

## **NARRABEEN LAGOON SUMMIT**

9.15 – 9.30am

Wednesday, 13 April 2005

Warringah Council Chambers, 725 Pittwater Road, Dee Why.

**NSW Minister for the Environment, the Hon. Bob Debus**

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- I am very pleased to be here to set the scene for today's summit.
- As everyone here would of course be aware, Narrabeen Lagoon is the largest coastal lagoon in the Sydney region.
- And In environmental terms, the lagoon and its catchment are crucially important conservation sites.
- They protect:
  - one of the last remaining viable freshwater wetlands in the region;
  - Aboriginal heritage sites, including shelters, rock carvings and paintings;
  - They protect valuable remnants of rainforest and sclerophyll woodlands; and
  - a rich and significant wildlife, including local and migratory bird species.
- In recreational terms, the lagoon and wider catchment also provide havens for both nature and sports lovers.
- They provide:
  - opportunities to connect with the environment through bushwalking and bird watching;

- a scenic backdrop for kayaking, sailboarding and fishing; and
  - a rich study area for students of all ages.
- Narrabeen Lagoon and the surrounding area has been an important recreation destination for Northern Sydney residents for generations. In some respects, the future of the Lagoon is intrinsically linked to the quality of life of local residents.
- By urban standards, the catchment is in reasonably good shape:
  - The catchment is well protected, with 17% of its area and 46% of remaining vegetation protected;
  - The region is home to important plant communities within the fringing wetlands of the Lagoon and remnant rainforest within the creek systems that feed the waterway; and
  - Several threatened species, including the Giant Burrowing Frog, Rosenberg's Goanna, the Southern Brown Bandicoot, the Eastern Freetail Bat and the Powerful Owl, can be found there.
- But let's be clear – the catchment is by no means in an untouched or pristine state. Decades of development and the surrounding urban environment have placed and continue to place the catchment under substantial pressure.
- This is the legacy left to us by past decision makers who knew little about the natural environment. The legacy of a past when environmental controls were either non-existent, or weren't as strong as they are today.

- If not prevented where appropriate, and carefully controlled and sensitively implemented where necessary, urban development can have negative effects on sensitive coastal areas like Narrabeen Lagoon.
- While the Lagoon may never be returned to its natural state, it remains critically important for us to continue to protect its waters, lands and biodiversity.
- Within the catchment:
  - 67% is privately held;
  - 45% of the remaining vegetation is privately owned;
  - 17% (or 984 hectares) is protected within part of the Garigal National Park; and
  - A further 16% (or 923 hectares) is Crown land, managed by the Department of Lands.
- The continued health of the Narrabeen Lagoon area depends on informed planning, sensitive management, but above all the support of the community and land managers.
- One example of cooperation is the development and implementation of the approved recovery plan for the endangered plant *Grevillea caleyi*. The plan, signed earlier this year, will protect this important shrub which lives along the highest ridges of the catchment. Plans are also underway to protect the *Grevilleas* living in Duffy's Forest Endangered Ecological Community. Excellent cooperation between Pittwater and Warringah Council, the Department of Environment and Conservation and local landholders will give this endangered species every chance of recovery against the threat of urban encroachment, inappropriate fire regimes and land clearing.

- Another example is the Voluntary Conservation Agreement between the National Parks and the National Parks Association. This agreement, signed in 2003, covers a remnant piece of rainforest near Wheelers Creek and is helping to protect the habitat of a pair of powerful owls, an endangered species which is roosting in the area.
- The Association has also recently investigated a number of private and public properties in the surrounding areas. This survey work represents an important collation of local knowledge and I would like to take this opportunity to thank that National Parks Association for undertaking this important task.
- The NSW Government is committed to working with Warringah Council and its local community to protect this important local environment.
- We believe conserving Narrabeen Lagoon and the surrounding area is important – it's why I'm here today.
- Many here today would be aware that, earlier this month, the Department of Lands completed its assessment on the future use of some 616 hectares of public land at Belrose, Cromer and Oxford Falls.
- I'm pleased to announce today that 72 percent of this land, or 446 hectares, will be conserved forever for environmental protection and community purposes.
- This land includes:
  - important catchment environments like the Sydney Coastal Estuary Swamp Forest Complex, an endangered ecological community listed under the Threatened Species Conservation Act;

- areas of Palm Woodland, which are rare in the Sydney region and not found within nearby National Parks; and
  - areas that provide habitat for several other threatened plants and animals, including the Powerful Owl, which I mentioned earlier.
- This decision also protects several Aboriginal heritage sites, as well as the heritage-listed Oxford Falls waterfall and the former Oxford Falls Public School building.
- We will enter into discussions with Warringah Council and other land managers about how best to conserve these sites and land in the longer term. I am confident the Council will actively engage the local community throughout this process.
- The remaining 169 hectares (or 26 percent of the study area) will be subjected to a detailed high level conservation and environmental investigation before any final land use decisions are made. This will of course involve extensive consultation with Warringah Council and the local community. I will ensure that my Department of Environment and Conservation is on hand to provide other relevant State agencies, and of course the Council, with any relevant conservation information about this land.
- The NSW Government's commitment to the Narrabeen Lagoon catchment extends beyond land allocation and management. For our part:
  - Narrabeen Lagoon was one of the waterways included in the Government-funded Beachwatch Partnership Pilot Program undertaken by Pittwater Council;

- We provided grant funding (\$6000) to the Ambleside Reserve Volunteer Bush Regenerators to undertake important restoration work through the NSW Environmental Trust; and
  - We entered into the Voluntary Conservation Agreement in Wheelers Creek and the Recovery Plans for the *Grevillea caleyi* mentioned earlier.
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- Of course protecting the health of Narrabeen Lagoon is not about any one player. As I mentioned earlier it's about all land managers and stakeholders, be they public or private, working together.
  - Careful management and forums like this one are important in deciding the best way to maintain the values of the catchment for future generations.
  - The Narrabeen Lagoon catchment is a magnificent area.
  - In this room we have representatives of local and state government, the community and environmental organisations around the table. I encourage you to embrace today and put your creative energy and scientific rigour into devising whole-of-catchment solutions.
  - I look forward to hearing your strategies for protecting the lagoon's environmental and recreational values now and in the future, so that many more generations of North Sydneysiders can continue to enjoy the area.

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