

25 February 2006

The Secretary,  
Senate Environment, Communications Information  
Technology and the Arts Reference Committee,  
Parliament House,  
Canberra, ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam

I have previously made a submission on behalf of the Botany Bay and Catchment Alliance concerning the impending impacts on Towra Point Ramsar Wetland as a consequence of the recent approval for dredging of Botany Bay for an additional shipping container terminal.

This submission is a personal account of National Park issues I have taken an interest in. My comments are restricted to the management of National Parks within New South Wales. The majority of references are made to management practices carried on within the Sydney Region and more specifically to the management of Botany Bay National Park (Northside).

I will begin by a broad address to the terms of reference:

- (a) **Values and objectives** are defined in documents such as the Corporate Mission, Corporate Plan, and a variety of policy documents. The implementation of and compliance with those values and objectives depends on the integrity/capacity of individual rangers backed by their line managers. In some areas they operate under political constraints and these constraints impact on the integrity of the management process.
  
- (b) It is difficult to assess whether the NSW government **budget** for National Parks is adequate. National Parks cover approximately 7% of the State and there is approximately 1 ranger per 20,000 hectares. Looking at previous Annual Reports it is clear that higher staff increases have been achieved in management areas which are "off the ground". There is evidence that fire management regimes are inadequate in parts of NSW and disquiet from long standing bushwalking groups that trails (fire and bushwalking) are not being maintained. I don't believe, given more pressing priorities in Health, Transport and Education, that the State Government could finance NPWS to the level where most environmentalists would be satisfied but – and this is a big but – the NPWS in my opinion could manage far better with the resources that it does have. To do this would require the organization to be totally committed and involved with its constituency - neighbours, visitors, volunteers, environmental and recreational groups.

NPWS is required to not only manage flora and fauna and habitat and provide recreational opportunities but also to manage cultural heritage. The focus and the budget is spread too thin amongst competing interests.

While the NPWS is the only agency charged with conservation of flora and fauna European and Aboriginal cultural heritage sits with various agencies including the Heritage Office, Historic Homes Trust, Australian Museum.

- (c) The **major threats** are these: Planning Decisions which for political reasons are not challenged by NPWS managers; lack of community engagement beyond a few selected interest groups; recruitment of personnel who have poor community engagement skills; direct political interference; a diminished focus on 'core business'

With the introduction of "green offsets" / similar trade off schemes staff in certain areas of the NPWS are expected to deliver judgements as to which are the more worthy areas of conservation. Staff making such judgements are often unaware of the community value and restoration possibilities. In addition such staff typically come with narrow specialised environmental/cultural heritage training.

- (d) In my experience there is a **lack of coordination** between government agencies and at each level of government. There appears to be no commitment to bringing players to the table to solve problems in a whole of government approach and certainly no commitment to provide leadership in the solution of any such problems.

Core business and values are diluted by managing activities which lie outside the Corporate Mission.

- (e) In my experience the **record on management is poor**. There are pockets of excellence and dedicated officers who have outstanding records of achievement but there is no consistency throughout the service.

I will briefly outline the management and the problems presented, primarily at Botany Bay National Park (northside):

## **BACKGROUND**

Botany Bay National Park is located on the South at Kurnell where it includes an area around and through Cape Solander. On the North the area extends from Cape Banks west to Bare Island. The South is managed in a separate Area and Region to the North. The Northside managers are located at Nielsen Park, Vaucluse. Vaucluse is situated on Sydney Harbour and the suburb presents a significantly different demographic profile from that of La Perouse. One of the neighbours at Vaucluse for instance is Mr Lowy, the

Chairman of Westfield Corporation. The Westfield Corporation contributed over \$200,000 for the restoration of the colonial garden at Greycliffe House, the NPWS headquarters at Vacluse.

There are two major community forums operating in La Perouse. The first is the La Perouse Precinct Committee which is open to anyone residing in La Perouse and neighbouring suburbs of Little Bay and Phillip Bay and the second is the La Perouse Land Council where members must be of Aboriginal descent. Around 35% of the population of La Perouse are of aboriginal descent.

Until late July 2005 the local member for Botany Bay National Park (northside) was Mr Bob Carr.

## **VISITATIONS**

Visitations to the Park(northside) were recorded at around 400,000 annually in the 2000 Draft Plan of Management. Since then numbers have possibly doubled with the opening of the M5 East and the introduction of parking meters to beaches further north. The area is particularly popular with residents from Sydney's south-western suburbs as well as international tourists. Popular weekend attractions include the Snakeman (a family tradition of nearly a century) and the Boomerang man (another local family tradition).

## **MAJOR FEATURES**

The main Park features on the Northside are these (please see map **Attachment 1**):

**Cape Banks** – listed for its entry to Botany Bay and fine sandstone. Site for whalewatching. Site of WWII military heritage regarded as highly significant in recent study, includes tunnels where rare and threatened Eastern Bent Wing bats roost. Significant site for shorebirds and raptors and rare and endangered *Themeda australis*. Marine conservation reserve area around to Henry Head and site of ongoing studies by UNSW and University of Sydney. Site used for filming.

**Coast Cemetery** – associated with history of Prince Henry Hospital and recently with reburials of aboriginal remains.

**Henry Head and Headland walk** – area where Banks and Solander collected during stay in Botany Bay (according to botanical analysis by Benson and Howells). Around 350 native species recorded around the area. Significant flora display, dominated by flannel flowers, in Spring. The National Park(northside only) holds some of the most significant stands of the remaining 1% of Rare and Threatened Eastern Suburbs Banksia Scrub.

**Browns Rock** and other sites around the coast are popular with fishers.

**Cruwee Bay** – site where Cook first collected water in Botany Bay.

**Congwong Bay** – site where Phillip may have collected water (Yarra Bay is also regarded as another possible site). Also the site where the Olympic Arts Festival was opened in 2000. Site used for filming. The Bay is the only number 1 ranking area of Botany Bay under EPA testing for bacterial contamination.

**Bare Island** – significant military history, site of filming for Mission Impossible II, significant scuba diving site.

**Laperouse Museum** – Telecommunications history (first connection with NZ February 1876), Laperouse expedition, local aboriginal history.

**Laperouse Headland Monuments** – Has particular significance to French community and regularly visited by French dignitaries in addition to annual celebrations of mass for Pere Receveur and Bastille Day and Laperouse Day.

**Macquarie Watchtower** – the first 'customs house' in Australia built by Governor Macquarie.

**Happy Valley** – significant Depression Camp site; creek runs (at times) into Botany Bay.

## **MAJOR MANAGEMENT ISSUES 2002-2006**

In compiling these papers I have been mindful of time constraints that the committee will have and have been careful to restrict the number of documents submitted as attachments. Please be aware that I am happy to provide further information – written or verbal - on any line of inquiry you may have.

### **CAPE BANKS REVOCATION OF NATIONAL PARK**

The revocation of National Park at Cape Banks illustrates my points regarding political interference and lack of community engagement.

The 'Westpac' Helicopter Rescue service was located on Anzac Parade, within the Prince Henry Hospital grounds. With the residential redevelopment of the hospital site by the State Government Corporation, Landcom a new site was to be found for the service. This site was found near Port Botany and the La Perouse Precinct Committee was briefed by the Project Manager, Garry Bauer. **Attachment 2** details that relocation.

There was no further consultation with the La Perouse Precinct Committee. Instead there were rumours that Landcom were 'pressuring' NPWS and the Scouts to allow the construction of a helicopter base at Cape Banks. Apparently the CEO of the Helicopter Service was not happy with the Port Botany site and wanted a more upmarket 'corporate' site that would allow him to promote additional services such as maintenance. With the assistance of a

senior executive at Westpac he captured the ear of the local member, Mr Carr. Mr Carr then set events in train that led to the revocation of part of the National Park specifically for the Helicopter base in May 2004, under a special act of parliament. One of the major reasons given in parliament and in correspondence has been that the area is not in controlled airspace. When I finally checked with Air Services Australia I was told that this was not the case at all (**attachment 3**). The decision to revoke National Park was not supported by the National Parks Association (see **attachment 4**) but it was supported by some senior scouts but not by local and district scouts. See **attachments 5 and 6** for background regarding the scouting connection. The main reasons for opposition to the Cape Banks site is because it is insecure and relatively remote; the road is narrow, winding and dangerous(as per a statement from the Plan of Management); military heritage and avian species are impacted; 20,000 litres of fuel will be stored and there will be regular deliveries of such fuel; the site at Sydney Airport is more convenient for the majority of missions; revoking National Park sets a dangerous precedent. There was no media coverage of this aside from an article in the Daily Telegraph (**attachment 7**) because any attempt to put an opposing view has been portrayed as an attack on the Rescue Service. I raised this issue with the then Treasurer, Mr Refshauge, early last year and he quickly dismissed it exactly in those terms. A neighbour and myself had a meeting with Landcom staff after the revocation was passed. (see **attachment 8** for follow up). In April last year the REF was placed on exhibition. In response to this I wrote to Bob Carr (**attachment 9**) and the Federal Environment Minister, DEH (**attachment 10**) and Morris Iemma (then Health Minister) (**Attachment 11**). I received a reply from my correspondence to Mr Iemma from Frank Sartor in February 2006(**attachment 12**). It fails to acknowledge that the area is in controlled airspace but the author does suggest that a base at Cape Banks will 'increase security' - a new angle on the issue. There have been reported impacts on whales despite what has been said. While the problem of the road has never been acknowledged I have heard recently on the 'rumour mill' that changes, impacting on the National Park, will be made to the road to accommodate the helicopter base traffic.

There is a great deal of information related to this issue including the allocation of rescue resources within the Sydney basin and the status of the Illawarra service. The Cape Banks decision came from the very top of government and various public servants within a number of agencies have had to spin reasons why that decision is in the best interests of NSW. Both sides of parliament supported the Bill. It would have been impossible to oppose given the ease with which opponents could be attacked on the spurious basis that they were opposing rescue operations.

## **DESTRUCTION OF EASTERN SUBURBS BANKSIA SCRUB**

This case illustrates how the NPWS is forced to play 'Sophie's Choice' with regard to conservation values. A former DEC officer explained the problem with reference to the Biodiversity Banking system of Red, Amber and Green lights – Red are generally off limits to development and green can be easily

negotiated. Apparently one ministerial response was 'we've got too many 'red' lights some of them will have to change to 'green'.

Eastern Suburbs Banksia Scrub is rare and threatened. Only 1% (or 2% depending on the source) remain of the original communities covering the Eastern Suburbs of Sydney. Stands of ESBS occurred on the Prince Henry site. Under the original masterplan these were conserved. The original masterplan has undergone numerous amendments and the amendment process is on-going. An early amendment saw 2 stands of ESBS 'standing in the way' of some desired roadworks. To get around the problem the National Parks staff reclassified these particular stands as less worthy of conservation based on disturbance with rubbish and reduced diversity. The NPWS supported the Landcom referral to the EPBC Act and in return Landcom agreed to pay \$100,000 for ESBS 'restoration' in the Botany Bay National Park. (see **attached article 13**) I wrote to Mr Carr before the newspaper article to 'alert' him to the problem (**attachment 14**). The reply given invoked the judgement that this ESBS was of lesser quality and that Landcom were compensating by enhancing ESBS on the Prince Henry site. The soil which underpins the integrity of this plant community was never referred to. There is a notion that ESBS can be created within a short timeframe!

## **REPATRIATION OF ABORIGINAL REMAINS AT COAST CEMETERY**

This is an example of the NPWS resources being spread too thinly and items and areas of cultural significance which should be dealt with by a Heritage office with State-wide resources and expertise instead being dealt with 'in-house' by Parks.

The Coast Cemetery is notable for the number of graves of patients who died of infectious diseases and the young nurses who cared for them. Despite being incorporated into the Parks Estate many years ago there has been no conservation or adequate interpretation (the same applies to the military heritage at Cape Banks and Henry Head).

The area is of course also significant for local aboriginal people. In recent years the repatriated remains of Aboriginal people have been buried at the cemetery. In September last year after another reburial the area was declared an Aboriginal Place. Some members of the Aboriginal community have objected to the fact that the reburials included those of people who were not connected with the La Perouse area. There has been no attempt to explain why Aboriginal remains cannot be buried as close to their original lands as possible such as Harbourside National Park but also other State managed lands. Confining significant Aboriginal heritage to the Parks portfolio limits the opportunities to provide Aboriginal people with appropriate cultural responses. There is also a very nasty hangover from colonial times and beyond when Aboriginal peoples were cast with the flora and fauna!

## **WILDLIFE RESCUE AND HABITAT PROTECTION**

These are examples where core business is neglected.

The NPWS is charged with the conservation of wildlife however while it licences a number of wildlife care organizations it provides no coordination of services, no first point of contact, nor does it adequately communicate with wildlife carers. The attached article (15) illustrates this problem of poor communication. While wildlife organizations in the Eastern Suburbs continue to rescue and rear brushtail possums the NPWS licences the Botanic Gardens to cull them. The NPWS officers quoted in the article did not communicate with carers in the same area of Sydney that they regarded the animals as problems and the region overstocked and that a coordinated approach to their management might be required. Another example is that of the Ibis, now at pest levels in parts of Sydney. Poisoning programs have been approved unbeknown to both carers and Vets with the result that very precious caring and professional medical time and energy has been expended attempting to treat and rehabilitate animals which the NPWS had approved for destruction. As a result of such practices and lack of communication, the message regarding wildlife conservation becomes muddled and respect for wildlife and the need to protect them and their habitat is diminished.

The case of migratory rare and threatened Little Terns nesting on the northside of Botany Bay is another case where political influence was brought to bear and where conservation values were compromised. Little Terns have nested on the northside of Botany Bay for thousands of years. According to noted environmentalist and 'founding father' of Towra Point (as per his submission to Upper House Inquiry into NSW Ports), the northside of the Bay, despite the industrial impacts of the port and airport, supports a greater diversity and numbers of birdlife than Towra Point. However the NPWS policy is to promote Towra Point as the one and only sanctuary for wading birds. When Little Terns were attempting to land and nest at Molineaux Point the NPWS used pickets and silver bunting to discourage them. When I wrote to Mr Carr about this I received a reply from NPWS saying that the numbers at Molineaux were not sufficient to support a colony and that as they had a Little Tern Warden at Towra Point they were encouraging the birds to nest there. I replied suggesting that it was possible to do something creative by protecting the wildlife on the north of the Bay. (see correspondence **attachment 16**). I didn't receive a reply. Soon after this time a warehouse was erected at Molineaux Point. There is more to the story. On an ABC report on Towra Point more recently, the NPWS officer in charge of the Little Tern breeding program admitted that the program at Towra had begun with far fewer than the minimum number of breeding pairs quoted to me. The argument, including I would argue 'the science' has been arranged to fit the desired outcome. A further reference to the Little Tern case appears at **attachment 37**.

## **MAINTENANCE OF LAWNS AND LITTER CONTROL**

This is an example of where the NPWS diminishes its service by providing services outside the corporate mission and also demonstrates poor communication.

In August 2002 some folk at Vaucluse heard that the NPWS would no longer be mowing lawns and picking up garbage. In an attempt to maximise public outrage they letter-dropped not only the Vaucluse area but also La Perouse. I responded with an email of congratulations to Messrs Carr and Debus suggesting it was about time Parks concentrated on core business, that a whole of government approach to littering be adopted, that a take-in take out policy be enforced and that 'feral' water-sucking lawns be left to wither. I received a response assuring me that the maintenance service would continue and no acknowledgement that I had in fact opposed it. I replied to this but received no response in return. (see **Attachment 17**)

## **CONSERVATION AND PROMOTION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE**

This is another example which suggests that Cultural Heritage should be managed by a more appropriate organization.

Because of the proximity to the Sydney CBD (20 minutes car and direct bus 40 minutes) variety of attractions, free parking, open space, eateries etc. there are ample opportunities to promote NPWS attractions on the La Perouse peninsula. There are a number of areas of the NSW curriculum that can be covered by visiting schools. Yet the promotion of activities is all but non-existent.

The Museum carries very little merchandise, in stark contrast to its equivalent at Kurnell. Complaints have been raised over many years and ignored. Early last year the Regional Manager signed an MOU with an interested party and with the assistance of the then President of the Friends organization said party effectively 'took over' the resources of the Friends of Laperouse Museum Incorporated. Email correspondence has flowed between various members regarding the legal status of the Friends....Inc. I am not at liberty to include the correspondence initiated by other members. The management of the Museum has deteriorated. On last Australia Day – a significant day given that Phillip's first landing in Australia was at La Perouse – not even the Australian flag was flown. A small detail but symbolic of the lack of interest in National Heritage.

I do include 1 exchange of correspondence I had early last year concerning a National Trust walk that I had organised the previous year on behalf of the Friends of Laperouse Museum to illustrate problems of communication over events that members of the Friends have attempted to organise. (**Attachment 18**)



It should be noted that there are a number of casually employed Museum guides who are extremely knowledgeable about La Perouse/ Botany Bay history, flora and military sites. Even though they may prefer to work at the Museum, for reasons of expertise or commuting time, they are rostered throughout Sydney. There is no opportunity therefore to fully utilise their special talents be they environmental or historical expertise or fluency in the French language. They are in no position to raise objections.

## **VALUES AND OBJECTIVES**

One of the major objectives of the NPWS is to provide recreational/education experiences for the public of NSW within the overriding constraints of protection of natural and cultural heritage.

Botany Bay National Park (northside) includes Congwong Bay, the only area of Botany Bay which complies 100% under EPA guidelines for clean beaches. Yarra Bay on the other side of the peninsula for example fails to comply over 30% of the year.

There are 2 beaches in Congwong Bay. The first of these is wide and open with a noticeable rip. The second, called Little Congwong, is smaller, flanked by rockpools, and protected to the north. A pathway connects the two beaches. **Attachment 19** gives a brief snapshot. Little Congwong in recent years has been used for anti-social activities effectively alienating it from general use by families with children. A few years ago a website called Sydkidz listed the best children's beaches in Sydney; Little Congwong was 1 of 2 Eastern Suburbs beaches (the other was Parsley Bay) to be listed. A short time later the website carried a warning that the beach was used by nudists and would be unsuitable for children. A later warning carried a notice that because of activities associated with nudists Police warned that it was an unsuitable beach for children. **Attachment 20** taken from an internet posting gives some idea of why the Police issued a warning. Families who know the situation avoid the beach and unknowing visitors who walk across to the beach quickly return saying they won't go there again.

Beaches in summer in Sydney are very popular. Congwong Bay is 20 minutes from the CBD and 20minutes from Sydney's SW suburbs such as Belmore, Lakemba, Punchbowl, Greenacre. Increasingly we are seeing a more culturally diverse range of people come to La Perouse. Many of these groups of people are traditionally under-represented as visitors of National Parks. To allow Little Congwong to remain dominated by a select club fails to acknowledge the stated commitment to Parks being available for all. A summary of the issues related to NPWS stated policies is contained in **Attachment 21**.

I have corresponded on this issue since 2003. Shortly after Mr Carr's retirement in July 2005 NPWS placed signs to say that Little Congwong was not a nudist beach. Until that time no 'warning' existed for visitors to the park. The NPWS do not accept that the beach is part of Botany Bay National Park because at high tide the water covers the beach. For that reason no

statement will be made on behalf of the many families who are locked out from using the area. The last correspondence(11/1/06) received came from the Director of National Parks informing me that "The DEC is not an arbitrator or enforcer of public morality issues....the government has previously determined that local councils are in the best position to determine the degree of attire on beaches..."(**Attachment 22**) Please note that it was Minister for Environment, then Pam Allen, who introduced amendments to the relevant local government act to legalise nude beaches in selected National Parks and Manly Council members were ridiculed for insisting that Reef Beach remain in the public domain. I have since written to Mr lemma suggesting that the NPWS response is inadequate (**Attachment 23**).

I wrote to the Mayor of Randwick in 2003 and the matter was referred on. I later followed up with an email after confronting 2 males engaged in a sexual act. The email was brief and somewhat cryptic given that it was also sent to the police commander and needed to go through the police email filter. The police commander replied and asked me to telephone. I did and he told me that he was conducting operations targeting pedophiles at the beach. Mr Carr's office did not reply. The Mayor's office sent it on to the General Manager's office and **Attachment 24** is the reply I received – I would suggest by mistake!

The failure to communicate and address issues of leadership and promotion of park values is summarised in correspondence at **Attachment 25**.

There appears a **general failure to provide leadership in coordinating approaches to conservation issues in 'interface zones'**. Little Congwong Beach, for instance, is now referred to as the beach adjacent to the National Park yet to the public it is a National Park Beach. NPWS are not concerned with the marine life in the rockpools around the beaches because it is the responsibility of DPI yet to the public the rockpools are an integral part of the National Park. While a marine reserve exists along the shoreline from Cape Banks to Henry Head it does not extend to Bare Island. Parents taking their children to a National Park expect to see native animals protected and respected – these values form part of the NPWS public identity. Yet while the animals in the sand dunes may be afforded protection the animals in the rockpools or close in shore are not. The focus on observing the natural world is broken by the intrusion of visitors with knives, spears and spearguns. It is acceptable to spear the squid and beat it on the rocks but such action against a lizard just a few metres away is illegal and subject to stringent fines.

## **MANAGEMENT OF VOLUNTEERS**

There will never be enough money in any State budget to manage the Parks estate and promote conservation and protection of native flora and fauna. A commitment to enlisting Friends organizations and volunteers goes a long way to providing a solution to the problem. There are in NSW some notable volunteer programs and in Sydney, the Friends of Lane Cove National Park and the Chase-Alive Program are amongst them. My own experience of volunteering at Botany Bay National Park(northside) is a textbook case study

in how to alienate volunteers. In fact just before a long-standing field staff member retired at Christmas 2004 he said to me: "I can tell you now that I'm leaving....they(the managers) don't want you here."

I moved with my family to La Perouse from the inner Sydney suburb of Redfern in 2000 and in 2001 set up a group called the Laperouse Explorers constituted as a Chapter of the CSIRO Double Helix Club. This consisted primarily of local parents, their children, the local cub mistress and anyone else who expressed interest. Our first volunteering project was National Tree Planting Day, July 29, 2001. The following year we set up a website, joined the Sydney Water Streamwatch Program – watertesting sites in the National Park – and set up a program of weeding in the National Park encouraged by the local NPWS Ranger. The local NPWS Ranger was particularly supportive and capable. The Neighbourhood Relations Liaison officer for NPWS at that time was also supportive. **Attachments 26** and **27** are examples of the activities and the nature of the email communication to the group. Laperouse Explorers were a point of contact for anyone interested in weeding programs in the park and a link to our website was listed on the National Parks website, see **attachment 28**. It was removed around March 2005.

Around Christmas 2002 the local ranger left to take up a position at another park. She came to say goodbye, was apologetic about 'abandoning' our program but indicated that there were issues which 'compelled' her to leave. She stayed on our Laperouse Explorers email list and from time to time would reply with words of encouragement.

A temporary ranger took her place. He was less enthusiastic and within a short time had scheduled a local field officer to take his place on weekend weeding days. This field officer was very knowledgeable about the local flora in the park and we conducted a number of productive sessions.

Mid 2003 I prepared an application for an ANH grant for interpretation of Happy Valley with the focus on sustainability. I had spoken to Geoff Sainty, a noted wetlands expert and consultant in Sydney and I met with the acting ranger and field officers before I submitted the application to management staff at Vaucluse(see **Attachment 29**). When I followed up with the relevant staff member I was told that there were no resources to support the application. I said that Laperouse Explorers would handle everything but as we were unincorporated we would require Parks to handle any finances if we were successful in obtaining a grant. (I had in 2001 signed off as a community representative for the same staff member when he had applied for a grant on behalf of NPWS). The application was to be forwarded onto the acting Regional Manager. After a month I had heard nothing so I drove over to Vaucluse on August 14. There I spoke to the acting Ranger and senior field officer who was handling the application. The senior field officer picked over it as if he were correcting a student essay. He queried the protected species list and scoffed at the inclusion of Dugong. I had taken the information from the Australian Museum, I said. He then remembered that Dugong had been in Botany Bay and continued to pick on another trivial point. He finished by saying there were no resources to support the application and indicated that

that was the end of the matter. The acting ranger then asked how often did the cubs use the Scout Ground at Cape Banks. It was not a pleasant meeting and I left shortly afterward surprised and disappointed that a volunteer would be treated in such a manner.

I did not pursue the grant application. The Acting Ranger no longer arranged for the Field Officer to attend weeding sessions yet Laperouse Explorers continued to be listed as the point of contact on the NPWS website. We continued to weed and we continued to include the Acting Ranger for all email correspondence. **Attachment 30** is an example of a report on our progress. Early in 2004 I sent around the weeding schedule for that year to the email list. As each session approached I sent reminders. Friday August 13 I sent such a reminder and received in reply a note from the Ranger (previously Acting) to say that we could not weed because of OH&S reasons. (**Attachment 31**) I did respond to say we were still interested in continuing to weed and the Ranger telephoned on October 6 to talk about "this volunteer stuff". He preferred to avoid weekends which made it difficult to arrange. We had one weekend session after that with the outgoing senior field officer, his wife and a friend, but as volunteers were generally unavailable for weekday sessions I finally emailed to say we could not continue.

## **WEED CONTROL**

Weeds are one of the greatest threats to the integrity of National Parks throughout Australia. Botany Bay National Park(northside) is infested with Bitou Bush and a variety of other weeds. The Laperouse Explorers who enthusiastically became Bitou bashers during their school holidays and a succession of Saturday mornings have seen their efforts wasted. The bitou has returned on all the sites that they worked because there was no follow up/ follow through. The stream that they watertest is clogged with a variety of weeds and the lagoon at Congwong Beach is infested with Alligator Weed. I reported a small infestation which could easily have been hand pulled. The staff member at Vaocluse not only ignored my report but also that of the Weed Management officer in Randwick council. (see **Attachment 32**). On a recent watertesting I saw that the infestation had spread.

The last session of aerial spraying of bitou resulted in damage to native plants(June 6, 2005). I wrote and received a reply to say the drought was to blame for that particular damage and then a denial of the extent of the damage. (**Attachment 33**) I took photos of the areas referred to and I walked the areas with a NPWS staff officer (who must remain nameless) who confirmed that I was not imagining the damage. The bitou in these particular areas was not extensive and could have been hand pulled with large individual bushes poisoned by hand. The issue of aerial spraying is contentious as there has been insufficient research on the long-term damage to birds and insects as well as skinks and other smaller animals. Randwick Council also eradicate bitou but do not aerial spray. In 2004 when the park was sprayed it was particularly windy. Randwick Council that week would not even handspray. I rang to complain that there had been no advice to neighbours and I was particularly concerned because we had 2 young babies

in the street. I was told the notice to spray had been placed in the Southern Courier. This is a local paper that is not always delivered. The notice was listed inconspicuously just before the sex advertisements. There was no prior communication with the local precinct committee or with Randwick Council to have it listed in the mayoral column. Lack of coordination of spraying that year was particularly noticeable as a film crew who had paid for the rights to film at Cape Banks were sprayed.

## **COMMUNICATION**

### **Feedback via submissions:**

One means of receiving feedback is to ask for submissions on proposed policies. As example I include **attachment 34** for which, after almost 11 months, I have not received an acknowledgment let alone a reply. I pointed out in this submission the glaring differences between activities available for families within the respective National Parks regions in Sydney. "For instance in Sydney's North there are 21 on offer ranging from those that are free to \$22 for a tour for a family which includes a sausage sizzle lunch. By comparison there are 14 tours available on Sydney Harbour with a starting price of \$30.80 for a family ranging to \$180 for the inclusion of breakfast. In Sydney's South you will find 1 tour – Bare Island....." The differences I should add reflect the local conditions. There are thriving Friends and Volunteer programs in Ku-ring-gai Chase and Lane Cove.

### **Liaison via local meetings:**

In 2004 the Chairman of the La Perouse Precinct Committee wrote to the Director of National Parks suggesting that as the major and dominant landholder on the peninsula it would be appropriate for a representative to attend the monthly precinct committee meeting. The regional manager replied on the director's behalf and the area manager attended the following meeting. Prior to the Christmas 2004 meeting I telephoned the area manager and suggested that this would be an appropriate meeting to attend given that it was a social occasion. He had other commitments. He did say however that there would be a community meeting to discuss the future of Bare Island to be held late January or February 2005 – 'all cards on the table'. No such meeting has eventuated and the area manager to date has attended a total of 2 Precinct committees – 1 in 2004 and 1 in 2005 - since the letter was sent to the Director.

### **Correspondence/telephone/meetings:**

I began raising issues by email and letter in 2003. I certainly have not set out to be 'in conflict' with NPWS. My interest was in furthering the environmental and cultural education of my children. I raised the issue of Little Congwong in early 2003. My middle son at the time was appearing in Orpheus in the Underworld with Opera Australia. Members of the children's chorus are supervised by an Opera Australia employee and monitored by the Department of Community Services(DOCS). The DOCS officer for this particular opera (which included stars like Joan Carden) questioned each of the parents about the content of the opera and the appropriateness for children to be exposed to the singers and dancers in 'scanty' costumes. My

immediate response was to say I had no problem with the opera and Opera Australia's duty of care but why wasn't the government, through DOCS, concerned about Little Congwong beach in the Premier's electorate. After that I wrote to Mr Carr. I received no response. Locals I spoke to about the situation said nothing could be done because of influence from 'high' places.

I took on the issue of the Helicopter base because my younger children were in the local cubs at the time. As I learnt more about this issue and spoke to people like the current CEO of the Rescue Service I came to see that it had nothing to do with providing a rescue service but more to do with corporate image and the integrity of national park was being lost and staff compromised because the area was effectively being managed as the local member's fiefdom.

Correspondence goes around in circles or disappears in black holes and comes back without answers to the questions raised but 'spin' on unrelated issues. I have persisted in following through on issues. **Attachment 35** is an example of the variety of issues and the poverty of ministerial responses.

Despite listing my telephone number on a number of pieces of correspondence at no point has anyone telephoned to discuss the issues I have raised nor have they suggested a meeting. The Director of Central Branch has been prepared to engage in email correspondence and we exchanged a number of emails after I wrote to say that the NPWS treated the Little Terns at Molineaux very differently from the Brush Turkeys in residential backyards. I have attached (see **36**) these to illustrate.

#### **Website, Brochures, Interpretative Material:**

On the website Botany Bay National Park north and south sections are presented together without regard for the fact that most visitors will confine themselves to one of the sections on any given visit. The north is easily accessed from the CBD by public transport and is ideal for tourists while the south primarily services the Sutherland shire. Wheelchair access could be available for the military heritage sites at Henry Head and Cape Banks but there is no reference and no attempt to improve such access.

When Urban Transit compiled a brochure of Aboriginal Sites in Sydney La Perouse was not included even though it is unique in Sydney for its Aboriginal Community(35% of the population of the suburb) and traditional crafts and boomerang displays by the Timbery family within the National Parks grounds. There appears no interest let alone any expertise amongst management staff to promote the area and ensure that it is promoted in government sponsored literature.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Political interference compromises the integrity of the NPWS and its senior managers. Mechanisms to ensure independence are required. At the Federal level stringent reviews of EPBC referrals are required.

2. Resources should be shifted to provide more front-line field staff and those staff should be empowered to respond creatively to local situations.
3. There should be a mechanism for auditing service delivery which includes robust, responsive, accountable internal and external complaints systems. These systems should encourage staff at all levels to participate without fear of demotion or loss of employment.
4. There will always be budget constraints and NPWS should focus on engaging local communities in on-going catchment volunteering projects.
5. Friends of National Parks organization should be formed for each of the parks to provide another layer of protection against interference with core values.
6. Staff recruited to NPWS require high order skills in engaging with local communities.
7. NPWS values, policies and corporate mission should be promoted. These constitute the NPWS charter. They should be clearly articulated within the organization and clearly interpreted to the public. Compliance is essential.
8. Staff recruited to senior positions in the NPWS require leadership skills in coordinating whole of government approaches to problems, particularly within 'interface zones'.
9. NPWS should maintain an advocacy role for the environment and not engage in 'trade-off' schemes.
10. NPWS should concentrate on core business with which it is primarily identified. Cultural heritage should be managed by more appropriate and better qualified/more creative organizations.

Sincerely,

Lynda Newnam