

It's Promise Time Again!

But what happens AFTER 22 March?

Promises are pouring into Kurnell Peninsula nearly as fast as sand is being trucked out, says Bob Walshe, Sutherland Shire Environment Centre.

□ **Premier Bob Carr** has announced intention to "list the Kurnell sand dunes on the State Heritage Register, preserving the historic landmark forever" (6.2.03).

□ **Opposition Leader John Brogden** has announced intention to "bring back six parcels of land at Towra Point... and [thus add to Kurnell's] Botany Bay National Park" (30.10.02).

□ **Deputy Mayor Tracie Sonda** has announced intention to pursue acquisition of the six parcels of Towra land by implementing a forgotten 1986 Report – at no buy-back cost whatever (13.2.03).

□ **Deputy Premier Dr Refshauge** has announced intention to "create a comprehensive regional Blueprint to guide all future land use on the Kurnell Peninsula" by means of a "major environmental study" (3.9.02).

Must be an election? Well, yes, a State election coming up. But let's find cause to hope that, this time, Kurnell will in 2003 gain from much needed efforts in preservation and rehabilitation.



Original Kurnell: bush, sand, sea

The past mistreatment of Kurnell by the political parties has been disgraceful:

✕ In the 1880s, Parliament declared that Kurnell Peninsula should be the site for Sydney's noxious trades, noxious rubbish and a cemetery. (Only remoteness saved it from that fate.)

✕ In the 1930s, when Sutherland Shire Council was offered much of the sandhills area at a low price, its conservative President (Mayor), C.O.J. Monro, used his casting vote to reject the offer and so opened the sandhills to plunder by a few private companies.

Thomas Essington Breen, for instance, saw an opportunity after World War II to acquire 202ha of Kurnell dunes and launch sand mining to supply the post-war building boom. He became a multi-millionaire with a clutch of Rolls Royces, parcels of Sydney real estate, and a mansion at Mt Wilson (he died last year).

✕ In the 1980s and 1990s many politicians have waxed passionate about "the Birthplace of Modern Australia" – usually on the eve of an election – but have done little or nothing when in office.

John Howard, for instance, famously declared in a "News Release" of 3 July 1987 his wish to "preserve and rehabilitate this vitally important and uniquely historic part of our heritage". Nothing has come of it;



Where once were sandhills!

and when a Shire delegation to Canberra last year asked for funding to "buy back" many areas, it was told the responsibility was that of the NSW Government. Labor's record is not more helpful.

Cause for hope

While being sensibly sceptical about pre-election promises, let's not overlook positive forces that are gathering to demand the recognition that historic Kurnell deserves:

- ✓ People are today more environmentally aware than ever before.
- ✓ Australian pride in national heritage is rising sharply.
- ✓ Kurnell is shaping as a big within-Sydney tourist attraction.
- ✓ More people than ever say continued sandmining is a disgrace.
- ✓ Many swinging electorates now border Botany Bay and Kurnell.
- ✓ Community groups around the Bay are better organised than before.
- ✓ The major parties now feel they must have programs for Kurnell.

The best hope yet

After promises from Environment Minister Bob Debus of intention to set up a single Management Authority for Botany Bay, Deputy Premier Dr Refshauge has made a powerful statement (3rd September 2002) :

"The State Government today announced a major environmental study into the entire Botany Bay catchment including the sensitive Kurnell peninsula – effectively suspending all development and rezoning proposals in the area..."

Known as the Botany Bay Strategy, this is a promise to come up with criteria by which development applications will be judged. A large team is at work on the strategy, with results expected before the year is out.



Remnant Kurnell bushland

Challenges looming

Predictably, powerful interests on the Kurnell Peninsula will present development proposals that will severely test the intention of the Botany Bay Strategy to safeguard Kurnell's sensitive and much abused environment.

Sandminers Holt, Breen and Rocla are likely to do so.

Landowner Australand will renew its proposal to build 500 dwellings at the southern end of the sandhills area.

And Sharks International football club is already pushing hard to build 240 residential units and a 110-suite hotel on its club carpark area.



Volunteers work at rehabilitation

Danger of a precedent

The Sharks' proposal has been criticised by Sutherland Shire Council planners as a "gross overdevelopment" at the edge of Woolooware Bay – which, being a waterfront site, should mean the imposition of a 2-storey height limit on buildings.

But the Sharks want a cluster of five buildings ranging from 4 to 7 storeys and visually dominating the low vegetation around the Bay.

The Sharks argue that a tall Anglican Retirement Villages complex on the edge of Taren Point – for aged accommodation – has created a precedent which justifies *their* complex.

On the other hand, opponents of the Sharks' residential development also warn of a precedent. They say the 240 residential units proposed by the Sharks will be disastrous for Kurnell Peninsula – will open it, first, to the even larger 500-dwellings Australand project (only a kilometre from the Sharks' site), and then to development on the landholdings of the Holt, Breen and Rocla companies.

Kurnell's moment of time is at hand. *

Kurnell Regional Environment Planning Council has created a website on the Sharks Club's rezoning application: www.ssec.org.au/SharkFeb03

 Our
Community
Our Environment

 Our Shire

Our
Sutherland
Shire
Environment
Centre

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- ☞ by the community
- ☞ run by the community

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