NEWCASTLE BIGHT
COASTAL PARK COALITION

NBCPC was formed in June 1993 as a coalition of interested groups and individuals for recognition and preservation of this valuable coastal area.

If we are to succeed, we need your support. Visiting the area with your friends and telling others about it would help our campaign. Put your view to the media with a letter-to-the-editor, phone-your-say or a call on talk-back radio. Letters to the President and councillors of Port Stephens Shire are essential - also to your State member of parliament.

EVERYONE CAN DO SOMETHING!

If you would like to become a member of the Coalition or to make a donation, please fill out this form and send to NBCPC c/- The Heritage Centre, 90 Hunter Street, Newcastle 2300.

Membership $5 Individual; $10 Family; $15 Groups - Donation $_____  
Phone (049) 263774 - 282092 - 431781

LET'S KEEP IT FOR OUR CHILDREN

Sandune Wonderland
A Hidden Treasure

The towering sand dunes that stretch from Stockton to Birubi Point are the Hunter's own Fraser Island, a sand dune wilderness. Behind the rolling frontal dunes lie coastal forest, wet heath and wetland swamps with rich and diverse flora and fauna. There is even the Sygna shipwreck. Hidden away are aboriginal middens and World War II gun emplacements.

The nearby Stockton Rifle Range is also a rich environmental sanctuary and heritage site, long protected by limited access. Like Fraser Island before the 1970s, the beauty and importance of the dunes is still little appreciated by the thousands who each day speed past along the Nelson Bay road. Lavis Lane at the Willimantown turnoff and Cox's Lane opposite Fullerton Cove are the best point of access. For many years most of the land has been earmarked as public reserve.

Some of the dune system to the north of Cox's Lane has already been sand-mined. Boral has recently opened up a quarry south of Cox's Lane. A private developer in conjunction with the State Department of Housing and the Hunter Water Corporation is now finalising a rezoning application to turn the remaining area of bushland near Fern Bay into suburban housing.

A proposed sewerage treatment works may be sited in what is now open forest on crown land and the effluent used to 'stabilise' the dunes, with likely damage to the water catchment. Dune 'stabilisation' for urban development has been costing at $9 million but could well be much more.

In the case of pressures for sandmining and urban development, it is now urgent to dedicate all this public land as a coastal park. Blackbutt, Newcastle's only other substantial reserve, is being loved to death. More parkland is much needed.

This resource is precious. The recent Local Environment Study recognised that the wet heath areas are regionally unique. Other flora and fauna regimes may be found elsewhere in the Hunter but their close proximity to Newcastle makes them also worth preserving as part of the city's green belt and recreation area.

Flora and Fauna

Between the rear of the bare dunes and the Nelson Bay Road the main dune habitat is dry schlerophyll forest with blackbutt, yellow-flowered coastal honeysuckle (banksia serrata) and pink trunked angophora costata the main species. In the southwest corner between the caravan park and Nelson's Bay Road lies an important pocket of swamp forest, predominantly paperbarks (melaleuca) with swamp mahogany, casuarina and, notably, cabbage palm. Along the Fern Bay section, where the original vegetation has been disturbed, are tracts of wet heath, believed to be unique within the region. The density and height of vegetation reflect the varying depth of the water table and the nature of regeneration from fire or clearing. Wildflowers, including native orchids and flannel flower, are numerous in the understorey and would be a feature of nature walks.

The fauna of the area has been little studied but is surprisingly diverse, notably grey kangaroo, red-necked and swamp wallaby, dingo, bush rat, swamp rat, New Holland mouse, brush-tailed and ring-tailed possum, Northern Brown bandicoot and a fairly dense population of hares and flying fox, including some rare species such as the white-striped mastiff bat. Birdlife is rich, including the endangered glossy black cockatoo. Frogs and reptiles are also found.

This range of fauna reflects the unusual location of this bushland between the ocean and the Hunter River wetlands and depends critically upon the diversity of dry and swamp forest and heath. Most of these species would disappear if the vegetation were preserved only in small pockets in the midst of an increasingly urban area.

History

This is not the first time that proposals have been made for dedicating the crown land on Newcastle Bight as a Nature Reserve. The Flora & Fauna Protection Society in 1968, the National Trust of Australia 'Hunter' 2000 in 1972 and the National Parks Association of NSW in 1976 were early initiatives. These were revived early in 1991 by local resident Bernadette Smith, naturalist Don McNair and lawyer Thomas Faunce, who formed the Newcastle Bight Nature Reserve Group. Local media gave strong support, with several editorials in the Newcastle Herald and television coverage by NBN. With consideration of the rezoning application at an advanced stage, in June 1993, representatives of the Fern Bay Residents Group, Stockton Rifle Range Preservation Committee, Northern Parks & Playgrounds Movement, and Hunter Region Community Forum added their support to form the Newcastle Bight Coastal Park Coalition (NBCPC) to press with all urgency for the inclusion of all public land along Newcastle Bight in a Coastal Park system.

Opportunity

This coastal land has long been used, officially or unofficially, by campers, bushwalkers, horse riders, anglers, 4-wheel drivers, naturalists and other recreational users, including school outings.

The aim of the Coastal Park is to enhance such passive recreation by improving access to the bushland and the beach through proper parking and access tracks, bike paths, picnic spots, camping grounds and guided nature walks. This is just the kind of eco-tourism called for by the President of Port Stephens Shire. It will complement the other natural attractions of the Lower Hunter and create jobs at the same time. Linking in an arc with the Glenrock Recreation Area, Blackbutt Reserve, Hunter Wetlands and Kooringang mangroves, it will become a vital part of the natural heritage of the Lower Hunter.