

Community Vision for the Future of Tomaree Headland, Shoal Bay, Port Stephens



A Proposal from the Friends of Tomaree Headland

January 2019

Tomaree Headland is an Outstanding Natural and Heritage Asset which can become a Nationally Significant Tourist Attraction

1. Objectives

- To realise the full potential of this outstanding natural and heritage asset by maintaining public access and enhanced interpretation of the unique natural, cultural and heritage qualities of the Headland and Port Stephens
- To protect and as appropriate restore the important World War II relics on the Tomaree Headland
- To enhance the public's appreciation of the vital role of the Tomaree Headland and Port Stephens in the defence of Australia and its allies in preparing for the Battle of the Coral Sea
- To optimise visitor experiences and enterprise opportunities leading to financial self sufficiency of the site
- To strengthen the appeal of the Tomaree Peninsula which is recognised as a strategic tourism hub
- To complement the existing and planned improvements to the adjoining Tomaree National Park, in particular the recently announced \$7m Tomaree Coastal Walk which commences at the base of Tomaree Headland

Friends of Tomaree Headland

comprises at this early stage representatives of the following Associations
and has rapidly growing support from the community at large:

Tomaree Business Chamber

Nelson Bay RSL Sub-Branch

Destination Port Stephens

Port Stephens Historical Society

Shoal Bay Community Association

Tomaree Ratepayers and Residents Association

EcoNetwork Port Stephens

Marine Parks Association

2. The site

Tomaree Headland is one of the most visually spectacular and unspoiled parts of the New South Wales coast at the southern entry to Port Stephens.

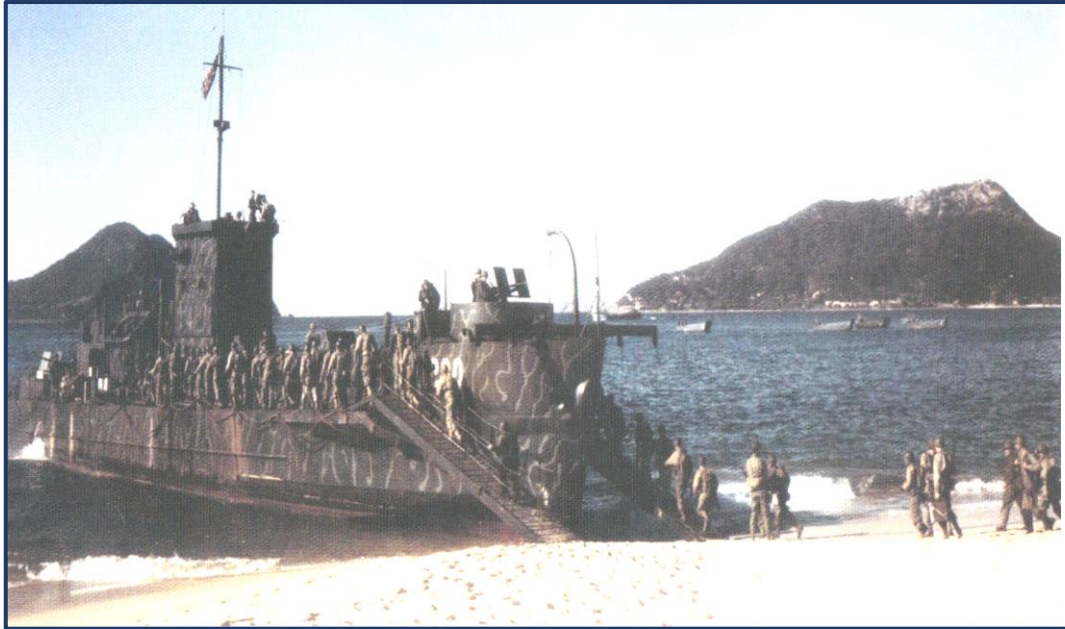


View to South from Summit



View to West over southern shore of Port Stephens

The Headland played an important role in the defence of Australia during the Second World War. Plans for Fort Tomaree were drawn up in 1941 and from 1942 it became the focus of Australian-United States combined training operations for the South-West Pacific. In March 1942 this facility and others in the Port Stephens area came under the command of General Douglas Macarthur.



American soldiers boarding a landing ship in Shoal Bay during WWII – Fort Tomaree in background.
There were 22,000 U.S. troops involved in Port Stephens

Many defensive structures remain on the site including gun and torpedo emplacements and a group of buildings which housed administration, training and other operational units.



Base for Torpedo Tubes on Headland



Three-Pounder Gun Emplacement on Headland

The defence administration buildings are located on the western portion of the Headland (Lot 453) comprising 8.8 hectares. These are currently used for supported accommodation for intellectually disabled persons in a facility known as “Tomaree Lodge”.



The land is owned by the N.S.W. Department of Aging, Disability and Home Care. Tomaree Lodge is due to close in 2019, once alternative accommodation is ready to receive the remaining occupants. This site has a significant area of relatively flat land offering spectacular views across Port Stephens.



In 1992 the Lodge was included in the Department of Health’s s.170 Heritage and Conservation Register.

The heritage criteria of rarity states:

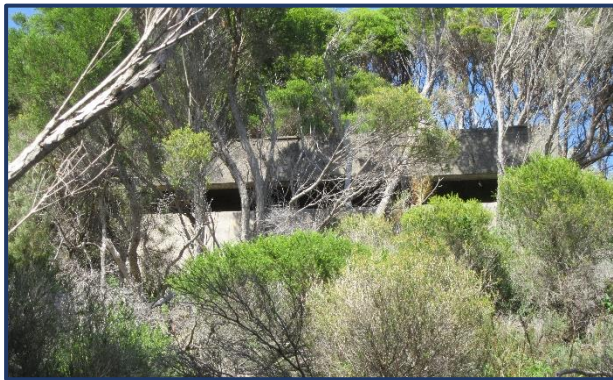
Tomaree Lodge has rarity value at a State level as one of the few surviving, relatively intact Army garrison camps dating from the Second World War in NSW. While Tomaree Lodge has some representative value as an example of a health facility in NSW for people with mental illness and developmental disability, it is unique in this group due to its earlier use as a World War Two Army Camp.

In 1999, the “Tomaree Head Army/RAAF camp” was added to the N.S.W. State Heritage Register.

<https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/heritageapp/ViewHeritageItemDetails.aspx?ID=5012303>

No interpretive signage is provided on this portion of the headland.

The remainder of the headland (Lot 454) comprises 26.7 hectares of steeply-sloping, thickly-wooded National Park land. This is where most of the gunnery and associated support facilities are located. Well-constructed walking paths provide access to the heritage sites and the much visited Tomaree peak lookout which is at 160 metres above sea level. Heritage sites in the National Park have interpretive boards provided by the National Parks Service.



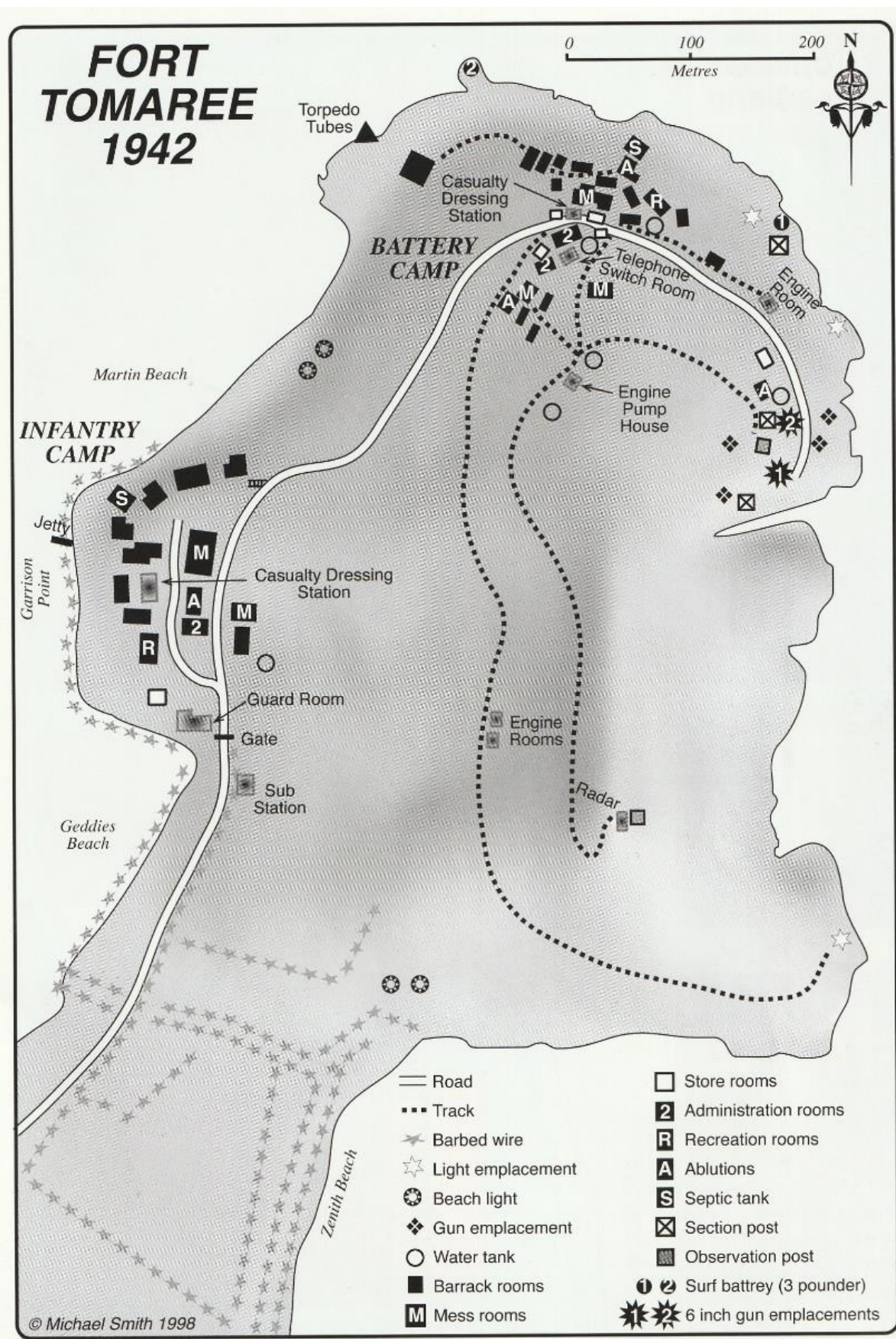
Communications Post on Tomaree Headland



One of two "6 inch" gun emplacements on Tomaree Headland



National Parks interpretive sign



Access to the headland is via a recently upgraded road and shared pedestrian/cycleway in a bay-side corridor under the control of Port Stephens Council. Parking for 55 cars is located at the entry to the Headland but vehicular access to Tomaree Lodge is not open to the public. The Lodge has 40 parking spaces for staff and visitors.

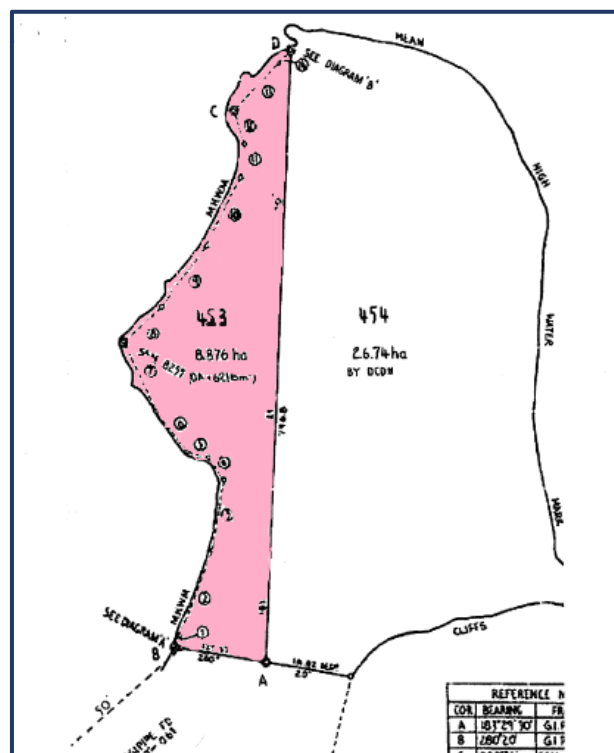
Shoal Bay village, 650 metres to the west, provides a range of tourist services including a resort hotel, restaurants, supermarket, club, cycle hire, medical centre and caravan park.

3. The Opportunities

Tomaree Headland's breathtaking panoramic views over Port Stephens and over the nearby islands to the East, in combination with its highly significant World War II heritage, together with its strategic Hunter regional location, offers a unique opportunity to create an outstanding national heritage and tourism asset.

To realise this potential, the future management and further development of the Tomaree Headland site urgently require a co-ordinated oversight and masterplan which would bring together the administrative, financial and technical capacities of National Parks, War Museum/Memorial interests, Port Stephens Council and Tourism/Regional Development interests.

A high priority should be given to retention of the Tomaree Lodge Site (Lot 453 in deposited Plan 705463) in public ownership with a continuing commitment to protection of its heritage values.



Land Titles on Tomaree Headland – Tomaree Lodge (Lot 453) and National Park (Lot 454)

The possibility of incorporation of the Tomaree Lodge site into a whole of headland complex is also critical. For example, part of its land could solve the already overstressed parking situation at the entry to the headland. The appeal of the \$7.0 m. National Parks Coastal Walk will be greatly enhanced by additional parking on the Lodge site.

The Friends of Tomaree Headland strongly believe that there is scope for a higher-level presentation of the WW II history, marine science and cultural heritage of Port Stephens. A visitor interpretive centre with creative audio visual and interactive exhibits would greatly enhance visitor and educational experiences. Retail, boutique holiday accommodation, cultural, research and educational/business opportunities could be possible.

The success of the recently established \$10.6 million National Anzac Centre in Albany W.A. (a memorial to Australia's participation in WW I) was fully funded by the Federal and Western Australian governments. (<http://nationalanzaccentre.com.au/national-anzac-centre>). Tomaree Headland could be a site for a memorial of similar status to commemorate our involvement in the South West Pacific actions of WW II.

4. The Market

Port Stephens is an established premier NSW Tourist Destination located 3 hours by road from Sydney, 1 hour north of Newcastle City and 40 minutes from the Newcastle/Port Stephens Airport at Williamstown.

Visitation figures to Port Stephens for 2017/18 show an increase of 19%, reaching 1.6 million visitors who stayed 2.3 million nights. Domestic overnight visitors increased by 7.4%, day trip visitors by 32% and international overnight visitors by 16%.

Tourism is a key industry in Port Stephens contributing an estimated \$539 million to the local visitor economy or \$1.5 million a day,

Recently, Port Stephens has been attracting increasing interest from China, Korea and other Asian markets such as India.

Recent improvements in accessibility to Port Stephens include:

- Direct flights to and from Williamstown Airport to New Zealand
- Progressive construction of a motorway standard road link from Nelson Bay to Newcastle (\$200 million announced for the Williamstown-Bobs Farm dual carriageway on 15 January 2019)
- Newcastle Harbour Cruise Boat Terminal improvements attracting increased cruise liner visits

The addition of a nationally significant tourist attraction at Tomaree Headland would diversify the product offer on the Tomaree Peninsula. In particular a major heritage and interpretive centre would assist in attracting visitors outside the traditional high season and add to the visitors' experience all year round and in all weather conditions. Additional overnight stays could be generated

5. Community Support

The membership of Friends of Tomaree Headland reflects a broad cross section of the Port Stephens community.

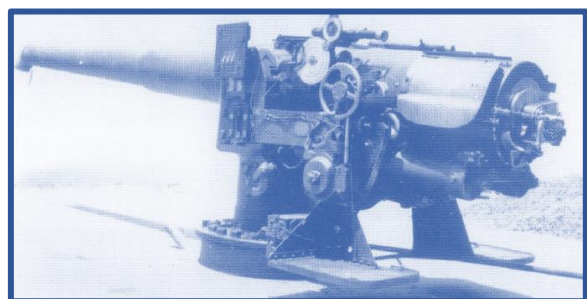
Residents and businessowners place a high value on Tomaree Headland as an iconic natural and historic local asset. They are supportive of this initiative which will strengthen the regional economy of Port Stephens. This strength of feeling was clearly demonstrated in 1989 when the State Government of the day proposed to sell Tomaree Lodge but retracted following fierce local opposition. The RSL sub-branch has its own collection of heritage items from the WW II operations and is aware of many other collections in need of protection and professional care.

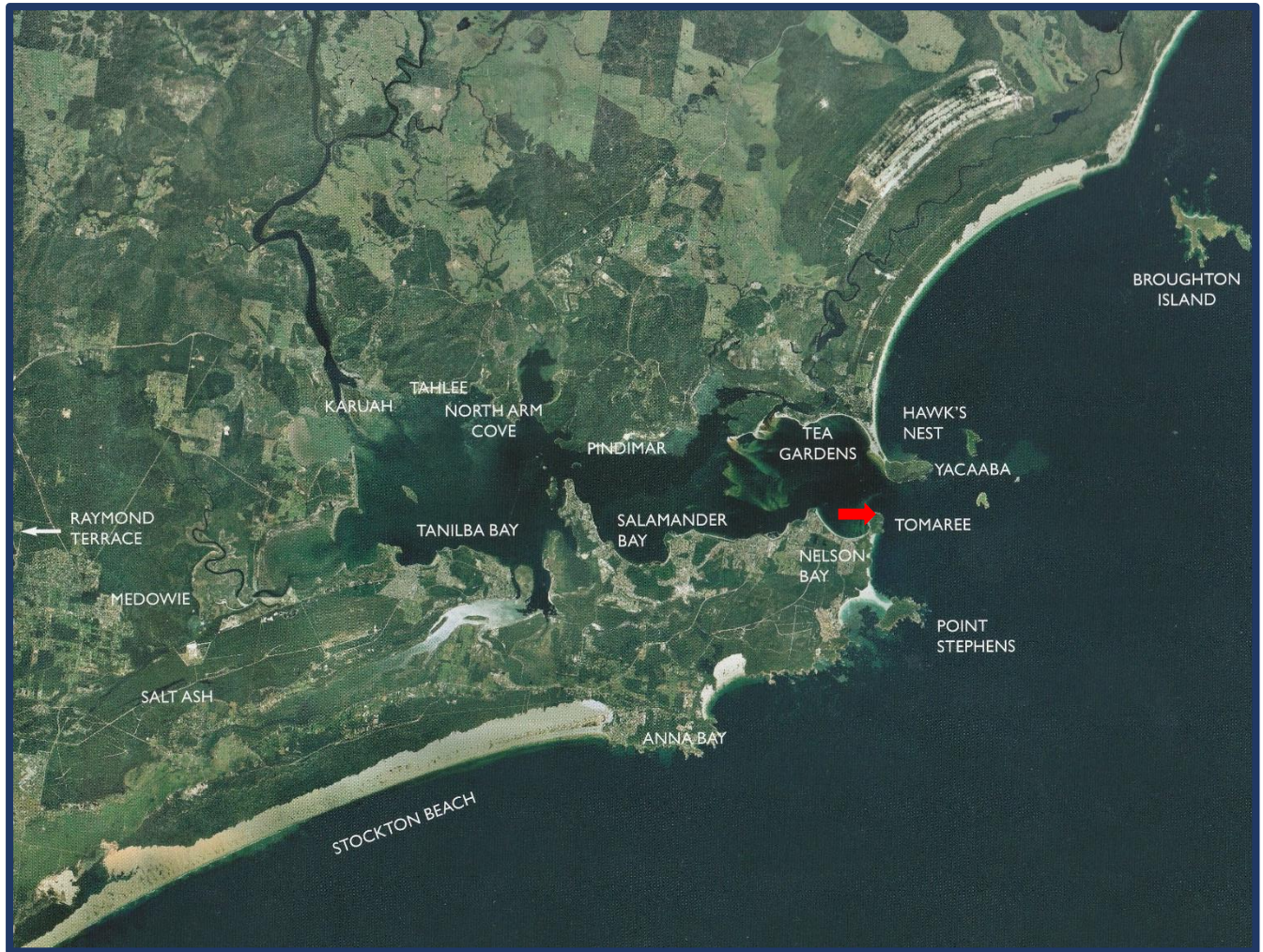
6. The Way Forward

The Friends of Tomaree Headland have prepared this proposal for discussion with relevant authorities, political representatives and stakeholders.

The aim is to:

- Highlight the current opportunities at Tomaree Headland
- Raise the need for the NSW Government to make an urgent commitment to maintaining the Tomaree Lodge site (Lot 453, Deposited plan 705463) as public land
- Initiate a programme to restore and protect the nationally significant World War II relics on Tomaree Headland
- Secure support from relevant authorities to establish a working party to consider the future management and development possibilities at Tomaree Headland
- Encourage the NSW Government to ensure a co-ordinated oversight of Tomaree Headland and to prepare a Masterplan to guide its future use and management.





Regional location map showing site of Tomaree Lodge on Tomaree Headland at entrance to Port Stephens