

# Neglect of Port Hacking is a disgrace!

## Its North West Arm shows the problems, offers solutions

That the Port is in trouble is known to everyone who takes an interest. Fish stocks have declined, seagrass beds have declined, water quality has declined. And the feral algae, *Caulerpa taxifolia*, is increasing, pollution from many sources is increasing, build up of sediments is increasing (shower by shower).

TWO years ago, worried residents met at Bundeena to present a “Report Card” to the State Government – an **F** for failure of management or, more exactly, *lack* of management, a management with authority and access to the funding needed to implement change.

The Port, they said, is crying out for a single management authority instead of half a dozen government departments each with its own uncoordinated fragment of authority.

Two years later, little has changed. A “Riverkeeper” struggles to get users to “do the right thing” while the larger causes of damage continue unabated.

### Mounting infrastructure problems

The Port’s decline is part of a Sydney-wide running down of infrastructure. Every day the newspapers are now full of complaints about railways, roads and bridges and warnings about looming water, sewerage and power shortages and much more.

Management of Sydney’s waterways is part of this infrastructure picture: as population rises, earlier services become incapable of coping; they also age and suffer breakdowns. Successive governments, of both parties, don’t think beyond the next election; they fail repeatedly to face up to long-term planning that is urgently needed.

The Carr Government in its third term is now feeling the full weight of past neglect of infrastructure spending. It is beset on all sides by people’s demands for remedial ACTION.

In the Shire, for instance, more and more residents are expressing exasperation at the slowness of all levels of government to respond to the demands for renewal and expansion of infrastructure – including care for precious Port Hacking.

North West Arm: a case study  
One of the loveliest of the Port’s bays is North West Arm (see box).

It is fringed with prosperous waterfront homes that enjoy open river views, and the people who live along Dents Creek, which flows into

it, enjoy a “countrified” green atmosphere. Much of it still enjoys dense native tree cover.

But increasingly, the residents of North West Arm and Dents Creek are voicing concern about the build up of sediments and the rising of the tidal flats. The main cause over the years has been sediment run-off from building on the often steep slopes of the catchment.

The deluge of May 13th this year has accentuated all the Arm’s problems. Where there had been deep water, it’s now shallow. Where there had been natural tidal flats with sea birds foraging, there are ugly mounds of mud and sand which successive tides are smoothing over while the flats rise higher and impede the cleansing tides from reaching the upper levels. Logs, branches, tyres and building debris are being incorporated into the mudflats and will soon be forgotten. Arms of silt are clearly visible reaching out into the “permanent” deep water of the bay.

These are problems that can only get worse until effective management takes steps, albeit costly, to turn the deterioration around.

### Residents wanting action

When a Grays Point resident, Michael McInerney, found his neighbours were as concerned as he was, a petition was born: 1400 names delivered to Council.

Mayor Phil Blight welcomed it. In 1997, then a councillor, he had urged Council, unsuccessfully, to “immediately undertake preparatory work” towards “the dredging of siltation in North West Arm”. The deluge of May 13th has made this more urgent.

Residents beside middle and lower Dents Creek, which flows into North West Arm, have long benefited from tidal flushing, but this is being impeded by sediment build-up.



Where once were lovely flats that met the deepwater, now there are shallows and ugly mudflats that are encroaching on the deep water. Those with moorings in such areas can now almost walk to their boats.



### Council explains its position

When *Shire Life* approached Council, this picture emerged: North West Arm’s claims for attention depend upon priorities. In 1997, Council had ranked the ten bays on the north side of Port Hacking in order of need – and North West Arm fell low on the list.

Since then, three bays have been investigated for remedial work (Gunnamatta, Yowie and Gymea). An “Estuary Management Plan” for Yowie Bay was completed in 1999 and similar plans for Gunnamatta and Gymea Bays will be presented to Council on 29<sup>th</sup> September for approval to go on public exhibition in October.

A report is now being prepared by Council recommending that North West Arm be moved up the priority list so that work on its plan may soon begin.

Meanwhile Council’s existing (1993) management plan for Port Hacking as a whole will be reviewed and revised, and depending on the outcome of that, Council will apply to

Older residents tell of good cover at high tide and swimming and fishing holes – but no longer.

State Government for funding in the 2004-5 budget. After a decision there, funds will be considered for North West Arm.

### A process ahead

A management plan for North West Arm is just that – a *plan*.

It does not mean the *implementation* of the plan. Yet it is a big and unavoidable first step involving costly surveys and estimates. It must take account of the many needs of a given bay, not just its dredging, though that will certainly be a major cost for the Arm.

When the plan has been publicly exhibited, modified and finally approved by Council then Council must apply to the NSW Government for financial support under its Estuary Management Program, a hurdle that takes time.

The initial steps taken by Council (surveys, etc.) are costly – up to \$100,000, shared with the Government. What follows is the very much costlier implementation stage – which could be \$1 million.

“I believe Council should have a ‘rolling plan of implementation’”, says Councillor Jenni Gormley, whose ward covers North West Arm.

“That is, it should budget each year for say \$1 million, so that we achieve implementation of a plan for a bay each year and so work through all the bays over a ten year period.”

“I’ll certainly be advocating that on Council. In the meantime, Council, through its newsletters and rate notices along with groups like Precinct Associations and Bushcare Groups must carry on educational activities aimed at reducing resident-caused pollution entering Dents Creek. I hope too that caring residents will soon join a Council-based Management Committee for North West Arm to oversee the development of the Management Plan.” \*

Bob Walshe, Sutherland Shire  
Environment Centre, Suite 4, 2-4 Merton  
Street, Sutherland, ph 9545 3077.

### QUIZ

## Where does it go – the little stream that runs through Hazelhurst Arts Centre?

Sure, creeks and rivers flow to the sea. But do you know where that little streamlet goes that you see when you visit the Arts Centre – it looks ornamental but its origins are natural?

It begins in trickles of groundwater which converge in the vicinity of the Kingsway and Hazelhurst in Gymea to become, under the Arts Centre building, Dents Creek, named for a pioneer.

The Creek is piped under President Avenue and travels south through a catchment that draws on parts of Gymea, Kirrawee, Gymea Bay and Grays Point.

In the area of Grays Point it broadens into one of the Shire’s loveliest bays, North West Arm, one of ten northern bays of Port Hacking. (Across the Port, in the Royal National Park, is South West Arm.)