



The Palm Beach & Whale Beach Association Inc.
www.pbwba.org.au | PO Box 2 Palm Beach NSW 2108

16 February 2026

Ms Alex Graham,
Director-General
National Parks & Wildlife Service (NSW)

Dear Ms Graham,

Belated congratulations on your appointment, about which we have only just heard. A challenging assignment, no doubt, but we wish you success.

The Palm Beach & Whale Beach Association Inc. is a community organisation, formed to protect the local environment and the amenity of these two suburbs and to advocate on behalf of the residents, landowners and small businesses of the area. It was formed in 1918 specifically to prevent what is now Governor Phillip Park from being subdivided and sold for residential development and has been involved in many similar campaigns over the intervening 107 years. We have over 450 members.

Barrenjoey Headland and Governor Phillip Park are the second most frequently visited reserves on the Northern Beaches, after North Head, Manly, with, we understand, more than 300,00 visitors a year.

Almost exactly three years ago, this Association, jointly with Protect Pittwater, organized a public meeting in Governor Phillip Park, Palm Beach to demonstrate against the then proposal to refit the heritage cottages and house on Barrenjoey Headland for short term holiday accommodation. The cottages, house and lighthouse are the oldest structures on Pittwater and are of significant historic importance. The community did not, and does not, believe that their historic value and heritage interiors should be lost to the public in the pursuit of a limited source of income but it does acknowledge that the NPWS should be able to earn a return on such assets, while at the same time preserving public access.

The meeting was addressed by the Minister, the Hon. Penny Sharpe who came to the same conclusion and promised that the cottages would not be commercialized in this way but would be preserved. She also supported the proposal of the establishment of a Community Reference Group to investigate alternative uses for the cottages and house, while preserving their heritage and historic values and public access.

What has happened in the meantime? Nothing! No community reference group, no attempt to preserve the interiors and exteriors of these important structures, no communication, either with the public or the organisers of the public meeting, other than the announcement of new toilet facilities on the Headland twelve months ago. We should mention that we have campaigned for the availability of water and toilet facilities for the Headland for something like twenty years.

One other concern. Over the past twenty years, there have been numerous incidents of accidents and health emergencies affecting visitors to the Headland. There have also been a number of bushfires on the Headland. There is no access to the Headland for emergency vehicles because part of the access is along the sand of Station Beach on the Pittwater side of the Headland. There is a wide masonry path from the beach up to the Lighthouse but it is not wide enough to accommodate normal emergency vehicles and they can't get access to the path because of the beach. What usually happens, at least in daylight, is that someone contacts the North Palm Beach Surf Club and asks if their ATV can be made available. Usually it can be made available and a driver found but this is not within NPWS control. There is no ATV on the Headland. However because NPWS is not connected into Emergency Services, like for example, the Surf Clubs, communication with NPWS in these emergencies is very difficult and rescues frequently take place with no NPWS involvement.

Earlier this month, there were three emergencies on the one day (3 February) on or near Barrenjoey Headland. The first was a man who fell on the headland near the Lighthouse, broke a leg and became unconscious; his condition required the New South Wales emergency rescue helicopter with a critical care paramedic – he was winched up and transferred to Royal North Shore Hospital. The second was a man who collapsed on Sandy beach with a heart attack after rowing himself ashore – again the CareFlight helicopter was called into service to transport him to RNSH. The third was a woman who in the late afternoon fell from the headland pathway down an 8-metre rockface; the NSW Ambulance Service helicopter was called and winched a medical team directly down to her; by this time it was dark and she had to be winched up to the helicopter on a Stokes litter and flown to RNSH. The response from emergency services was fantastic but there was no involvement by NPWS staff or equipment.

Since Governor Phillip Park was declared a “Dark Sky” venue a couple of years ago, another risk has become more critical. The Headland is not closed to access at night and people have been known for years to visit it at night but with the Dark Sky events now happening several times a year, the risks are multiplied. There is no way of knowing how many do this or who is there on a particular occasion. There have been a few instances, fortunately rare, of people falling down one of the cliffs of the Headland at night and not being found until some time later the next day.

Clearly health emergencies, accidents and fires will continue to happen and are likely to become more frequent with increasing visitors but NPWS and the headland should be properly equipped to handle them better.

We would like to recommend three immediate courses of action: -

1. Proposals for the formation of the community reference group and its terms of reference and rules to be finalised and published for comment within 2 months from now. The group should obviously comprise representatives of NPWS as well as local community associations. The identity of its chair would be important.
2. A public report on the condition of the cottages and house is required because of three years of lack of maintenance and the impact of, for example, the recent severe summer storms. This could also cover any damage from the recent fire.
3. The integration of NPWS into the emergency communication systems of NSW, to assist rapid recovery of patients in emergencies and to ensure rapid response to accidents and fires.
4. The stationing of an ATV on the Headland with designated drivers to deal with emergencies.

We would be very happy to meet with you to discuss these issues or to show you around the area.

We look forward to hearing from you.

FWE Bush AM

President

Palm Beach & Whale Beach association, Inc.

cc. The Hon Penny Sharpe, Minister for Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, Parliament House, Macquarie Street, Sydney

Jacqui Scruby MP, Member for Pittwater, Parliament House, Macquarie Street, Sydney

Mr Deon Van Rensburg, Director, Greater Sydney, National Parks & Wildlife Service,