

**Submission
No 35**

INQUIRY INTO TOURISM IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES

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Hon Natasha Maclaren-Jones MLC

Submission to Inquiry into tourism in local communities

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Thank you for providing this opportunity.

My submission focuses on the La Perouse headland which is located on the northern shores of Botany Bay and where the majority of attractions are controlled by the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service(NPWS).

La Perouse offers a number of attractions for both the overseas and the domestic tourist market.

I have resided with my family in this area since 2000. During this time I have coordinated a volunteer Landcare group, served on the executives of the Friends of Laperouse Museum(Friends) and Randwick City Tourism(RCT). My husband served for a number of years on the regional NSW National Parks Advisory Committee. This submission is made independently of the Friends and RCT.

Most of my comments concern the NPWS where management shortcomings negatively impact tourism opportunities. These shortcomings are summarised as:

- Poor communication with customers/potential customers;
- A Plan of Management which lacks a budget, marketing plan, and where there is no accountability for meeting listed targets;
- Poor neighbourhood/catchment engagement skills;
- Poor promotion/understanding of the 'products' & major projects undertaken lack planning;
- Little coordination with local LGA and lack of engagement with local businesses;
- Poor management of natural heritage;
- A culture that militates against individual initiative and a 'can do' approach



La Perouse is located 20 minutes from the CBD, approximately 15 minutes from Sydney Airport, and 25 minutes from Sydney's Southwest along the M5. There are direct and regular buses from Circular Quay. Botany Bay National Park itself is located on the South of Botany Bay at Kurnell and on the North the area extends from the Historic Coast Cemetery and Cape Banks on the Eastern side of the peninsula west to Bare Island and Astrolabe Cove. The South is managed in a separate Parks 'Area' and Parks 'Region' to the North. The Northside managers are located at Nielsen Park, Vaucluse.



On the La Perouse peninsular, defined as the suburbs of Little Bay, Phillip Bay and La Perouse, the approximate breakdown of landholdings are as follows:

- Department of Lands leases (including Golf Courses, Cemetery, Heritage Chinese Market Gardens, Boatshed Café, Helibase, Yarra Bay Sailing Club) and other Government Departments 50%
- Botany Bay National Park 20%
- Residential 20%
- Randwick City Council Open Space 4%
- Other 6%

VISITATIONS & COMMERCIAL OUTLETS

Visitations to Botany Bay National Park(northside) were recorded at around 400,000 annually in the Plan of Management, written in 2000 and enacted 2002. In a traffic study conducted for the Energy Australia Environmental Assessment 2006-7 vehicle movements peaked at around 7400 per day at La Perouse on summer weekends.

The area is particularly popular with residents from Sydney's south-western suburbs as well as attracting international tourists, particularly the French because of the Laperouse heritage. There are 7 café/restaurants in La Perouse along with the restaurants at Yarra Bay Sailing Club in Phillip Bay and the Coast and St. Michael's Golf Courses in Little Bay. Randwick City Council manages the Prince Henry Centre at Little Bay which is available for conferences and other functions.

MAJOR FEATURES

The main features on the Peninsular from the Western beaches around to the Eastern Beaches are as follows (*controlled by NPWS):

Industrial Complex and Shipping – The western boundary of the headland is defined by the DPWorld terminal and Heritage Listed Banks' Wall. Prince of Wales drive terminates at the Visitor Lookout at Molineux Point. The area was recently leased and is now controlled by NSW Ports P/L.

Bicentennial Park – Managed by Randwick City Council, it incorporates a section of the Botany Bay Walking and Cycling trail <http://kaimiaway.org.au/docs/botanybaytrail.pdf> and includes the monument commemorating the first landing of Cpt. Phillip on 18 January 1788.

Pioneers Cemetery – This is part of Botany Cemetery with headstones from the Devonshire Street cemetery including pioneers such as John Cadman.

Heritage Chinese Market Gardens – This 7ha site was heritage listed in 1999 in recognition of the significant and long-standing Chinese association with Market Gardens - the only remaining example in the Eastern Suburbs. The Gardens are operated by 2 tenants belonging to Chinese clans(houses) who have been farming in the area for over 100 years.

Yarra Bay House - Yarra Bay House was built in 1903 to house the supervisor of the Cable Station(now Laperouse Museum). The building, surrounding estate and nearby Hill 60, and Malabar Police Station are owned by the La Perouse Aboriginal Land Council. A property located near Prince Henry in Little Bay was sold recently.

Yarra Bay Sailing Club – The Junior Sailing Club which operates independently provides training programs for youth and continues because of extensive volunteer input.



Frenchman's Bay & Yarra Bay – popular beaches, western facing and therefore notable for sunsets.



***Laperouse Headland**

Monuments – the obelisk and Receveur Tomb.

Have particular significance for French community and regularly visited by French dignitaries in addition to annual celebrations of mass for Friar Receveur, Bastille Day and Laperouse Day. Masses performed in January 1788 were the first Christian services in the new colony of Australia. Receveur was the first priest and scientist buried in Australia.

***Laperouse Museum** – Barnet designed building.

Telecommunications history (first connection with NZ February 1876), Laperouse expedition.





***Macquarie Watchtower** – the first ‘customs house’ in Australia built during Governor Macquarie era (photo taken prior to ‘renovation’).



***Bare Island** – Barnet designed building and first Royal Commission which forced Barnet’s resignation. Significant military history, site of filming for Mission Impossible II, significant scuba diving site, site where Joseph Banks on the Cook expedition collected shells. Parks do have a brochure available on this site.

***Happy Valley** – significant Depression Camp site. This story is statically interpreted and appears near the entry to the National Park; creek runs (at times) into Botany Bay but in parts is severely impacted by weed species. Makes a poor impression on entry to the Park.

***Congwong Bay** – Site where the Olympic Arts Festival was opened in 2000. Site often used for filming, movies, documentaries and advertisements. The Bay has often been the only number 1 ranking area of Botany Bay tested by the EPA for bacterial contamination. Protected beaches popular with families and for snorkeling. NPWS refers to the smaller of the 2 beaches as ‘the beach adjacent to Botany Bay National park’.

***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. Walks and Species Lists at http://laperouse.info/?page_id=18 Opportunities for access to military heritage and scenic area for mobility restricted.

First Hang-Gliding worldwide conducted here



but no longer allowed: <http://laperouse.info/?p=590>

***Browns Rock** and other sites around the coast are popular with fishers but access is difficult for those with mobility problems. The coastal track from Little Congwong Beach to this site has been fenced off and fishers have to walk about 3 times the distance. It is argued by Parks that this is because of potential impacts on vegetation but most of the vegetation is bitou and other weed species. A track joining the Little Congwong Track would also allow for an alternate track for the return walk from Henry Head. A small number of people oppose a track because it would disturb the current activities they enjoy and bring more visitors into the park.

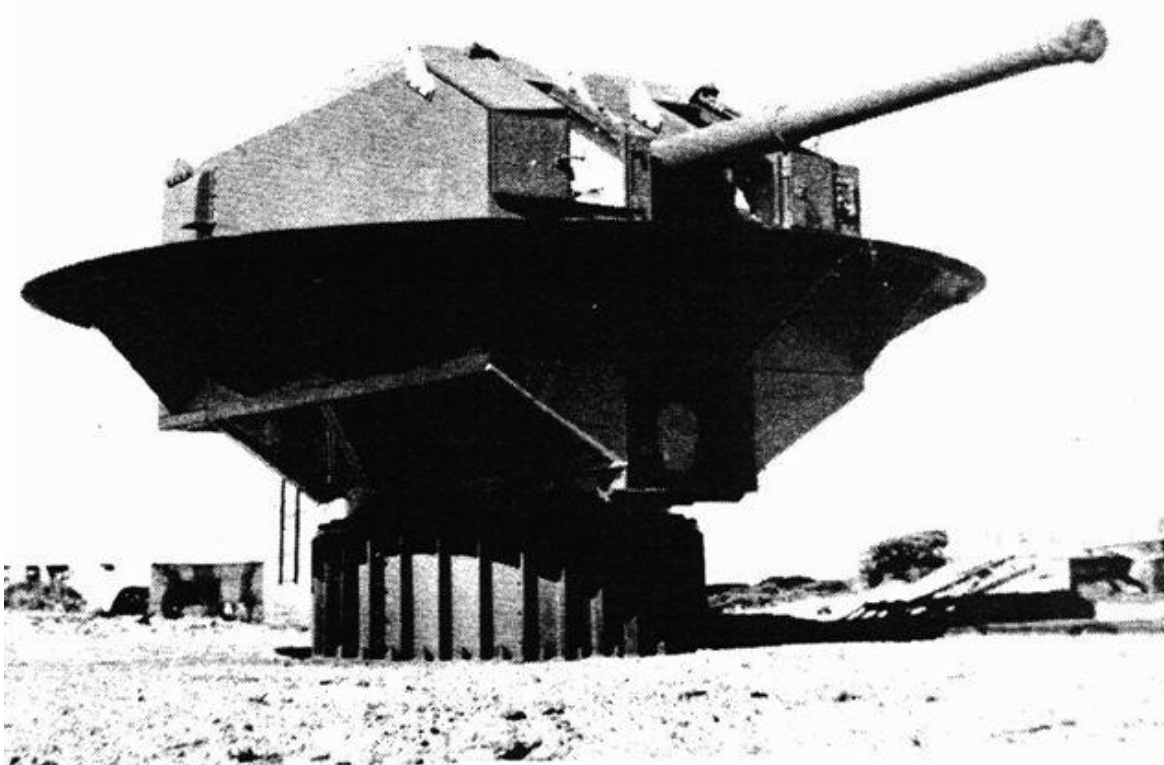
NSW Golf Course – top Australian Golf Course



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

***Minmi Wreck –*Cape Banks** – heritage listed for its entry to Botany Bay and fine sandstone. Site for whalewatching. . 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. There is no interpretation of this.





* **Banks Battery** – WW2 military heritage regarded as highly significant in recent study, includes tunnels where rare and threatened Eastern Bent Wing bats roost. Military Heritage as significant as North Head. North Head in 2007 was handed back to the Federal Government. See <http://laperouse.info/?p=209>
There is no interpretation of this.



***Coast Cemetery** – associated with history of Prince Henry Hospital and deaths of infectious disease patients and nurses and recently with reburials of aboriginal remains.

***WW2 Military Residences** – occupied by NPWS staff.

Golf Courses and Prince Henry Development – includes a number of historic sites including Museum as well as Geological dig with records of Wollemi Pine pollen.

1. POOR COMMUNICATON

For a prospective customer researching a visit the first port of call is likely to be the free National Parks Booklet and/or the website but these provide little information.

There is very little static interpretation of the attractions. Cape Banks has nothing, nor does Henry Head. Nothing on the whales, nothing on the Military history, nothing on the Minmi, nothing on the Military Residential Complex. There is a one-sided installation for the Coast Cemetery and another for the Jennifer Street Boardwalk.

There is a 2-sided board at the Happy Valley entry to the Park but nothing near the Snake Pit which is opposite the bus terminus where the majority of tourists arrive. There is nothing at Henry Head, nothing for the Laperouse Monument and Bare Island. There is for the Receveur Tomb but with no reference to Bougainville who commissioned and paid for the Tomb nor to Governor Brisbane who granted the land.

While the Kurnell visitor centre is open 7 days a week, the Laperouse Museum is only open on Sundays. There is no brochure on Botany Bay National Park or the Museum and monuments.

2. PLAN OF MANAGEMENT

The Plan of Management was written in 2000 and adopted in 2002. It lacks a Marketing Plan. There are short-term and long-term targets, few of which appear to have been addressed. There is no budget. While walkers can stop over in places like Coogee there is nothing on the La Perouse peninsula even though it takes more than a full day to inspect all the sites. The NPWS residences at Cape Banks could be used as B&Bs. Toilet facilities are also required on the Coastal Walk.

3. POOR ENGAGEMENT WITH NEIGHBOURHOOD AND CATCHMENT

Bare Island is one of the premier dive sites in Sydney. There are stories to tell from the fort built to defend Sydney against the Russians to providing accommodation for WW1 returned soldiers to the filming of Mission Impossible. Those stories could be statically interpreted and the area could be permanently open and used commercially – a dive shop, a café, and areas for volunteers to co-manage. Before NPWS took control of Bare Island the area was accessible but now it is rarely open. It does provide accommodation for NPWS staff.

4. PROMOTION/UNDERSTANDING OF PRODUCTS & MAJOR PROJECTS UNDERTAKEN LACK PLANNING

Parks appear to have a poor understanding of the value of the 'products' under their control. One example comes from World Youth Day(WYD) held in 2008. The Receveur Tomb is the site of the first Catholic Mass in Australia and WYD presented the biggest opportunity that Parks will probably ever have to market the Receveur story. Even though the week was held during school holidays NPWS made no change to the usual hours of the Museum. It remained closed on the Monday and Tuesday. The Bare Island Tours which only operate on a Sunday afternoon, were cancelled at short notice on the both Sundays. There was no provision for the pilgrims who did come to La Perouse during this period to access the Tomb. On one afternoon there were two groups observing mass, one gathered near the grave site and another around the Macquarie Watchtower. The altar stone that would have been used by the senior of the two priests on the Laperouse Expedition for Receveur's burial mass was recovered from the wreck of the Boussole and presented by the French Government as a Bicentennial Gift along with the preserved portion of the eucalyptus tree which had grown near the grave. These items were sent to the Maritime Museum in Paris earlier in the year for an exhibition on Laperouse. NPWS did not offer to send replicas nor to make replicas to have available for the WYD. So for the pilgrims who did get to the Museum when it was open the two key items were absent. In 2012 Randwick City Council commissioned and paid for replicas of these items.

The Laperouse Museum owes its existence primarily to the French Government, French community in Sydney and to major French organizations. Contributions to the Museum totalled around \$1million by 1990. The Museum and Monuments represent a strong connection between France and Australia. The Maroubra electorate has attracted French families particularly since the establishment of the French School. The Museum however is in decline. Because there is little expertise in the area of museum management, it is poorly managed, with major sections of the exhibition compromised. There could be opportunities to seek further French investment but there are no incentives.

Over the summer of 2009/10 NPWS closed the Museum and repainted and rearranged exhibits – see details <http://laperouse.info/?p=675> The work was undertaken without a business plan and during the high tourist season rather than the low season. The Laperouse Exhibition which had occupied the southern wing of the Cable Station was reduced and items from exhibitions in the northern wing were 'incorporated'. It was impossible to make sense of story lines. The northern wing was then turned into gallery space even though there is no demand for gallery space. There have been a handful of exhibitions, including one for the brother of the curator and the current one is of photographs taken by a senior NPWS manager. Since the renovations were undertaken the Museum opening hours were gradually reduced from 5 days to 1

day. This impacts businesses in the area and limits opportunities to spread the visitor load for the benefit of business, residents.

During the Macquarie Bi-Centenary the historic Macquarie Watchtower was out of commission for most of the year undergoing a makeover – see <http://laperouse.info/?p=1055> At the re-opening in December the NPWS Director commented that now that it was renovated they would think about how to use it – as usual there was no plan.

5. POOR NATURAL HERITAGE MANAGEMENT

The following post is taken from a major Bird Watchers website:

Date: Wed, 2 Jan 2002 09:14:59 +1100

Hi all

*Despite the smoke haze and 33 degree heat, a 3.5km return walk to Henry Head at La Perouse (Sydney) yesterday was quite nice. Great Cormorants perched on a cliff top, being 2 adults and one sub-adult which was panting in the heat. A grey-headed male Nankeen Kestrel sat on top of a power pole and preened, and at times held its wings out, hoping to catch some of the slightly cooler sea breeze. Tawny-crowned Honeyeater, Eastern Yellow Robin and Grey Butcherbird were heard. Some Yellow thornbills were in the melaleuca. An adult and immature Kelp Gull were on the rock platform near the fishermen. Fertilised Microtis (Australian native orchid) was found, as was Calochilus paludosis in full flower. **Fantastic Cloanthes stoechadis was in flower,** and a Jacky Lizard chased and ate an ant.*

The Cloanthes stoechadis which has been a feature of the walk was cut down in 2007. I made enquiries of the Acting Area Manager but could not get an answer as to why. The local Field Officers rarely get detailed to weeding projects and knew nothing so I could only assume that weeding contractors working under direction from Vaucluse managers removed it by mistake. The point was, nobody cared. The main entry to the Park on Anzac Parade is overgrown with Cape Ivy and the Happy Valley creek smothered with a variety of weed species. In 1974 a survey was undertaken by botanists from the Sydney Botanic Gardens and over 350 native species were recorded. Some of the species have not been sighted in recent years. The Botanic Gardens website contains a list of the species but there is no promotion in a walking guide and the only static interpretation is at the entry of the less utilized Jennifer Street Boardwalk.

The local Field Officers rarely work on weed eradication. Their primary work is mowing lawns and collecting litter. There are no attempts to reduce the lawns with strategic plantings nor to address the litter issues in collaboration with Randwick Council. There are no attempts to expand the jobs that the local field officers undertake even though there are opportunities to do so.

6. POOR COORDINATION WITH LOCAL COUNCIL

Visitors to the La Perouse headland 'stray' across jurisdictions. Very few residents let alone visitors know the exact boundaries between Council and Parks property. Council gets the blame for stormwater litter in Parks beaches. Little Congwong beach which is subject to illegal use by nudists has at times been referred to in correspondence from Parks as 'the beach adjacent to the National Park'. The situation at Little Congwong has deteriorated over the period of Parks management from the mid-80s. The illegal activities at Little Congwong and surrounds, including a recognized 'beat', discourage visitors and it is difficult to deter nudists who have had exclusive use of the area for the past 25 years, despite protests to authorities from the Precinct Committee and local Aboriginal elders during that period. The main nudist group are media savvy. They are typically articulate Australian or European born while the majority of visitors displaced are of Middle Eastern or Asian heritage.

During the recent upgrade of the Loop by Randwick City Council there was no overall coordination. Better outcomes would have been achieved if the area was controlled by Council instead of being under the two jurisdictions.

7. CAN'T DO CULTURE OF CONSTRAINTS

Working with local communities and forging partnerships, where possible and appropriate, with organizations which can provide financial and 'in-kind' assistance is essential. But the operative word is 'partnership'. It is just not a case of taking the money and then failing to deliver. Parks managers need to understand that their 'clients' are not restricted to a few 'ideologically aligned' organizations which like them think Treasury coffers are overflowing. In the case of La Perouse the French Community has already contributed significantly (over \$1million for the Museum and continuing grants for the upkeep of the Monuments) and has demonstrated commitment and passion for a history which is a national symbol for the bonds which exist between our two nations, eg. in 2008 when the Commander of the French Pacific Fleet laid a commemorative plaque at the Laperouse monument he later described this, in a communique with the Consul-General, as the highlight of his career. Such is the importance of Laperouse in French History. Botany Bay is a bay of exploration. It contains the stories of Cook and the crew of the Endeavour, the scientific discoveries of Banks and Solander and the 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. The first observatory was set up by the French, as too was the first garden. They also made the first geological observations – see <http://laperousemuseum.org/>

The culture of exclusiveness and lack of accountability to the public at large needs to change. The service as a whole will not move beyond the position of ‘never passing up an opportunity to pass up an opportunity’ until this is addressed. Protection of biodiversity is used as an argument against change when too often there are individual fiefdoms under threat which are being protected.

Plans of Management should be reviewed to ensure that they include Marketing Plans, budgets, accountabilities which are properly audited, responsive visitor/stakeholder feedback protocols, invasive species eradication/management plans, conservation plans, and volunteer plans. Local managers should work with neighbouring communities. This includes attendance at peak community forums on a regular basis, collaboration with local schools and community groups. They should also work with local LGAs to achieve ‘whole of government’ outcomes appropriate for local residents and businesses. The Plan of Management should be comprehensive so that the manager in charge can operate with a degree of autonomy in achieving the agreed outcomes. The devolution of decision-making should extend to staff on the ground. Empowerment of staff fosters a ‘can-do’ attitude.

More people visit La Perouse than Kurnell because of its proximity to the city and because there are more activities and more historical sites yet while the Kurnell Visitor Centre is open 7 days a week La Perouse is only open on a Sunday. Bare Island is only open on a Sunday afternoon. There are too many tourists on Sundays in summer and the load needs to be spread across the week for the benefit of tourists, businesses and residents alike. It is impossible to achieve this when the major landholder, NPWS, restricts access to key attractions, eg Laperouse Museum and Bare Island. This is not a matter of lack of resources but of better management. Suggestions for volunteer groups to have access to Bare Island and the Laperouse Museum have been ignored even though site co-management by volunteers is a model that operates successfully elsewhere.

I am happy to respond to any questions which the Committee may have. What has been provided here are just a few examples of the difficulty in providing tourism experiences in this historic area.