

Battle for Botany Bay Begins

And Kurnell will be a battleground

Premier Bob Carr's shock announcement on October 5th that container ships will be phased out of Sydney Harbour and its stevedores moved to Port Kembla brought a swift reaction from 30 community organisations around Botany Bay and Sutherland Shire. They said, "The real agenda is to double the size of Port Botany – which will smother what's left of the ecology of Botany Bay, choke the traffic all the way from Botany to Enfield, and erode Kurnell's precious Towra Nature Reserve". *Bob Walshe reports...*



Port Botany container-handling facilities. These have seven years to go before capacity is reached – plenty of time to get the ports of Kembla and Newcastle functioning and so obviate any need to expand Port Botany.

BOB Carr's announcement to the Sunday 5th conference of the ALP was widely interpreted as an intention to end Sydney Harbour's traditional role as a working port.

It did not bring the applause he expected. Instead a storm of protest filled the media all through the following Monday and Tuesday.

Most of the initial protest was against ending the Harbour as a working port, but Carr had also thrown in the brief statement, "Yes, we will expand Port Botany", and this quickly assumed precedence over Sydney Harbour's loss of container operations.

Instant bitter opposition

"The south and west of Sydney are up in arms", said Gary Blaschke, chairman of the 22-organisation Botany Bay and Catchment Alliance (BBaCA).

"Botany Bay is already overstressed. Its many burdens include the international airport, the huge oil refinery, the dangerous Banksmeadow chemical storages, and the already massive container port. More than enough!

"To propose, on top of that, a doubling of the length and capacity of Port Botany is outrageous."

Carr's grand vision a flop

In a major article on the hostility and suspicion aroused by Carr's announcement, *Herald* reporters Anne Davies and Geraldine O'Brien declared, "This is Sydney where it seems that behind every grand vision lurks a greedy developer" (*SMH* 11-12 Oct).

(Right) Botany Bay in 1812. So open, so beautiful – and so vulnerable to the storm of development that has hit it since the 1950s... Oil refinery, Chemical plants, Third Runway, Port Botany...

"This is the hard-working Committee of 19 that has now been ignored by Premier Carr's announcement. The Committee has been told its next meeting, October 22nd, will be its last – before any finished work has been publicly exhibited and before its recommendations can be presented to the new Minister for Infrastructure and Planning, Craig Knowles.

"The two community reps on the Advisory Committee know that any good done for the Bay and Kurnell by the Committee's work will be far outweighed by dire effects of an expanded Port Botany."

National Trust's crisis 'summit'

The angry public reaction to Carr's bid to exclude container ships from Sydney Harbour – seen as a bid for a boutique harbour rather than a working port – aroused the ire of the National Trust.

"The Government will have a fight on its hands," declared Trust director Elsa Atkin. "The Trust has fought continual battles over the past 50 years to save harbour industrial sites from rapacious developers".

Accordingly, it convened a "summit of all stakeholders" on October 24th.

The Trust is not only concerned for Sydney Harbour. It is well aware of



Since 1770, residents around Botany Bay have been ready to defend their beloved bay from outside interests.

the historic nature of Botany Bay and its many cultural and heritage values. Its members are likely to see through the Premier's announcement to the real agenda – the doubling of Port Botany.

Challenge to the Government

If the Government were at all sincere about shifting the container trade to Port Kembla and Newcastle, it would be proceeding urgently with

the upgrade of the wharf facilities and the rail capacity of those two ports.

Ask yourself why it is showing no haste to do so?

Answer: Because its real intent is to double the size of Port Botany, careless of wrecking the struggling ecology of the Bay and of gridlocking the traffic of Botany and surrounding suburbs.

Yet the present Port Botany is easily handling the million containers being sent to it. Port Botany has seven years to go before it reaches its full capacity. That is more than enough time to get Kembla and Newcastle up to full functioning. Moreover, expansion of Port Botany would cost over \$250 million, which is more than would be needed to upgrade the two smaller ports.

A community alliance of 30 organisations has already formed to oppose expansion of Port Botany. It has announced that it will at once proceed to form "A Grand Alliance of Community, Councils and Small Business that will unleash a tidal wave of campaigning that will roll through the heads of Botany Bay and sweep through the catchment, up the Georges, Woronora and Cooks Rivers – a catchment that embraces half the population, half the councils, and half the electorates of Sydney" *

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(Above) The beach that has protected Towra Nature Reserve for 5000 years has been washed away by waves rebounding across Botany Bay from collision with wharves and runways. This deterioration will be greatly worsened if Port Botany is doubled in size.

