SUBMISSION BY TOMAREE RATEPAYERS and RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION Inc. (TRRA)

COMMUNITY CONSULTATION ON THE FUTURE OF THE TOMAREE LODGE SITE

TRRA'S INTEREST IN THE TOMAREE LODGE SITE

TRRA Inc. actively represents the community on a range of issues that affect the Tomaree Peninsula including planning and development, economic development, cultural infrastructure and resources, the built and natural environment, tourism and other grass roots issues.

TRRA recognises the iconic status of Tomaree Headland and its strategic location at the entrance to Port Stephens. Our interest also relates to the natural, heritage and cultural assets of the Headland which underpin its importance for local recreation and as, arguably, the foremost visitor attraction in Port Stephens.

Our membership seeks to ensure that the future adaptive reuse of the Lodge site protects its assets and maintains public access and enjoyment of the site. We also consider that the Lodge site, together with the adjoining National Park, has the potential to become a nationally significant tourist attraction which will contribute substantial local and regional economic benefits. TRRA also appreciates the special heritage value of the site and its remaining relics from its World War II army garrison days which is the justification for its NSW Heritage register listing

TRRA networks with other local organisations on issues of shared interest. TRRA is represented on the Board of the Tomaree Headland Heritage Group Inc. (THHG) and has participated in the deliberations and initiatives of that organisation since its inauguration in 2018. TRRA contributed to and endorsed the submission made to Umwelt in December 2022 in response to the request for community comment on the future of the site.

SPECIFIC COMMENTS FROM TRRA

Planning Principles and Scale

TRRA, since its inauguration in 2008, has noted and responded to many proposals for the ultimate use of the lodge site and the Tomaree Headland as a whole. These have included a 5-star resort, a multi-storey casino, and an all new modern building

to house a regional museum and gallery. There have also been proposals to install a cable car/gondola providing access to the summit and to Stephens Peak immediately to the South of Zenith Beach. The membership of TRRA and the general community's responses to these proposals were, for the most part strongly negative. The reasons for opposing these proposals were largely on the grounds of the scale of the developments involved, the impact on heritage and natural assets, the absence of contextual character and the possibility of limitations on public access.

Accordingly, TRRA very much welcomed the 2022 report from the consultants Clouston and Associates entitled *Strategic Concept Plan - Adaptive Reuse of the Tomaree Lodge Site*. The consultants' planning analysis addressed key considerations including:

- Context
- Access and Circulation
- Natural Heritage and Environment
- Cultural Heritage (including the World War II History) Land Uses and Buildings
- Image and Character

This was followed by a statement of **Constraints and Opportunities, Concept Plan Principles** and **Concept Development.**

TRRA urges due regard to the consultants' advice on suitable Adaptive Reuse (See page 26 of this Report). The key paragraphs are quoted below:

> *'Any future uses should optimally draw directly from the site's environmental and cultural qualities, it's historical uses and its direct association with the Headland, the bay and its heritage and marine and terrestrial ecology.'*
>
> *'In that regard, future uses associated with such themes as the environment, culture, Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal heritage, World War II, terrestrial and marine ecology, education, research, the arts, health and wellbeing and so forth are likely to be compatible - subject to meeting other criteria implicit in the scale, character and accessibility of the place).'*
>
> *'Likewise, supporting and complementary uses for visitors such as food and beverage, toilets, visitor orientation, event spaces, wayfinding, interpretation and the like will also be compatible, where sensitively located and designed.'*

under the heading **Criteria and Ratings** (page 26) there is another key conclusion:

> *'This matrix (page 27) will however be able to demonstrate from the outset which uses are clearly not suitable to the site. For instance, any activity that requires large areas of parking for private vehicles on the site or which needs a large building footprint will not be compatible, given the site's location in a*

natural setting on a peninsular with a single minor road access and a village-like setting of small buildings'.

Opportunities

TRRA envisages the establishment of state-of-the-art interpretive displays relating to the heritage of the site and the marine life of Port Stephens.

TRRA believes that the listing of opportunities by THHG on pages 2,3 and 4 (see attachment A below) of their submission meet the Principles and Criteria as quoted above.

We particularly subscribe to the need to embrace uses which have the potential to generate revenue for the responsible management authority to provide the essential security, governance and maintenance of the site. In this regard a thorough financial feasibility study and business plan should follow or be part of the master planning process.

The very promising potential for the Headland to attract tourist and recreational visitation should be taken into account. The NPWS investment of some $7 million in its Coastal Walking Track, the expansion of Newcastle Airport's capacity and return of Australia as a prime overseas visitor destination should ensure a strong market for future businesses on the site. The quality and design of future uses will be a factor in the success of enterprises.

Master planning of the site will need to be carried out in co-operation with the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service. Access tracks and visitor service facilities such as wayfinding, interpretation, toilets and refreshments located on the lodge site can complement the improvements planned for the National Park and greatly strengthen their park visitor management and satisfaction.

Visitor Access and Transport

The capacity of the Lodge site and its approach road network are frequently raised by members of the community when contemplating the future use of the lodge site and the Headland/Coastal Walking Track. Observation of the pressure on access roads and parking in the Shoal Bay/Tomaree Headland precinct over the 2022/23 holiday period demonstrates that saturation point has already been reached.

Innovative solutions need to be investigated as a matter of urgency. Solutions could include:

- Reinstatement of the jetty at the Lodge site

- Substantial dedicated remote car parks (possibly along Nelson Bay Road) connected to the Headland by shuttle bus services.
- Augmentation of the existing Public Bus services.
- Introduction of a regular tourist bus (or tractor train) linking major visitation points such as Nelson Bay Marina, Fly Point, Little Beach, the Diggers Club, Shoal Bay Centre and Tomaree Headland.
- Time limited, paid parking on Shoal Bay Road and at the Headland car parks.
- Augmented cycle ways supported by additional bike racks at the Headland.

Responsibility for future Management

TRRA considers that the Lodge site and Tomaree Headland have a level of significance and potential for New South Wales to justify funding and support from the State level to undertake initial planning and improvements as well as security until the adaptive reuses are established and generating revenue.

We support the establishment of a Management Trust which would include representatives of relevant State Authorities such as NPWS and Port Stephens Council, Destination Port Stephens, as well as key community organisations such as the RSL Sub- branch, the Historical Society, EcoNetwork, the Museums Association and the Shoal Bay Association. The inclusion of persons on the trust (or as advisors to the trust) with relevant expertise in management of tourist and /or educational facilities or interpretive centres is also recommended.

TRRA welcomes this opportunity to have its say on this important matter.

Ben van der Wijngaart
President
Tomaree Ratepayers and Residents Association Inc. 5 January 2023

Attachment A: THHG Submission List of Opportunities

ATTACHMENT A – THHG SUBMISSION LIST OF OPPORTUNITIES

The Opportunities –

THHG's Vision is for the Lodge land to be retained in public ownership with the objective of providing maximum public access consistent with safety and conservation objectives.

THHG proposes a range of potential uses which it believes can be accommodated without detracting from the core heritage and natural values of the site and which do not require new large-scale buildings which could be inconsistent with the existing scale and current character of the heritage village.

- ***Recreation and sightseeing***
  The Lodge site is already very popular for passive recreation such as walking and sightseeing. NPWS records indicate that each year some 200,000 persons climbed to the Headland summit prior to the Covid outbreak. Many also take the tracks through the Lodge site and these numbers are expected to increase dramatically once the NPWS Coastal Track is completed.

- ***Visitor access orientation and amenities***

  These facilities are needed to cater for the Lodge site and Tomaree National Park and its Coastal Walking Track.

  Uses proposed by THHG include walking track extensions to increase accessibility to the Headland as a whole, interpretive facilities and displays, services such as toilets, a visitor information booth (wayfinding materials and displays), café/light refreshments and a base for guided walking tours focused on the natural and cultural heritage.

- ***Museum and Interpretation facilities*** *showcasing the History of the Headland and Tomaree Lodge, Worimi Culture, Port Stephens generally and its marine environment, especially whales and dolphins.*

  Some of the existing heritage buildings may be able to accommodate ***a permanent display on the history of the site, of world class standard, utilising state-of-the-art display techniques and audio-visuals.*** *This has potential to be a core attraction complementing any board mounted information planned for the Coastal Walk. This could be a source of revenue and become a primary attraction for Port Stephens as a whole.*

  The Nelson Bay RSL Sub-branch has proposed that the key World War II military relics be linked by a 'Memorial Walk' dedicated to those that trained and served from the Tomaree Peninsula.

- ***Education and Research***

The natural and heritage assets, coupled with the existing dormitory accommodation, could support educational activities such school or tertiary level excursions. This could also be associated with marine science research facilities.

- ***Visitor Services and Retail***

  In keeping with the village character of the Lodge and its relative isolation from the local retail and service centres, there may be scope for refreshment and food outlets as well as retailing of site-related souvenirs, arts and crafts, clothing and outdoors equipment.

- ***Events and Culture***

  There are some locations within the Lodge site which are suitable for outdoor events such as music, dance, drama and celebrations such as weddings. Subject to more detailed inspections of the existing buildings, there may be indoors spaces with similar potential. The capacity of the site and its open spaces as well as space for parking to accept these events is limited. This would determine the appropriate scale of such events.

  Arts and Crafts, including a gallery and workshops, could also be a suitable use.

- ***Marine-Linked Businesses***

  The existing oyster spawning operation is reliant on easy access to the relatively pristine water of the Bay and its owner is willing to accept visitors for inspections. This facility may be a nucleus for an oyster-tasting and sales business.

  Reinstatement of the jetty (recommended later in this submission) could also service tour boat and diving operations.

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