



PRESIDENTS REPORT – TRRA INC – 2020/21

Introduction

TRRA Inc. continued to represent the interests of the Tomaree community over the past year.

To state that this last year has been a challenging one for all of us is of understatement. Nevertheless, despite the limitations on communication and travel, TRRA has managed to pursue its mission with a level of intensity quite undiminished. We have continued to represent the interests of our members in physical and on-line meetings with Council staff and councillors other local interest groups, Joint Regional Planning Panels and other members of the community.

Each council meeting agenda and its papers have been reviewed and relevant comments submitted, often in great detail and reflecting a very professional level of research, care and attention to detail. Where praise for Council action has been due, we have given it and where better solutions are evident, we have advocated them vigorously on paper and at public access.

Not surprisingly, providing this level of representation requires a significant commitment of resources by our committee and other interested TRRA members. As President, I wish to express my appreciation for these contributions which have led to some significant achievements over the year.

I would firstly like to touch very quickly on some of the major issues in which we have been involved and then draw some conclusions from their outcomes. I think doing so is particularly relevant as we will shortly have our Council elections.

TRRA's involvement in key events and issues

TRRA has made submissions on and in many cases met with council staff or made presentations at public access on the following DAs and initiatives in the last 12 months. The list is far from exhaustive, but it gives you some idea of the breadth and depth of what has been tackled this year:

- Gateway to the Tomaree Peninsula*
- Changes to newspaper advertising and public access.*
- Nelson Bay Parking – Smart Parking.

- Future of Tomaree Headland
- Coastal Walk Masterplan.
- Tree Moratorium and Tree Vandalism Policy*
- Fingal Bay Link Road.
- Nelson Bay Road duplication
- Harvey Norman complex development Taylor's Beach
- Council Waste Strategy.
- Kings Hill development.*
- Residential apartment building at 10 Tomaree Road, Shoal Bay,
- Expansion of the Soldiers Point Marina building,
- Rezoning of some Council land at 12 Bagnall Avenue, Soldiers Point,
- A proposed 24-hour gym behind the Salamander Centre
- Greenside Seniors Housing by the Soldiers Point Bowling Club.
- Council's "parklets"
- Funding for Projects from Nelson Bay Public Domain Plan.
- Design of Little Beach amenities block
- A revised proposal for the Bay Resort, Anna Bay
- Holcim sand operation at Salt Ash.
- Boardwalk Lifestyle Resort in Anna Bay,
- Helipad in Anna Bay
- Shoal Bay Improvements to the Public Domain
- Jet Ski Control Measures
- Nelson Bay Strategy and Implementation and Delivery Program
- 11 Church St high-rise development*

Time doesn't permit me (you'll be glad to hear) to touch on each of these even briefly. Anyway, those who attend our regular general meetings will be well aware of these issues and their outcomes – although some are still current.

Instead, I will select a few that deserve some comment, because they paint a picture of what we are consistently contending with in our dealings with Council and developers in our LGA. These are those asterixed on the list. I will preface these statements with two points:

- These are not 'political' statements as TRRA tries its best to remain politically neutral, but with a Council election coming up it is worth reflecting on some conclusions that can be drawn from the last term of office of our present Council when we talk to candidates for the new council and when we go to the ballot box.
- TRRA is not anti-development – we are pro-good development that enhances our community and that abides by agreed strategies, the LEP and proper community consultation.

Gateway to the Tomaree Peninsula*

In April 2020 TRRA took the initiative to work with Council and Destination Port Stephens on improving the visitor experience of coming into the Tomaree Peninsula. After receiving information from a number of other Councils that had undertaken successful improvements and submitting a detailed project brief to Council in April 2020, it was not until 18 September that Council staff were willing to meet on it, and at that meeting they had no substantive responses.

Initial efforts were met with stonewalling by PSC. The Mayor expressing an opinion the approach to the peninsula was fine!

Our persistence and subsequent meetings this year with senior Council planners indicated a high degree of personal sympathy to improving the approach to the peninsula, but an admission there was little interest on the part of Councillors, and no budget.

We therefore determined that since there was no interest on the part of the Mayor or most Councillors in improving the approach to the Tomaree Peninsula, this should become an election issue.

Newspaper Advertising Withdrawn

This year saw the withdrawal of DAs being advertised in local papers, greatly lessening the transparency of development in our community. The only remaining public access to this information is Council's very difficult to navigate website.

Tree Moratorium and Tree Vandalism Policy.

While the policy on tree vandalism was quite strong, Council has this year made the removal of trees too easy with little effective control over the most spurious applications. Following joint representations by TRRA and the Business Chamber, Council had promised further consultation, but little has yet transpired.

Kings Hill development.

The proposed development at Kings Hill, to comprise 1900 houses and 10,000 people, poses the most significant threat to koala habitat in the region. Despite making much of

its Koala credentials this is just another of many instances where serious protection of endangered fauna habitat is not rated very highly against development demands.

While the Regional Joint Planning Panel has yet to finalise its decision on this development, a favourable decision for local koalas seems unlikely.

11 Church St Development

TRRA made a major submission at the end of September on the development in Church St that now proposes a building height 29% in excess of the newly granted height limit in the LEP, based on very specious arguments. Again, while the DA has yet to be resolved, previous concessions granted by Council on height limits in the Nelson Bay (1 Yacaaba St) and Shoal Bay (10 Tomaree Road) provide a low base for expectations for the refusal of this DA.

Drawing Some Conclusions From Our Experience

I acknowledge some commendable achievements and initiatives by Port Stephens Council; which include:

- New and replacement playgrounds of a high standard with attractive equipment and shade
- Progress towards a comprehensive waste management strategy
- The shared pathway around Fly Point
- The new multipurpose pathways in Anna Bay.

Nevertheless, I think it's appropriate to draw some conclusions from the picture our efforts have inevitably drawn in this last year. We have seen the following consistent patterns in approvals by Council:

- Little effective leadership on climate change and environmental issues including the protection of endangered wildlife – a belated Mayoral motion for 12 October to investigate Council going 'carbon neutral' stands in stark contrast to his opposition to joining hundreds of other councils in declaring a climate emergency.
- An increasing propensity for less transparency in process,
- Token community consultation on major developments and policy, and an unwillingness to listen to criticism, and
- Little appetite for enforcing planning standards and limits.

It seems that unless there is a significant change in leadership in our elected representatives in Dec, we should regrettably expect to see more of the same in the next 3 years.

TRRA Communication Initiatives

A big part of our role is facilitating the communication from ratepayers and residents (giving them a voice) and communicating to them the issues of the day and what we are doing about them

Our general meetings are a large part of that, even though this last year we have, like many organisations, had to conduct meetings, such as now, on-line.

Website. TRRA continues to host a Website which reports on its activities and comments on major issues. This site also accepts comments from readers which are moderated.

Newsletters. Thanks to our retiring Media Officer, Geoff Washington, our regular TRRA Newsletters are circulated to members and other interested parties. Thanks for a great job Geoff.

Media Relationships TRRA also has a sound relationship with the local media outlets and has enjoyed improved publicity through its press releases.

Changes to Facebook presence. We also have a Facebook presence, “Tomaree Voice”, that has been a valuable tool for mobilising community views, but it has been difficult to manage with the limited resources we have had on the Committee. The recent High Court case has also again underscored the known legal dangers in operating a Facebook account. Consequently, and regrettably, the TRRA Facebook no longer accepts comments. .

TRRA’s Collaboration with Peak Community Groups

TRRA also continues to collaborate with other peak community groups in the Tomaree - including Business Port Stephens, EcoNetwork, Destination Port Stephens, Climate Action Port Stephens. Tomaree Headland Heritage Group and other local groups at Shoal Bay, Soldiers Point, Salamander Bay, South Tomaree and Mambo Wetlands.

Acknowledgment of Contributions

Finally, I would like to briefly acknowledge my hard-working Committee.

- Vice-president, John James, and Planning Sub-Committee Convenor, Nigel Waters, effectively monitor all planning and administrative issues impacting on the Tomaree. The professional standard of their submissions is widely recognised. This brief mention of their crucial efforts cannot do justice to their sterling work.
- Nigel Waters has also been responsible for moderating the TRRA Facebook. Not an easy task.

- Our Secretary Bill Salter and Treasurer Denis Pittorino very effectively take care of these vital administrative responsibilities.
- I've already mentioned Geoff Washington's efforts as Media Officer and we're all glad we're keeping his invaluable experience on our Committee.
- Geoff Basser contributed to our overall strategy drawing on his wide-ranging experience and positive can-do approach to tricky issues.
- Alistair Waddell brings his IT skills to bear on TRRA communications including the Website.
- Robyn Williams for her tireless efforts for fostering our membership numbers'
- Cath Norman, Hazel Driver and Chris Peters for their willing support as committee members, and
- Judy Washington prepares the Powerpoints for our meetings.

I would also like to acknowledge the support we have enjoyed from our State Member for Port Stephens, Kate Washington MP. Kate has attended a number of our meetings and has supported our positions in writing on other occasions.

Councillor Nell has been a regular attendee at our meetings and is always willing to engage with us. We are advised that he will not be a candidate for the next Council election in 2020. The East Ward community appreciates his lengthy service to Port Stephens as a councillor and for a time as Mayor. Enjoy your retirement John.

Finally, I wish to thank our membership for their ongoing support and practical assistance when called upon. Could I only ask you all to mention us to your friends and neighbours and actively encourage their membership of TRRA. The larger our member base, the more legitimate our voice.

TRRA will also maintain its tradition of offering the community an opportunity to "meet their candidates" for key elections. So we will be doing the same for the forthcoming council elections in December, but by Zoom. I would encourage everyone to attend this opportunity to hear from and question our candidates for East Ward and the role of mayor.

Thank you for your attendance and continuing interest.

Ben van der Wijngaart

President, TRRA Inc.

11 October 2021