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53rd Annual Report of the Parks and Playgrounds Movement Inc 2004– 2005

Colleagues and Friends,

Your Parks and Playgrounds Movement committee has had another busy year dealing with the issues we have to respond to as well as continuing the issues that seem to have been with us for many years.

Matters like the Green Point Foreshore Reserve, Newcastle Council's Environmental Advisory Panel and the Fernleigh Track development are constantly requiring attention as we continue to promote proper ethical and open Management. The Newcastle Honeysuckle Planning and rail and public transport issues are always with us and constantly need the attention from members.

However I am pleased to report that the Parks and Playgrounds Movement continues to enjoy wide support in the community but we must work to renew our committee and a drive for new members. This has been a constant theme in many annual reports and it is more pressing as the years go by. The Movement has provided leadership over a wide spectrum of natural and cultural heritage issues in the region for over 53 years but many of us are getting slower and we must have fresh voices in the movement.

During the year it was heartening to hear new knowledgeable and intelligent voices being raised in our region through the Environment & Community Coalition of Hunter Organisations under the leadership of James Ryan backed by Fran Kelly of the Total Environment Centre. ECCHO worked constantly to respond to the Lower Hunter Regional Strategy and was able to produce and publish an excellent comprehensive analysis of the strategy. The Green Corridor Coalition initiated originally through the Movement by the work of Helen Smith and headed by Brian Purdue has also been successful in marshalling wide community support and a thoughtful submission to the LHRS.

Our Submission to the strategy was brief and based on our experience of planning in the Hunter and the need to support the revision of the statutory Hunter Regional Environmental Plan. We believe that planning in the Hunter should continue to progress within a statutory planning framework. The Movement had also previously made submissions to the Greater Sydney Metro Strategy.

Submission to Draft Lower Hunter Regional Strategy 2006

The Parks and Playgrounds Movement is a community organisation established in the early 1930s. Its secretary was the C E W Bean, the historian, lawyer and journalist. It was brought to Newcastle in 1952 by R.E. Farrell, and continues the work to safeguard our Natural and Cultural Heritage. The Movement's

work included the protection of the openspace provisions of the 1952 Northumberland County District Town and Country Planning Scheme.

This Submission is a brief critique of the Draft Hunter Regional Strategy as published and is meant to supplement the Movement's previous submissions to the Minister's draft paper of May 2004 and the Submission to the Metropolitan Strategy and other correspondence concerning the LH Strategy.

Preliminary

In May 2004 as part of the Greater Sydney Metropolitan Strategy the Planning Minister the Hon Craig Knowles MP issued Ministerial directions for the Lower Hunter Region which included: Prepare a Regional Strategy to manage growth and change. Identify conservation priorities, Locations for housing growth, employment and future infrastructure. Improve public transport outcomes through LHTWG. Manage low-density rural residential living. Preserve future development opportunities in the broad Maitland to Newcastle corridor. Plan for development of the F3 corridor to Branxton.

The need for a general strategic planning framework for the future of the Greater Metropolitan Region including the Lower Hunter Region is generally regarded as essential and the Department of Planning is to be congratulated on this initiative. Unfortunately the directives for the Hunter are Sydney centred and lack an understanding of the planning history in the Hunter Region from 1948 onward.

Sydney Regional Outline Plan was a strategic concept plan to provide for growth and change and was launched in 1967 and together with additional strategies has provided a guiding overview for Sydney.

It was the Lower Hunter Region however, that has had the benefit detailed statutory planning since the exhibition of the first scheme in 1952 and of Regional Environmental Planning since March 1982. The REP 82 was revised to create REP 1989 and now needs to be again reviewed and improved to especially include clear provisions for protecting and conserving the natural and cultural qualities of the Hunter Region. Planning should be a naturally evolving process and it is destructive to sweep away the advances that are achieved by one planning cycle and disregard the wisdom and memory carefully built up since the commencement of the earlier schemes.

The currently proposed Lower Hunter Strategy is welcomed but should address the need to modify the Statutory Regional Instrument so that there is logical continuity in planning ensuring that past successes and future potentials are identified and advances clearly made. It is important that the planning process is not just seen as a facilitation scheme at the mercy of short-term political expediency or arbitrary development pressure.

The LH Strategy will need to be much more determined in triggering efforts from the whole of government to protect and conserve our natural and cultural environmental heritage in the emerging urban pattern in the years ahead.

Dedicated National Parks control urban sprawl

In terms of the overall strategy the dedication of National Parks is the most sustainable spatial determinant in the control of urban sprawl and in sustaining a quality regional environment.

This is obvious when you realise how Sydney Region has benefited from the dedication of the 14000ha Royal and Ku-ring-gai Chase National Parks, which were set-aside when Sydney's population (Cumberland County) was similar to that of the current Lower Hunter Region population. The Cumberland Green belt proposals failed only because the conservation lands were not clearly identified and purposefully dedicated within the Public Reserve System and the Cumberland Fund used for parkland acquisition.

The Lower Hunter Strategy

The LH Strategy is the poorer for not being based on an exhibited Regional Environmental Study under the EP&A Act that carefully reviews the growth of the region and understands the natural and cultural history and the planning initiatives of the past and their strengths and weaknesses and the opportunities for the future.

We believe that the LH Strategy cannot achieve its stated Aim to be the pre-eminent planning instrument informing State and Local EPI's without that firm statutory base.

We would like the Strategy to include and reflect the following objectives.

- I. To make the conservation of the Region's natural and cultural heritage an integral and essential feature of the Strategy.
- II. To make Ecologically Sustainable Development the criteria for future healthy growth and change.
- III. To clearly identify the elements and attributes of the Region's "unique natural beauty and enviable lifestyle" (*Directions statement*) and include policies that will ensure their protection and survival into the future.
- IV. To provide Public Domain policy for the Region that protects the right of every citizen to clean air and water and the enjoyment of public foreshores, parks and open spaces and beaches and the provision of public transport.

Parks and Playgrounds Movement want to see the future planning instruments based on a realistic understanding of the environment. The complete and detailed mapping of the Region's native vegetation and the full assessment of the publicly owned lands for the protection of Flora and fauna in parks and reserves and the creation of a firm foundation as an integral part of the planning strategy for a sustainable future.

We acknowledge that the Government claims to be committed to ensuring continued growth and prosperity, increased choices for housing, transport and employment, protecting of environmental assets and allowing the *Region to grow in a sustainable way*.

However there is no machinery embedded in the strategy that can realise the achievement of these desirable commitments within an environment worth living in.

Honeysuckle

The Honeysuckle Development Corporation with its \$100 million Building Better Cities head start failed to integrate at Central Honeysuckle with the foreshore work that had been so laboriously achieved by the citizens of Newcastle. It clandestinely worked for the removal of rail services to Newcastle and growth without consideration of previous planning schemes or the morphology of the City. Honeysuckle Development Corporation is not a transparent public body and the current Growth Centre boundary should be reduced to Honeysuckle's original 45ha around the Basin of Newcastle Harbour and its Approved Scheme revised to comply with the exhibited Newcastle LEP.

The Development Corporations legislation provides for the creation of Growth Centre boundaries that can be altered without exhibition and for *Approved Schemes* that are required to be implemented but can be disregarded as has happened with the closing off the Newcastle Harbour front contrary to the Honeysuckle Approved Scheme and REP Central Honeysuckle. The Corporation has no annual meetings where directors can be questioned and the minutes of regular meetings are not available to the public.

Planning requires a true partnership with the citizens and their representatives and must be publicly transparent and accountable to the electorate.

Biodiversity Corridors

Parks and Playgrounds Movement has identified the need for the provision in the planning strategy for the establishment of biodiversity corridors from Stockton Bight through the Hunter River estuary to the Sugarloaf Range and connecting to the conservation corridor in the Wyong/Lake Macquarie buffer zone which includes the Wallarah Peninsular to the Wattagans in the south. These regional corridors are essential natural elements giving form and character to the urban developments and these corridors must now be given inviolate reserve status as National Park, Conservation Areas, Nature Reserves or Regional Parks.

These corridors, absolutely essential as they are, must be part of the overall protection of Biodiversity within the Lower Hunter Region and beyond.

The Strategy at a glance (9 dot points)

The Strategy plans to provide a broad scale land use framework for a 25% population increase. A critique is provided within brackets by the Parks and Playgrounds Movement.

- **Promote Newcastle as regional City with hierarchy of mixed & special centres.**
(Clear guidelines and regional help are needed to make these centres attractive and improve their amenity for future citizens and businesses. Charlestown is an important District Centre that is about to squander its natural advantages as a Hilltown and cohesive centre by sprawling across priceless openspace to the south with one dominant business rather than create a many faceted renewed centre with an attractive aspect. Intervention is urgently needed).

- **Provide 95 000 new dwellings by 2031- 50% (45,000) in existing zoned areas to accommodate 125,000 increased population.**

(The real planning crises are not the raw figures but the lack of base environmental information to guide their siting in an ecologically satisfactory way and provide new and interesting urban areas in a staged pattern)

- **Identify new release areas and contain urban development. Ensure supply of employment lands within new centres for 50,000 new jobs.**
- (The Sustainability Criteria Appendix 1 is more likely to allow ad-hoc settlements to form and add to sprawl rather than containment. Employment lands do not need to be wastelands they require much more thoughtful development and ecological responsibility)
- **Focus new housing in centres to maintain urban character and reduce pressure on established suburbs.**

(The importance of history and heritage in the maintenance of urban character must be given sufficient emphasis for the Strategy to be successful)

- **Provide housing choice and maximise use of existing and new public transport.**
(This concept is essential and the LHWG Reports must be rejected as wrong in their direction because they were biased in the favour of removing Newcastle from CityRail services rather than improving public transport. The Newcastle urban strategy based on New Urbanism should be a necessary part of the Lower Hunter Strategy)

- **Release 5,300 ha of rural land for new communities and extension to existing areas.**
(This objective must be based on the Biodiversity and Conservation Plan that should be an integral part of this Strategy but is still to be formulated)

- **Release Greenfield land in coordinated way, improved design and efficient use of infrastructure.**

(This objective is vital to the success of the Strategy but as pointed out earlier can only be considered if the Conservation Plan is an integral part of the Strategy)

- **Ensure protection of Biodiversity through a Regional Conservation Plan.**

(As mentioned at every stage of this critique it is absolutely essential that the Conservation Plan be an integral part of the strategy. Indeed the Strategy should have been based on the finding of the Conservation plan at the outset)

- **Future development outside strategy areas be subject to Sustainability Criteria and be required to contribute to additional urban infrastructure.**

(The Sustainability Criteria should be removed from the Strategy in its current form that is without the properly exhibited Conservation Plan. As an addendum it is not part of the Strategy and it relies on too many imponderables. The Strategy would also be more effective without the Investigation Areas and the need to develop outside the designated areas)

These may be achievable and desirable objectives but because the Strategy doesn't currently contain the basic tools to achieve them it is prone to fall short. Regrettably the Strategy has not identified the basic framework needed to create the sustainable future so earnestly needed.

Regional Conservation Plan

The proposed Regional Conservation Plan should be progressed as an integral part of the Strategy and not treated as something separate that can be added on later. The Regional infrastructure plan must also be part of the integral whole of the strategy. The Hunter REP suffered grievously from having the Urban Settlement Pattern added at a later date and not as an integral part of the Regional Environmental Plan when it was formulated.

Planning needs to be supported by a permanent planning authority that understands and advises on the implementation of the plan. Schemes can easily be distorted by arbitrary changes to facilitate growth without the in-depth revision that forms the base of good planning.

Health and sustainability must be the basic criteria and not growth and change. We believe that the Strategy should guide the revision of the Hunter Regional Environmental Plan.

Rathmines RAAF Base.

Parks and Playgrounds Movement has had a long association with the Rathmines RAAF Base since it was vacated by the Air force in an endeavour to have it purchased by the Lake Macquarie Shire Council and managed as a parkland public reserve. Our former Chairman Joe Richley and Patron Tom (RE) Farrell fought hard to see the base kept in public ownership. We were pleased to see it Listed on the State Heritage Register and to attend the large ceremony and the fly by of the restored Catalina flying boat which was a very moving experience. We provide the Heritage Office copies of aerial photographs of the base taken in the sixties and items of correspondence from our files and the State Planning Authority suspension map dated 7-11-69

Coal River Precinct and the Founding of Newcastle.

Your committee worked hard from 1999 to 2004 to raise interest in the founding of Newcastle 30th march 1804 by Lt Menzies and the 34 remnant Irish patriots from the Vinegar Hill insurrection and to promote the Coal River Historic Site to celebrate that event. As you know we were able to achieve the Listing of the Coal River Precinct on the State Heritage Register and in December 2004 we were able to obtain support from the Newcastle City Council for the erection of a Newcastle Foundation Monument project.

Grant from Heritage Office of NSW

I am pleased to report that the Movement has been granted up to \$5,000 dollars towards a project comprising research and the engagement of an architect and illustrator to design a monument to

tell the four founding stories so as to interpret and promote the Coal River Precinct. Our project was for a monument that reflected the concept of the 1909 Newcastle Council Jubilee Monument that used to have pride of place at the head of Hunter Street. Now situated at Parnell Place and better known as the Coal Monument. We propose the founding monument would be at the head of Hunter Street in the site that was set aside for the coal monument in the Pacific Park Plan.

We envisage that the monument would be a large cube of local sandstone symbolising on each face an aboriginal dreamtime creation story, the 1797 coal river Shortland story, the 1801 Coal Harbour settlement and John Platt convict miner and the 1804 Newcastle settlement under Lt Menzies.

We see this project as a public educational and civic design project and hope that an imposing monument can be designed and the promoted.

Nobbys Headland

A start should be ordered on the Coal River Precinct Conservation Management Plan before further suggestions for development of Nobbys Headland the regions most significant heritage item. We are disturbed that is the Port Corporation seems to be a partner in the proposed over-development of Nobbys Headland that would seriously impact on the heritage status and practical operation of the Commonwealth Heritage Listed Nobbys Light?"

This is particularly alarming as the development is well outside the core responsibility of the Corporation and contrary to the Expressions of Interest document, which was carefully developed by the Corporation to seek the adaptive reuse of the Port Corporation's redundant building on the headland and widely published. Certainly no new buildings should be contemplated. The old garages could be removed but no new buildings should be allowed. The over-development of the restricted site makes a mockery of the concept of opening the headland for the enjoyment of the general public. If the Port Corporation has no further desire to manage these facilities on Nobbys Headland the historic property should be transferred to the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service for dedication as a Historic Site under the NSW National Parks & Wildlife Act.

The whole summit would be virtually privatised by the development and only available at the resolve of the proponent: in the proposed restaurant or on top of it! All natural ambience and public amenity of the site would be lost. It was never envisioned that a development would be considered under the EOI document provisions that compromise or impact on the heritage and visual significance of the headland and the Nobbys Lighthouse.

The current development proposed includes a new cottage for a manager and motel style development in existing cottages and a new restaurant building in front of the lighthouse.

A much more considered assessment is needed in conjunction with the formulation of an overall Conservation Management Plan for the Coal River Precinct (SHR 01674). The formulation of a Conservation Management Plan has been in abeyance now for more than five years since the Parks and Playgrounds Movement prepared the Prospectus for the Coal River Historic Site, which was taken to the Prime minister of Australia the Rt Hon John Howard by the Lord Mayor of Newcastle Cr. John Tate in October 1999. The Prime minister had offered \$40,000. Dollars toward the implementation of the 10 point Action Plan, which included preparation of a Heritage Masterplan for the Coal River Historic site. (Now protected by the Coal River Precinct SHR).

The proposed motel type accommodation and restaurant and manager's cottage development could perhaps be considered within the curtilage of the Fort Scratchley complex as part of the Coal River Precinct but it is entirely inappropriate on the limited and remote headland site.

Parks and Playgrounds movement would be pleased if Councillors would request that the Commonwealth Minister responsible for the Department of Environment and Heritage declare that the proposed development is a controlled activity under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) that protects the environment, particularly matters of National Environmental Significance. This would provide the machinery for an in-depth analysis of the impacts and an investigation into why the funds promised for the Prospectus and Heritage masterplan were used for other purposes.

Clearly the current proposed development that is again submitted under section 60 of the NSW Heritage Act makes nonsense of the lighthouse as an important national heritage item together with the National Estate Listed Headland. Note Commonwealth Heritage Register listing below.
Nobbys Head Register of the National Estate
Nobbys Lighthouse Registered on the Commonwealth Heritage list
Nobbys Lighthouse Register of the National Estate

The Movement would be grateful if the Heritage Council would reject the proposal outright or consider the EPBC Act referral as the matter of urgency because the practical and sensitive management of this proposed Historic Site has been allowed to run too long without clear direction and the formulation of an official Conservation Management Plan (Heritage Masterplan) to form the base document for the professional management of Newcastle's nationally significant Coal River Precinct.

I would like to especially thank my loyal committee for their strength and support. I was absent in England for over two months during the year and I know the strain of family commitment that places such a heavy burden on our secretary and I want to express special appreciation to Pat. The Movement has made over a hundred submissions and letters on environmental matters this year.

I have pleasure in submitting this report.

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<http://www.geocities.com/parksandplaygrounds/>

**Parks and Playgrounds Movement is an independent conservation group that has been serving the people of the Newcastle Region for fifty-three years. The Movement has been the initiator of and advocate for the principal reserves in the area: Blackbutt Reserve, Barrington Tops NP, Tomaree NP, the Newcastle Harbour Foreshore, Green Point Reserve, Glenrock SRA and Mt Sugarloaf Reserve.
\$10.00 individual annual subscriptions, and donations are our principle source of funds.**