural facility for the Tomaree Peninsula in Nelson Bay, possibly in conjunction with this, to include a multi-purpose performance space, visual arts gallery, museum/heritage gallery and coffee shop.
- TRRA has repeatedly called for the various Council strategic plans to be integrated and linked to ensure a consistent approach. This is essential to provide the certainty and evidence of Council and community commitment to tourism to build investor confidence. Future Councils will need the discipline to ensure that all future developments are consistent with the overall design and development strategy.
- TRRA's recommendation on the key planning issue of the Built Environment has been that residents generally support a strategy which maintains the 'relatively low key coastal town' character of Nelson Bay and which does not impact on its natural amphitheatre

location between the surrounding wooded hills. The majority do not accept a plan which includes high rise buildings which would dominate view lines out to the Bay or in reverse from the Bay towards the surrounding hills.

- Discussions with consultants advising on retail issues in the various strategies have expressed the view that the success of any town centre must depend on its support by the local population and that the 2030 Strategy needs to include proposals to attract permanent residents as well as tourists. This applies equally to the Tourist Strategy.
- The Marina and Nelson Bay Harbour provide an important focus of activity for visitors and residents. They provide significant services for water-based activities including ferry services, police and rescue, commercial and amateur fishing, boat anchorage and chandlery, watercraft hire, cruise and other water based entertainments. TRRA has indicated concern that major expansion of retail space at the marina (proposed for Victoria Parade East) could seriously impact on the quality and range of tourist shopping and services in the CBD. We believe that there is an opportunity at the northwestern end of the marina to create an integrated 'Fishermans Wharf' precinct built around the existing Co-operative and fresh seafood outlets.
- Reference has been made to the many instances of visitor impact on natural assets such as foreshores, beaches, and reserves. Additional funding is essential to install the appropriate infrastructure and to maintain this equipment and these spaces. Controls are necessary to limit the impact on marine life and land life such as koalas.
- TRRA suggest that there needs to be a study of educational and training needs in the LGA and of the student educational market. Based on the results of this survey a case may be made to locate further trade courses in the hospitality and building trades within the Tomaree area.
- There are a number of agencies including the National Parks and Wildlife Service, Marine Parks Authority, Maritime Services and NSW Fisheries with a significant presence in Port Stephens, and each provides excellent service in its respective areas of responsibility. It is suggested that there is scope for some of these agencies to provide a higher level of interpretive and public education programmes. And there are instances such as Birubi Point/Stockton Beach and eastern Shoal Bay Road where a co-ordinated plan of management and more co-operation among agencies is required.
- Careful market research is required as to which is the most appropriate brand name for this tourist destination area. The selected brand should be used in promotion and on directional signs on the freeway approaches and approach roads.
- A view has been formed that there seems to be considerable fragmentation of responsibilities among the various local organisations involved in promotion of tourism, organisation of events and promotion of the business centres. The focus of these groups seems to be on marketing in the narrower sense of publicity and promotion rather than the important issues of product and product development, thereby lessening our competitive position with other destinations.