



COAST & WETLANDS  
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15<sup>th</sup> December 2003

Director, Standing Committee on State Development  
Legislative Council  
Parliament House  
Macquarie Street  
SYDNEY 2000

Re. Inquiry into Port Infrastructure in NSW

The Coast and Wetlands Society Inc. welcomes this opportunity to make a submission to the Inquiry into Port Infrastructure in NSW.

The Society recognizes the importance of ports to the economic and social well-being of the nation and the state. We are also aware that a Commission of Inquiry into the proposed expansion of Port Botany has been announced. We are concerned that in the flurry of announcements regarding port matters the impression may have been given that the Inquiry process has been pre-empted – there appears to be apparent certainty that the Port Botany expansion will occur, and that any Inquiry will result only in fine-tuning of the proposal. In our view an Inquiry has to have all options open to it – and that must include the option of recommending against any expansion.

- the NSW Government Ports Growth Plan, including any planned closure of shipping freight facilities in Sydney Harbour.

The Government's announcement of closure of some facilities in Sydney Harbour has attracted a great deal of discussion. At least in part this reflects concern about the process leading to the announcement – seemingly a case of making the decision and consulting afterwards.

We recognize the arguments in favour of maintaining a diversity of commercial uses in Sydney Harbour. The point we would wish to stress is the necessity to keep all options open.

There are very few options for the development of deepwater port facilities on the NSW coast. While in the short term there is scope for greater use of Port Kembla, Port Botany and Newcastle the capacity of these centres to grow is not infinite. As the global economy continues to grow we could foresee a time, perhaps several decades in the future, when port facilities will be at their limit and when Sydney would be again required as a major port. However, once the shore facilities in Sydney are surrendered the chance that they could be reclaimed is minimal. We may well come to regret a decision to convert former port facilities into public open space and development sites.

- the economic, social and environmental impact on the State, including on the proposed Port Botany upgrade.

The impacts of the proposed Port Botany upgrade will be addressed by the Commission of Inquiry, but it is important to stress the environmental importance of Botany Bay, a matter which has been of concern to the Society for many years.

Botany Bay has suffered for many years from a lack of commitment to a holistic, environmentally sustainable planning framework. Twenty five years ago, the then State Pollution Control Commission carried out a major investigation into Botany Bay. Few of the recommendations of the study, even though endorsed by the government of the day, have been achieved. One of the recommendations was to construct an oil berth within the shelter of the port, rather than continue use of the single point buoy facility, which is potentially environmentally hazardous. We have consistently supported this recommendation – but as far as we can ascertain it is not part of the current Port Botany proposal.

We would point out that the legacy of previous development in Botany Bay – including the Airport and the existing Port Botany – has been increased erosion at Towra Point and Lady Robinsons Beach, loss of seagrass beds, and substantial loss of wading bird habitat, and we would expect the Commonwealth Department of Environment and Heritage to take a keen interest in any proposals for Port Botany. We note that the proponents of the Port Botany expansion claim that the wading bird habitat protection is a high priority. This claim will need to be scrutinised in detail – similar claims were made a decade ago in relation to the third Runway and proved subsequently to be hollow.

The possible impacts of the development on ground water moving into the Bay from the Botany aquifer will need careful examination, particularly in light of the pollutant plume within the aquifer.

- current and future infrastructure needs and social impacts including with respect to the adequacy of existing road and rail infrastructure

The proposal for the Ports Growth Plan highlight the lack of integrated traffic planning, and the inadequacy of existing infrastructure, let alone what may result from implementation of the plan.

Sydney will remain the largest single market in NSW. Development of Port Kembla and Newcastle will inevitably result in greater freight traffic to and from Sydney to these ports, much of which is likely to add to traffic on the road network.

We would like to suggest, however, that in any transport policy, consideration should be given to reviving coastal and interstate shipping – regular services between Sydney and Brisbane or Melbourne could remove large amounts of truck transport from highways.

- the future of public land at Millers Point, Glebe Island and White Bay on which shipping freight operations are currently located.

It is our view that freight operations at these locations should continue. Any cessation should be temporary, with all options for future resumption of commercial activity retained. No public land should be alienated for residential or commercial/industrial development.



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On behalf of Coast & Wetlands Society Inc.