

Lynda Newnam

9 September, 2008

Attention Jeanette Radcliffe,

Committee Secretary,

Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport

Parliament House, Canberra 2600

Dear Jeanette,

Thankyou for the invitation to make a submission to the **Inquiry into Natural Resource Management**.

I understand you are working within a very tight timeframe and would ask you note that I received an invitation, addressed to the Chair of the Botany Bay and Catchment Alliance (BBACA), on the day submissions closed. I am no longer the Chair of BBACA, that is a position limited to a 2-year term, but I am still a committee member. This is a personal submission and is not made on behalf of the committee. While some of the issues raised relate nationally, my 'place of reference' is the Botany Bay catchment.

### **MEANING OF ENVIRONMENT**

**1 in 13 Australians** live in the Botany Bay Catchment. Botany Bay is recognized as the Birthplace of Modern Australia and today the catchment is the most ethnically diverse in the country. Circling the shores of Botany Bay are Australia's largest airport, second largest shipping container terminal, oil refinery, chemical and paper plants with a desalination plant, a third container terminal and a major electricity cable project under construction. Because of these massive impacts the Bay and surrounds is often referred to as a 'brownfield'. Indeed when I first spoke to the local federal member, Mr Peter Garrett, in 2004 about his future electorate he dismissed my concerns of overscaling the Port by saying that Botany had always been a brownfield.

As a member and former chairperson of the Botany Bay and Catchment Alliance I have regularly defended the environmental values of areas which 'expert' environmentalists refer to as 'brownfields.' Sitting at meetings with staff from Sydney Ports I've often heard that the Ports 'created' Penrhyn Estuary and

Foreshore Beach. The word 'created' has a 'God-like' ring to it when uttered by civil engineers, but when the same language is adopted by those charged with advocating for the environment it is even more confronting. I've read assessments from DECC/Parks staff dismissing areas because the environmental values were considered low recognizing only a handful of key species in the assessment and failing to value potential because the magic ingredient 'pristine' was absent - and of course could never be reclaimed. In one classic study of the rare and threatened Eastern Suburbs Banksia Scrub(ESBS) at Prince Henry in 2003 two sections of the ESBS were deemed of lower value. These sections needed to be removed to widen roads. The recommendation was made under the EPBC Act and the developer, the NSW State Corporation Landcom, agreed to pay \$100,000 to enhance ESBS values in nearby Botany Bay National Park. Five years on and we are still awaiting enhancements. On another occasion rare and threatened Little Terns nesting on Sydney Ports land were encouraged to leave when 400 star pickets and 4km of bunting were spread about the area – on the advice of Parks. According to Parks the numbers of Little Terns were too low for a viable breeding population and the birds were required to relocate themselves at Towra Point where a Little Tern Warden would tend to them. Were the Sydney Ports and National Parks personnel involved in this to find a brain between them they might have come up with a small reserve on Ports property that could have served as an environmental offset and been hailed for its innovative approach. With 24/7 high security this particular area provided far greater protection from feral animals, including humans, than the Ramsar listed Towra Point. But alas the thinking went along the lines of – we have divided the Bay into 'industrial' and 'nature' and the two don't mix.

In an interview for Film Australia's "Wilderness", Tim Low, the author of many 'nature' books including "Feral Future" and "The New Nature", had this to say in response to the question –

**Q: What does the word 'wilderness' mean to you?**

*Wilderness has grown into the one of the biggest buzzwords in Australian history—I mean, it's a marketing tool, it's a way of selling holidays and calendars and diaries. It's just gotten a bit over the top. When I hear the word 'wilderness', to me it's about remote places where there's been no human impact and people can never get a sense of belonging and I have a problem with that because **I think that there's an environmental crisis and the way to overcome that is for people to feel close to nature**, and the word 'wilderness' is ultimately alienating because you can never really belong in it—you can be a kind of transient visitor just passing through but you don't really belong there and I think **we need a relationship with nature that's based on a much greater sense of belonging and being in rather than passing through**.*

In our urban areas, where most of the population of Australia reside, we can make claims for restoration, regeneration and conservation but hardly to pristine and

wilderness. Yet I get the impression that there is a 'ruling order of greens' that believe anything less than pristine is not worth worrying about. The 'brownfields' are the landscapes to be further impacted, traded in for more destruction so other areas can escape untouched. As if the organisms which inhabit 'disturbed' environments 'care' about their habitat being viewed in terms of a human 'aesthetic'. Examples of this thinking are alive and well within the Botany Bay catchment as the example below testifies.<sup>1</sup>

As someone originally from North Queensland I am particularly concerned about the plight of the Great Barrier Reef but where I live on Botany Bay we also have a major dive site threatened by State Government development brought in under Part 3A. Yet it was one of the first developments to get the OK under the new Labour Government – no questions asked thanks to the bilateral arrangement under the EPBC Act. The development underpins a series of other questionable developments but notwithstanding that the end game would be approval the Environmental Assessment did contain a number of conclusions and statements that should have drawn 'please explains'.

When I read the following commitment from the new government:

*Funds will be provided to implement election commitments to:*

- *rescue the Great Barrier Reef;*
- *repair our fragile coastal ecosystems;*
- *save the endangered Tasmanian Devil;*
- *improve water quality in the Gippsland Lakes;*
- *fight the Cane Toad menace;*
- *employ additional Indigenous Rangers;*
- *expand the Indigenous Protected Area network; and*
- *assist Indigenous Australians enter the carbon trading market.*

I don't see anything that hints at constructing

1. ***a relationship with nature that's based on a much greater sense of belonging and being in rather than passing through.***

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**1**

**Letter to Editor, Sydney Morning Herald - 11/7/08**

**People who live near airports shouldn't complain of noise**

Sydney's international airport has been at Mascot since 1921. It has been on a troubled, yet relentless, growth trajectory since. Residents who have chosen to be part of the gentrification of its surrounding suburbs have chosen the consequence of aircraft noise. The people of Sydney's south-west have chosen differently. The burden should not retrospectively be dumped in their backyards. How dare your editorial even suggest it ("The airport eating its host", July 9). Sharyn Cullis Oatley,

2. A framework for dealing with the environmental problems facing the majority of Australians - related to those living in cities and those producing primary industry products for local consumption and for export. For instance, the majority of Australians would not recognize that the urban footprint of Sydney extends across the majority of NSW and that the individual footprint of inner city dwellers is higher than their regional counterparts. A statement of the interconnectedness in terms of belonging and sharing responsibility ie. full-scale stakeholding is absent.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL VOLUNTEERS**

BBACA members are involved as volunteers in the following activities:

1. Coordinating environment centres
2. Coordinating Friends organizations for regional national parks
3. Coordinating groups engaged in water quality testing, seagrass monitoring, bush regeneration, educational activities such as walks, canoe trips.
4. Coordinating groups managing wetlands, eg Freshwater Creek Wetlands Chullora.
5. Coordinating campaigns to conserve the environment/restrict impact upon it.

Members are experienced in managing grants, delivering presentations, writing submissions, contributing to committees (convened by Government/Commercial organizations), liaising with government and industry, conducting species surveys etc. Included amongst my colleagues are Bob Walsh, OAM, founder of the Sutherland Shire Environment Centre, Nancy Hillier, OAM, President of the Botany Environment Watch. Both Nancy and Bob are in their eighties, have decades of experience behind them and are still active. Gary Blaschke, OAM, is another high profile activist in the catchment. Amongst many other projects, Gary is one of the founders of the Freshwater Creek Wetlands, located at the head of the Cook's River. Freshwater Creek Wetlands was a project that saw an industrial wasteland turned into a wetland. It can never enjoy the status of 'pristine' but the animals that are thriving there and that use it in passing through to other 'scraps of green' don't know the difference. Gary presents tours of the sites and organizes tree plantings and in many cases this has been the introduction to the Australian environment for recent immigrants and refugees.

All the work that is undertaken is done so on a voluntary basis. Over the 8 years that I have been attending committees, workshops, forums, etc. I've seen numbers of volunteers decline and the average age of activists increase. Stage managed events like National Tree Planting days will attract a broad and large audience and the numbers employed in the environment industry has increased significantly but the day to day slog of volunteering is undertaken by a small minority. I recall attending a workshop last year for Federal grants where my son and myself were

the only ones to turn up. A year later, a colleague was the only attendee. Workshops and meetings contain the same faces, only the paid organizers change.

## **INCLUSIVENESS, HUMANS SEEN AS ONE SPECIES**

The challenge is to instill a sense of individual and collective responsibility and belonging and to forge longstanding partnerships throughout the community. Programs need to tap into that connection we all, as human beings, have with the land. I don't see any attempt to do this. If anything the recent trend at a State and Federal level has been to suggest that those who can claim any aboriginal heritage have a superior connection regardless of knowledge. There are individuals with superior knowledge in some areas but not all; there are cultures and in some areas of Australia cultural groups which display greater overall respect for maintaining biodiversity and strengthening environmental values; but there is no stereotypical ideal. Humans in all cultures have rearranged the landscape for their own benefit. Australia is no different. The range of impacts by humans (and other notable species) reflect not only cultural practices but also population numbers. Australia today is part of an international community and while there are invaluable land and water management practices to be learned from Aboriginal cultures we also have other cultures and sub-cultures to learn from and a scientific approach to capture them all. In the history of our planet it has been 'barely a blink' since our species 'walked' out of Africa. We need to break down the barriers not be erecting them. In catchments like Botany Bay there is an urgent need to engage a diverse range of people from different ethnic backgrounds, eg. Malek Fahd Islamic High School students watertest at the Freshwater Creek Wetlands.

In 2004 I participated in a workshop at the [UNSW on Botany Bay](#). We were divided into small groups and the group that I was part of contained 2 members from the Sutherland Shire Environment Centre, the Aboriginal Liaison Officer for UNSW, an officer from National Parks, my 12 year old son, and a member of a Parks Advisory Committee who was also a chairman of a Catchment Management Committee and who chaired our group. One of the big challenges facing Botany Bay has been lack of data on how the Bay works and at this session we were discussing the geology of the Bay and how we might approach funding for more study. At one point the Aboriginal Liaison Officer proclaimed that Aboriginal people had always, from the beginning of time, been around Botany Bay. The Chair then attempted to integrate that sentiment, expressed as fact, into the discussion. It was the end of discussion on the need for scientific research. The discussion thereafter focused on the rights of Aboriginal people. At the various inquiries and committees of recent years there have been no submissions nor presentations from Aboriginal groups nor individuals objecting to the scale or scope of development on north Botany Bay but developers have been able to note that they have spoken to the local land council and there have been no objections. The agreement of the land council is then held up, almost mockingly, in the faces of those who do object or dare to question. It is

unpopular to express this but I'm fed up with the hypocrisy. The environment is increasingly used as a cheap means to address social justice initiatives. In some instances the approach is patronizing and echoes a previous time when anyone of Aboriginal descent was separated out and lumped with the fauna. At other times the motives reveal some romantic vision. We urgently need everyone in Australia to connect to the land and waters and recognize that the human species is just one part of the continent's biodiversity.

Botany Bay is a bay of exploration. It contains the stories of Cook, the scientific discoveries of Banks and Solander and the exceptional botanical art of Sydney Parkinson as well as the last camp of Laperouse and the last resting place of the young French Franciscan scientist Receveur. The significant meeting that took place was between the French explorers and the English officers sent to found a colony 8 treacherous months sailing from home. In the case of Laperouse and his men it had been almost 3 years since their departure from France. Both parties found their paths literally crossing in Botany Bay on the same day. Laperouse entrusted his last journals to Phillip and they were forwarded onto France. Clarke records Receveur, inspecting his butterfly collection and requesting a specimen. French speaking Lt. King writes warmly of Laperouse.

Botany Bay is promoted by Parks as the Meeting Place of Cultures and the theme of exploration and all the challenges that it imposed are diminished. The anniversary of Cook's Landing is now referred to as "The Meeting of Cultures Celebration". Yet the first real meeting of cultures occurred on Sydney Harbour when the local aborigines were forced to fight, flee or adapt to the invaders. By comparison Cook and Laperouse were 'fleeting', not meeting. They were like tourists not settlers and the Bay today with Kingsford-Smith Airport continues this theme. In Samoa the Captain of L'Astrolabe and members of his crew had been massacred. The stopover in Botany Bay for Laperouse was necessary as they had to build a new longboat. The good company of the English was a pleasant surprise. Laperouse was in no mood to engage the locals given the Samoan experience and a sense of this can be gained by reading his journals and letters. Yet, the book which informs Parks' current approach to Botany Bay is "Botany Bay, A Meeting of Cultures", by Maria Nugent. The author has no understanding of the environmental campaigns and the deep connections that has driven them, forces a duality where none exists, and doesn't come to grips with the broader historical context which drove exploration in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It's reads like a book with an agenda and it upset some local aboriginal elders who live at La Perouse because of the author's ignorance of the history of key families.

Obviously, this is not to argue that there are not later examples of genuine cultural exchanges/meetings around Botany Bay but the symbolic first meetings, where both sides were meeting with a knowledge/foreboding of the permanency of cohabitation, were on Sydney Harbour. Around 1996, I recall the citizens of NSW being asked to provide submissions on what they thought should be the function of Government

House as the incoming NSW Governor intended (with encouragement from Premier Carr) to reside at his home in Bronte. I wrote at the time that it should be a Centre of Reconciliation which provided a venue for Aboriginal performances, a permanent gallery for Aboriginal art from around Australia, a bush tucker café and an aboriginal artist in residence program. Government House could have formed the 'holy trinity' of icons on the Harbour along with the Bridge and the Opera House by providing the best possible piece of real estate to celebrate, in a symbolic way, the cultures (across Australia) that were swept aside after the First Fleet landed in Farm Cove. My submission was politely acknowledged and as expected ignored. Prime real estate indeed! Instead, the Government has opted for Botany Bay to address reconciliation. It doesn't fit the history of exploration and science. It ignores the biggest story at Farm Cove but it is 'out of sight' of the main game – just like everything else that Sydney Harbour advocates don't want. The Parks service has the task of tidying up the loose ends and as a result pays far greater attention to appeasement than it does to the biggest threat to biodiversity on the coast of NSW – Bitou bush. In the process, opportunities to support commercial ventures engaging Aboriginal people are passed up and because of divisions within the Aboriginal community interpretation of the cultural landscape is all but non-existent on the north. The NSW Government has recently declined the opportunity to make a high profile symbolic gesture to reconciliation by handing over Goat Island on Sydney Harbour as a centre for Aboriginal tourism. This was something that Peter Garrett did express interest in but of course more powerful interests, including a former Prime Minister, hold greater sway on how the 'sacred' Harbour is presented.

## **WHAT WORKS & SOME IMPEDIMENTS**

Programs like Landcare reach out to everyone and do so by emphasizing that humans are part of their landscape and also by connecting the regional to the urban. So many concerns that city dwellers have are shared in rural and regional Australia even though much more is made of the divisions. Overscaling in the capital cities is one area which draws similar responses. Development is concentrated in the capital cities when regional centres need it far more - 'one man's meat, another man's poison', so to speak.

Landcare has far greater potential to bridge gaps by emphasizing common approaches to environmental problems on a national basis - and 'national' is the language we need to talk in future. Last week I attended one of the talks that Maude Barlow gave during her visit here. In speaking of desalination she said that it seemed to her that Australia was going down a path where before too much longer our coastline would be ringed by desalination plants. A few months ago I attended an Ecoliving Fair coordinated by my local council and Peter Garrett was amongst the attendees. Peter was asked about regional development and predictably, and without going into the complexities, he cited the Labour

Government's previous 'failed' attempt with Albury-Wodonga and added that governments had to respond to what people wanted. People want to live on the coast, he said. The previous year I had a discussion with one of the Greens Legislative Council members who had just returned from touring inland NSW. She commented that it looked as though the government had written off parts of NSW. At a NSW Planning Conference last year I was at a workshop where we were broken into groups to discuss planning solutions for Sydney's woes. The mayor of Parkes and an employee of Parkes City Council, who were at my table, both suggested regional development and the rest of us agreed. We weren't called on. Instead an employee of Mirvac, from another table, gave his findings. The solution was simple – build more units in Sydney. My Parkes colleagues muttered 'Sydneycentric' in disgust so I put up my hand to relay these sentiments. I was ignored so I called them out to the coordinator, a senior staffer in Department of Planning. Without missing a beat she said 'What do you expect at a Planning Conference held in Sydney' Like doesn't everyone know that NSW stands for Newcastle, Sydney, Wollongong so why would you bother to travel from Parkes. More to the point, Labour electorates are grown in sprawling cities not in regional centres.

The Catchment Management Committees were very valuable because they provided locally focused forums. It was under CMCs that Green Corridors gained greater currency. Green Corridors are an excellent example of strategies that not only connect wildlife but build bridges between local communities. With greater support they have the potential to enhance community capacity – similar in some regards to the Community Greening programs successfully run by the Department of Housing in conjunction with the Botanic Gardens. When CMCs were disbanded and replaced with large Catchment Management Authorities existing community volunteers lost their local forums and the broader community, including potential volunteers, lost valuable existing volunteer expertise because the new CMAs were set up to exclude community representatives. That's been one of the major blows in the past 5 years in NSW. The others have been the introduction of "Part 3A" into the Planning Act, the abolition of the Commission of Inquiry into Planning and Environment, and the introduction of Biobanking. Added to this has been the Federal Government's reluctance to invoke powers it has under the EPBC Act. How could anyone forget that the Federal Minister for Environment's representative had to admit that tides in Port Phillip Bay would in fact be higher after the dredging and that the toxic dump being constructed in the Bay is acceptable. We need a national Freight strategy which includes building the 'Steel Mississippi', we haven't needed the Federal environment department assessing habitat/biodiversity as 'low value' simply to fit poor planning by State governments.

The community volunteers who apply for grants are often the same people who write submissions defending the environment. There are some who maintain an

‘apolitical’ position and are fortunate to be working in areas unthreatened by development and/or they have developed strong blinkers, but for the majority defense of the environment means responding to all threats – from invasive species to invasive overscaled/inappropriate development. As one who only ever wanted to water test, monitor seagrass, pull weeds and facilitate interpretation, I can assure you the rest is something I would rather not be obliged to engage in. But ‘doing’ environmental justice is akin to bathing – if you don’t do it regularly you stink.<sup>2</sup>

## **BOTANY BAY CATCHMENT OVERVIEW**

The article from John Huxley(see below this submission) captures some of the threats in the Botany Bay Catchment. Since this was written the State Government has overruled its own Commission of Inquiry into the Port expansion, approved the expansion and a subsequent add-on, watered down the mitigation of impacts, valued the offsets at less than \$1million<sup>3</sup>, and disbanded the Commission. Construction has recently commenced. Desalination has been approved and the Botany Bay Cable project has been approved – one of our local member’s first approvals as Environment minister. The Strategic Plan for the Bay, promised for 2005, has not been finalized let alone released and acted upon. It is very difficult to engage volunteers to Care for Country in this context. What point, for instance, would it have been to have bush regenerated along Foreshore Beach when within a week years of volunteer effort would be destroyed by graders and tractors – and to add to the insult to have the State Premier usher in the destruction with the words “let it rip”.

## **GRANT PROCESS**

I did intend to submit a proposal for a grant and it was to address restrictions on visitor access into Botany Bay National Park. This is a poorly maintained park with on-site field officers delegated to lawn mowing and picking up litter rather than weed eradication. Poor weed management, poor staff management, and sending all the wrong messages about responsibility for litter and the cultivation of feral species such as lawn. Under the NSW State Plan issues of visitor access are a high priority, particularly in urban parks with large and diverse populations within their catchments. There was initial interest from the Area Manager and he was to provide specifications on what Parks wanted to see but after a meeting and then

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<sup>2</sup> Acknowledgement to Maude Barlow for this analogy.

<sup>3</sup> **The value placed on the Bay is around \$950 million.** As part of the conditions of ex-Minister Sartor’s approval for the Port Expansion in 2005, he required the Penrhyn Estuary and the area off Foreshore Beach to be ‘valued’ for ‘offsets’. This was in anticipation of the loss of Penrhyn as bird habitat and loss of seagrasses and saltmarsh. The 3.4ha of bird habitat at Penrhyn has been valued at \$340,000; the 1.4ha of Saltmarsh at \$980,000 and the 6.5ha of Seagrass at \$900,000. Using these values and government figures on the size of the Bay and the extent of remaining Seagrass and Saltmarsh, and allowing the Penrhyn habitat valuation to cover the remainder, we end up with \$954,345,000.

many follow up reminders I received nothing. Instead, I received feedback via other sources suggesting that I shouldn't be pursuing this. Powerful interests would rather see the restrictions maintained so that illegal activities – like nude bathing, overt public displays of indecent behavior and 'beats' - can continue.

With this door closed I applied to be an assessor for the Caring for Our Country Community Coastcare grants. I have heard nothing since the email <sup>4</sup> over 2 months ago. During the intervening time I have had one conversation where I was asked whether I was submitting a proposal because Botany Bay is regarded as a 'hotspot', and I have given detailed advice to one local council sustainability officer regarding the community engagement and consultation segment of a grant proposal. There is a large 'sustainability' industry now. It reminds me of all the employment once created in computing which no longer exists because software has become more user friendly. We pay an environmental levy to employ people to tell us what light bulbs to use but ask Council to audit the 900+ dwelling Prince Henry development against sustainability criteria and they return a report which fails to recognize the importance of being able to walk to shops for basic items. Suggest strategies for community engagement and draw a blank, except for the showcase Tree Planting Days, because the converted find it easier to continue talking to the converted.

## CONCLUSION

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<sup>4</sup> ----- Original Message -----

**From:** [Myles, Vanessa](#)

**Cc:** [Short, Rachel - AGNRM](#) ; [Matley, Amanda - AGNRM](#)

**Sent:** Wednesday, June 25, 2008 10:10 AM

**Subject:** FW: Community Coastcare Assessor Nominations [SEC=UNCLASSIFIED]

Good Morning,

Thank you for your nomination to participate in the Caring for Our Country Community Coastcare grants assessment process. Your offer to contribute your time and expertise is welcomed and greatly appreciated.

Our call for assessors received an overwhelming response, with over 270 nominations. We are currently considering nominations and panels will be finalised during July.

Further information about the Community Coastcare grant round and the grant application process is available on the Caring for Our Country website at [www.nrm.gov.au](http://www.nrm.gov.au) Any questions relating to the assessment of applications and establishment of panels may be directed to Vanessa Myles by calling (02) 6272 4614 or e-mailing [communitycoastcare@nrm.gov.au](mailto:communitycoastcare@nrm.gov.au).

Thank you once again for your commitment to caring for our coasts.

Yours sincerely,

Vanessa Myles

on behalf of

**John Talbot**

General Manager

Australian Government NRM Team

Caring for Our Country is something we all need to do on a daily basis and it needs to be made easy and desirable at the grass roots and most importantly it needs to start in each and every backyard, local park, local estuary and so on. It needs to emphasise the relationship that our species has with every other species in the landscape. Saving the Great Barrier Reef does nothing to enhance the 'dirt on the hands' connection that we need with our country if we are going to save it – and thereby save ourselves. Employing additional Indigenous Rangers; Expanding the Indigenous Protected Area network and Assisting Indigenous Australians enter the carbon trading market are all worthy and may be appropriate social rather than environmental goals (if they don't breach hard fought EEO principles) but they represent 3 of the 8 commitments where all other Australians don't rate a mention. We should be aiming to improve water quality everywhere not just the Gippsland Lakes. As a Queenslander I was brought up loathing Cane Toads but what an outstanding reminder of our ability to downplay risk and aren't we likely to head down the same path as we develop arguments for growing 'weeds in waiting' as biofuel crops. The Weeds CRC where so much expertise resided for carrying the fight against invasive plant species should have been extended for another term but it wasn't. Yes, lets "repair our fragile coastal ecosystems" but don't forget that in NSW Bitou Bush is the number one threat to biodiversity along the coast. And the Tassie Devil, well if we don't focus on the Devil we might have to talk about land clearing and the power of the CFMEU. I wish the Great Barrier Reef could be saved but it may not happen. Lets not get strung out, whole pacific cultures are losing their island homes and any planet that could survive the end of the Permian will survive the human species.

I read this –

*Caring for our Country will focus on achieving strategic results and invest in six national priority areas:*

- *a national reserve system,*
- *biodiversity and natural icons,*
- *coastal environments and critical aquatic habitats,*
- *sustainable farm practices,*
- *natural resource management in remote and northern Australia, and*
- *community skills, knowledge and engagement.*

And my response is

1. think very carefully about what is reserved and why. During Bob Carr's time as Premier of NSW 2.6million ha were added to the Parks estate and 1.3ha were removed in his own electorate to satisfy the aspirations of a few in Surf Life Saving. Recognise that reserves have different functions and parts of reserves may have different functions. Some reserves may have restricted

access, some may require resting periods. Recognise off-reserve biodiversity and the importance of green corridors and the part that good planning plays. Get serious about LEPs and communicating this throughout the broader community.

2. who determines what are 'icons' and why are 'icons' lumped with biodiversity. Shouldn't biodiversity stand out well above human aesthetics.
3. Aren't all aquatic habitats critical
4. Sustainable farm practices – would someone define what is sustainable. Taken literally the end game would result in the eradication of the majority of monocultural activities. We have to understand that the urban footprint, in Sydney for instance, casts a shadow across the whole state and that people live more sustainably in the regions than they do in Sydney. Getting sustainable means taking a hard look at the scale of settlements. There comes a point when diseconomies of scale kick in and Sydney provides prime examples. Hence the need for NRM structures that understand and connect the urban with the regional and rural.
5. Natural resources management in remote and northern Australia should be seen in the context of changes in the landscape over the coming centuries. Sometimes I think these objectives are written in terms of the personal. As a former north Queenslander I can understand the attraction to the landscape of the north but the future of humanity doesn't depend on an appreciation of Kakadu, but it does depend on a deeper respect for biodiversity, conservation and for living local. We won't relish living locally and giving up all that air travel to the exotic locations if we are continually told that our local environment is rubbish.
6. Community engagement – well it won't start until the average policy maker, and some of the pollies get themselves down on the ground and start respecting the people who have engaged - despite the obstructions.

I could write a lot more but I doubt that anyone is particularly interested in reading material that doesn't conform. I have recorded this potted version because I was invited. This afternoon I go to a meeting where experts representing Sydney Ports Corporation and others representing Orica Corporation will explain that dredging over 7million cubic metres from Botany Bay around where Orica's toxic plumes have emerged and also where toxic materials have been dumped for decades will not be a problem for Botany Bay- migratory birds, marine species, human health etc. The community's lone expert in groundwater will most probably argue that both parties should consider more monitoring – more regularly and over a greater range. Ports and Orica will most probably disagree, as they have for the past 2 years.<sup>5</sup> We

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<sup>5</sup> At a meeting with Orica and Ports staff early last year he was heard to exclaim at one point when the recalcitrant representatives from the two corporations didn't 'see the need' for the monitoring required: "gentlemen I would like to bang both your heads together". In more recent times he has referred to 'people sleeping at night' as motivation. This professor has been adviser to the previous Federal Environment Minister and has consulted widely around the world. He is no starry-eyed greenie rejecting development at any cost.

won't talk about all the other constraints. For instance we won't mention Sydney Airport. At present if the extra berths were built they couldn't be used because Air Services doesn't have the appropriate equipment to allow ships to berth and planes to fly – all in the pipeline as they say. But our local member, the Federal Environment Minister doesn't demonstrate about any concern for this. It's a State matter and the north of Botany Bay is a 'brownfield'.

Not for him nor the policy makers that surround him the words of William Blake,

“To see a world in a grain of sand,  
And a heaven in a wild flower...”

These people are wedded to the WOW factor of dramatic landscapes rather than the 'thinking globally and acting locally'. It's an exclusive world view which militates against engagement in the biggest 'battle' the people of this country will ever face.

Yours sincerely,  
Lynda Newnam

### ***Historic birth, modern death***

*March 31, 2005, John Huxley, Sydney Morning Herald*

*Sydney has all but driven the botany from Botany Bay. The time to rescue it is short, writes John Huxley.*

*Her immediate task - helping to ensure a toxic plume of chemicals does not enter Botany Bay and cause an ecological catastrophe - could scarcely be more urgent, but Joan Staples takes a long-term view of the troubles besetting the birthplace of modern Australia. A very long-term view.*

*Some evenings, she walks along the waterfront at Brighton-le-Sands in the footsteps of her grandmother, Florrie, a spirited woman born in the 1890s, who as a teenager left England on her own after discovering her father was a bigamist.*

*"It's a long leap back to the early 1900s, but you can still imagine how beautiful the bay must have looked to her," says Staples, campaign co-ordinator of the Save Botany Beach community group. "She just loved the beach, loved the water."*

*Some sunny mornings Staples walks along the edges of the Penrhyn estuary, once a popular recreation spot but now little more than a dumping ground, a polluted backwater, increasingly cramped by the airport, the container base and chemical plants.*

*"Despite all that's thrown at it, it can still look exquisite at that time of day," Staples says. But such are the levels of contamination that she refuses to take her six-year-old twin grandchildren to play there, and fears that by the time they grow up there will be little or nothing left for them to enjoy.*

*"Even if Orica wins its fight [to prevent a toxic slug of chlorinated hydrocarbons oozing through the groundwater into the estuary] it will still be polluted for 30 or 40 years." And if it doesn't win the fight? "I dread to think. But the word 'catastrophe' would seem to be consistent with the facts."*

*The stakes may be higher, the remedies more extreme, but the crisis at Penrhyn estuary represents in microcosm much of what is happening across a bay that has suffered more than two centuries of abuse, after enjoying what Sharon Sullivan, retired director of the Australian Heritage Commission, calls "15 years of fame" from 1773 to 1788.*

*"For that period Botany Bay represented Australia in England - that is from the time [Captain James] Cook and [botanist Sir Joseph] Banks returned to England and published accounts of it, until Governor [Arthur] Phillip sailed into it with the First Fleet."*

*Cook produced enthusiastic, if simplistic, reports of the place and its people, who were "far happier than we Europeans; being wholly unacquainted not only with the superfluous but the necessary Conveniences so much sought-after in Europe". Banks was so inspired by this new world of plants and animals that he changed its name from Stingray Bay.*

*Phillip, though, was not impressed. After a few days he sailed north with his human cargo into Port Jackson, leaving Botany Bay unloved and, increasingly, uncared for. Since then, its very name has become a cruel irony.*

*So much of the botany has disappeared, replaced by concrete, destroyed by chemicals, as colonists dumped by Britain created their own dump south of the new settlement. Today, writes author Peter Carey, Botany Bay looks as though it has been punished for not being what Cook had promised.*

*"It became, instead, the place where everything and everyone who is not wanted - the dead, mad, criminal and merely indigenous - could be tucked away, safely out of sight. It is the backyard, the back door, the place where human s--- is dumped. What better place to site an airport?" Or oil refinery, or chemical plant, or sandmining operation.*

*That may be harsh. Bar-tailed godwit and other waders still drop into the estuary on their amazing trips to and from Siberia. Little terns breed on Towra Point nature reserve. Seagrasses grow luxuriantly in the bay. Seahorses are spotted by divers off Bare Island, whose fort was built to repel possible attacks on Sydney's drinking water.*

*The tinkling froglet is still found in Kurnell's swamplands. Communities of eastern suburbs banksia can be seen in La Perouse. The bay has retained its cultural significance for the tenacious Aboriginal people. And it remains a special place, not just for the 85,000 or so bayside residents, but for all Sydneysiders.*

*But for how much longer? Birds, frogs, grasses, native plants, historical reminders are in retreat. Oysters have virtually disappeared.*

*As Jim Colman and Micaela Hopkins recounted in their 2001 report, hopefully titled *Turning the Tide*, urban development, including sea and airports, has encroached on more than half of Botany Bay's shoreline and much of the riparian land upstream. In places, water quality is so poor that fishing is banned.*

*Not only have pollutants infiltrated the Botany aquifer, with potentially devastating results, but dredging and foreshore development has caused beach erosion and altered tide patterns, sending "shock" waves bouncing across the bay to damage areas such as world-listed Towra Point reserve. Effluent flows daily down the Georges and Cooks rivers.*

*Elsewhere, things are no better. "One century after it was designated for noxious trades and waste," writes historian Daphne Salt, "the Kurnell Peninsula had largely become an industrial wilderness." Worse, conservation activists such as Bob Walshe fear it could soon become an island as tides flood across degraded, low-lying land.*

Recent public attention has focused primarily on the toxic plume - or more accurately, plumes - moving at about 120 metres a year from Orica's Botany Industrial Park towards the bay. Rightly so: it is, one senior government official said, "the most serious ground contamination issue in Australia".

It probably originated more than half a century ago, as ethylene dichloride and other volatile chlorinated hydrocarbons, used in the manufacture of plastics, began leaking from plant and pipework at the industrial park into an aquifer that once supplied Sydney with water.

With hindsight, it was unwise to build industrial plants in such a sensitive area, but as Orica's Botany site environment manager, Bruce Gotting, says, in the 1940s the nation had higher priorities than protecting the environment. Indeed, the word wasn't even in the language.

True. But today furious, frightened residents in the so-called "exclusion zone", who have been forced to shut contaminated bore holes used for watering gardens and filling swimming pools, complain that government has known about the plume since the early 1990s.

They accuse authorities of covering up, then bungling, the issue. Belatedly, Orica - which acquired ICI's Australian operations in 1997 - has committed \$167 million to clean up the mess, for which it has publicly expressed "deep regret".

It will take decades. Meanwhile, Orica has been racing against time to prevent the high-concentration plume - many thousands of times over permitted marine levels - crossing Foreshore Road, and to build the treatment plant where the toxins will be stripped.

"We look like we're winning," says Gotting, who keeps residents informed through a regular column in the local Southern Courier newspaper. "As we speak it is being contained." But many, such as Joan Staples, remain unconvinced of Orica's ability to halt the flow or to dispose safely of these toxins or others stockpiled on site.

If the plume is the biggest stain on Botany Bay's future, it is by no means the only one, says Bob Walshe, who laments the seemingly inexorable transformation of what he calls "God's own country" into "paradise lost". Unfurling a large-scale, hand-drawn map, he points out some of the pressure points, actual and projected. They include:

The planned \$580 million expansion by Sydney Ports Corporation of Port Botany, which would involve dredging 7.5 million cubic metres of seabed to reclaim 60 hectares for a third shipping terminal. Opponents argue the development is unnecessary, will further damage the bay and clog already crowded roads.

Residential and commercial developments planned for several places round the bay, including Kurnell, Woolooware and Cooks Cove, Arncliffe.

Plans at heritage-listed Kurnell for more sandmining, construction of houses on mined-out sites and even, it was recently hinted, wind farms. The suggestion, later withdrawn, prompted Bruce Baird, the local Liberal federal MP, to declare, "It's time we stopped looking at Kurnell as a place for exploitation and moved to conserve, recognise and celebrate its unique place in Australia's history."

The addition to Sydney Airport's grounds of office towers, a retail complex and two 12-storey car parks to handle traffic expected to triple to more than 60 million passengers a year by 2020. Local councils say it will depress land values and increase congestion.

*No one suggests it is realistic to turn back the clock on a working harbour that provides tens of thousands of jobs, generates annual production worth about \$30 billion and, of course, supplies many of the products - "conveniences", as Cook described them - demanded by modern Australians.*

*But cumulatively such developments "scare the pants off" Gary Blaschke, spokesman for the Botany Bay & Catchments Alliance, an umbrella group representing 30 community organisations. "Are we just going to sit back and accept that this is our second-rate harbour: that we keep Sydney clean and green, and dump the rest in Botany?"*

*"If so, we might just as well concrete over the bay now. For the benefit of people flying in from overseas, who might get the wrong idea, I could paint it green if you like," adds Blaschke, a signwriter. "Or are we going to do something about it?"*

*But how? Part of Botany Bay's problem is that development has happened piecemeal. Sadly, little has changed. "Botany Bay and its catchment are not managed in any formal sense of the word," Turning the Tide concluded.*

*"The result is a confusing maze of responsibilities, duties, policy statements, plans and programs which do not provide an easy answer to fundamental questions which the wider community appears to be asking."*

*Questions such as: who is in charge? What is government doing to help protect the bay and restore its environmental integrity? How much is it spending and where?*

*Supporters and users of the bay are still waiting for answers. Meanwhile, the reports pile up. "Come round to my place and I can show you a pile a few feet high," says Blaschke. He and Walshe recently spent 18 months helping to produce a three-volume report for the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources setting out a "Strategy for Botany Bay".*

*It has been made public - but as an "anorexic" discussion paper, renamed "Towards a Strategy for Botany Bay" - a weaselly "Yes Ministerish" amendment, says Blaschke, that does not bode well for the strategy or for the bay.*