



## The Palm Beach & Whale Beach Association Inc.

[www.pbwba.org.au](http://www.pbwba.org.au) | PO Box 2 Palm Beach NSW 2108

### PROPOSED NEW PLAN OF MANAGEMENT – KU-RING-GAI NATIONAL PARK

*“The New South Wales Government is committed to retaining Barrenjoey’s special character, heritage buildings and natural environment. There will be no commercial development of new buildings on the top of the headland and the community will continue to enjoy the scenic views, walk the trails and have access to the tours of the headland and the lighthouse”*

*Robyn Parker, MLA, Minister for the Environment and Heritage, 7 August 2013*

### INTRODUCTION

This submission is prepared by the Palm Beach & Whale Beach Association, whose principal role over the past 100 years has been to advocate on behalf of the residents and businesses of Palm Beach and Whale Beach. The Association appreciates the opportunity to put forward its views to assist the National Parks & Wildlife Service in the formulation of proposals for a new plan of management for the Park.

The Association is most interested in proposals relating to Barrenjoey Headland, Lion Island and the Basin as the areas of the Park which impact on the interests of the members of the Association and the interests of the community, in the way in which those three parts of the Park are managed.

These three parts of the Park comprise a valuable site of heritage, historical and natural interest, much visited by tourists, a valuable nature reserve and a much-appreciated recreational area. The activities for which the Headland and the Basin are enjoyed affect the residential and commercial interests of our members and the communities of Palm Beach and Whale Beach. We therefore see one of our roles to help protect these unique values so that they can be enjoyed by future generations.

We support money raising opportunities to ensure the upkeep and maintenance of heritage assets to a high standard.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Objectives

(1) The objectives of national parks include the identification, preservation and conservation of areas containing outstanding or representative ecosystems, natural or cultural features or landscapes or

phenomena that provide opportunities for public appreciation an inspiration or sustainable tourist use and enjoyment. The Association supports these objectives.

### Aboriginal Partnerships

(2) The Association encourages steps to form partnerships with the Aboriginal community for the preservation and protection of significant sites within the park and for the recording and publication of the Aboriginal history and culture in relation to the area of the Park, particularly the area around The Basin and the Barrenjoey Headland. Such recordings and publications might be one of the basic business opportunities involving the Aboriginal people in making the tourist experience richer and more complete. These opportunities might be manifest in escorted tours on Pittwater and on West Head and the Barrenjoey Headland, for example.

(3) The Association notes that there are limited Aboriginal sites on the Headland but there is much rock art at The Basin which could be made the subject of Aboriginal-managed business opportunities for cultural education.

### Barrenjoey Headland

(4) Access to the Headland is restricted by two factors: - first, access along Station Beach is difficult at high tide as most of the Beach is covered. Second, access to the lighthouse complex is by way of a paved walkway which is not suitable for vehicular access except in an emergency, and one corner is particularly difficult for vehicles to negotiate. The walkway is too narrow for joint pedestrian and vehicular use and it is difficult to widen the walkway without significant damage to the natural environment. The Association does not therefore favour widening the access walkway. This issue of accessibility underlies a number of our submissions.

(5) The Association is not in favour of the use of the heritage buildings for short-term accommodation, for reasons of safety, both physical and fire-related, poor access, increased waste and the difficulties of its removal, lack of lighting and safe after-dark access, effect on nocturnal wild-life, and impact on the public visiting the Headland. The use of the heritage buildings for short-term accommodation would mean they were inaccessible for public access and to make them habitable for this purpose would risk damaging the unique interiors to install the standard of accommodation expected of modern short-term accommodation and would incur considerable cost.

Instead the Association favours finding other uses for the buildings which will preserve their historic exteriors and interiors. The buildings are the oldest collection of structures on Pittwater; their method of construction is unusual with dressed ashlar stonework and they contain rare stone kitchen chimneys, stone stairs, iron balustrades and the remains of covered ways.

These alternative uses might include: -

- An interpretative centre for NPWS, highlighting history, heritage, park management, culture of the area, ecosystems or littoral systems, wildlife conservation; this could include immersive audio-visual presentations, sales of books, cards, photos, art, videos and other relevant merchandise;

- A study centre for any of the above topics, including the holding of classes as a possible income stream;
- Artists' studios or an art gallery or a resident artist;
- A writer in residence, one of whose roles could be interacting with the public on the culture or history of the area;
- A resident historian, coupled with research on a particular topic/s of interest;
- History "days" for tourists, visitors and school groups;
- A learning centre for restoration and maintenance of historic buildings and their interiors, with demonstrations.

An alternative use which would at least ensure the upkeep of the heritage buildings would be to let some of them on long-term "repairing" leases where in return for a nominal rent, the tenants would undertake to preserve their conservation values and maintain them in good condition. This has been done in the past. The tenants could perhaps be asked to assist the volunteers at the lighthouse.

One of the cottages could be furnished in the style of the era of its construction with appropriate explanatory commentary and opened for public viewing for a fee.

Much is made in the documentation of the historical background of the Headland and Pittwater – maritime trade and safety, growth of coastal trade, timber cutting, salt and soda production, smuggling and more; there is no other venue at present where this history and culture is available to the public. Surely this could be exploited for income generation. Funds could be generated from the rental of space, rent of headphones, fees for courses or for history "days", coin-operated interpretative displays, sale of artworks and the like.

(5) The Headland urgently requires the completion of a water supply and sewage facilities, in the interests of visitor safety and the avoidance of pollution. With at least 250,000 visitors per annum, the provision of these facilities is an urgent necessity.

(6) While the provision of basic levels of refreshment would not be objectionable, there is only one means of access and no parking available so restocking would have to be done during hours when the Headland was not open to the public. Rubbish removal is also a problem. The economic viability of such an operation would be doubtful. A café or restaurant would not be an acceptable use of the heritage buildings.

(7) The use of the Headland for functions such as weddings is not practicable due to the difficulty of access for organised groups, and such functions limit or exclude public access. The addition of a helipad or the use of the heritage buildings for conference facilities should be explicitly excluded in the plan of management.

(8) Urban Night Sky use of the Headland should not be allowed because of the need to install lighting for reasons of safety (which would cause light pollution and disturb nocturnal animals), there is no proper safety fence around the public area on the Headland and the problem with accessibility referred to earlier.

### Fisherman's Cottages on the Beach

(9) In relation to the Fishermen's Cottages, there is some heritage value in the cottage built in 1928. There would have to be significant expenditure to remove or seal asbestos and deal with rot, to lift the buildings to a suitable standard for habitation. It is doubtful if the income would amortise the cost of renovation. Access is difficult and there are at present no facilities for rubbish removal and the sewage facilities would require substantial upgrading. The buildings should not be rebuilt or extended. If they cannot justify conservation as they stand, the Association would prefer that they were demolished and that area returned to its natural state.

### The Boatman's Cottage and Red Boatshed

(10) In relation to the Boatman's Cottage and the Red Boatshed, these have history and a certain heritage value. It is understood that the Boatman's Cottage is currently occupied by a ranger/caretaker and that person performs a very valuable service on the Headland. Should this cease (and we would not want it to cease), the Association would be prepared to consider alternative uses. However the Association understands that the terms of transfer of these properties from the Commonwealth specifies that these buildings should be taken down when no longer occupied and the area returned to its natural state. This would represent a loss of heritage. The archaeological remains of the Customs House are part of the history of the area and should be conserved.

The Red Boatshed represents an opportunity for other activities, including an interpretative centre or children's' activities, centred around early smuggling activities and their history. A Smugglers' Cove children's educational activity centre would be worth considering. The Boatshed could perhaps include a coffee facility and drinks store.

### The Basin

(11) In relation to the Basin, the Association would not object to additional "glamping sites" being installed or greater use of Beechwood Cottage, provided that this would not "crowd out" the existing camping use. The Association is concerned that that any expansion of activities in The Basin would require additional parking on the Palm Beach side of Pittwater. There is no capacity in Pittwater Park South near the ferry or in Governor Phillip Park or surrounding streets to absorb additional parking. We recommend that parking be made available at the Careel Bay Playing Fields (and the cost included in the charge for The Basin) but this might require additional transport from the Playing Fields to the ferry. Greater use of Beechwood Cottage would be welcomed but the facility requires greater publicising and promotion and this may require entering to a contract or contracts with professional event organisers to maximise its use. The history display installed for a brief period in Beechwood Cottage some years ago should be updated and restored to a publicly accessible position in The Basin – there is also a possibility here to reference the Aboriginal heritage.

### Revenue generation

(12) The Association is concerned that the Headland and the adjoining Governor Phillip represent an overworked stretch of public recreation with already overstretched parking and toilet and garbage facilities. The installation of toilet facilities on the Headland will reduce that stress but if public usage is expected to increase, planning to provide additional facilities will be required.

(13) The preparation of proper business plans, both for the Headland and for The Basin might reveal other opportunities but would certainly assist in the financial management of these natural assets and assist in making responsible choices for the heritage assets.

(14) There should be a donation box in a conspicuous position on the Headland – people are generally appreciative of the value and costs of keeping the Headland and its heritage assets in good condition.

Two pay telescopes could be installed at the brass direction finder plate, to allow visitors to see the spectacular surroundings more clearly and also whale spot during the relevant periods.

Development of a phone app to provide information on the various attractions of the National Park, including the features of the Headland and the Basin could provide another revenue possibility.

Expansion of the Lighthouse tours to include Saturdays, augmenting volunteers with NPWS guides, would also increase revenue.

#### Natural and Shared Heritage Values

(13) The Association notes the statement that “sustainable visitor or tourist use is not one of the purposes for establishing a nature reserve”. So far as Lion Island is concerned, the Association appreciates the relevance of this statement and would not wish to see any changes in the way in which Lion Island is managed at present – any greater human involvement would endanger the fragile ecosystem which is essential for the survival of a number of species in Pittwater.

In relation to both the Headland and the Basin, the fact is that both areas have for many years been managed as both tourist destinations and nature reserves and, short of barring the public from the area, the dual role of the areas must be recognised and accepted and provided for in the management plan and managed in a way which preserves these precious natural resources.

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The Association appreciates the opportunity to put forward its views and would be happy to discuss further any of the points contained in this submission.

A/Prof Richard West AM

President

8 September 2019