

PROPOSAL

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ILLAWARRA

FORESHORES

REGIONAL

PARKLANDS

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Proposal for a Illawarra Foreshores Regional Parklands

We, as residents of the Northern Illawarra, propose that a Regional Park be created along the foreshores from Thirroul to Kiama. The Illawarra currently has no regional park, this is a situation which should be rectified by the State Government. The Illawarra Foreshores Regional Parklands would be formed by a string of "pearls" linked by the existing and extended cycleway/walkway.

The Regional Parklands Concept

This Regional Park has the potential to provide open space and recreation for the people of the Illawarra and southern and western Sydney, as well as attracting NSW, interstate and international tourists. If fully implemented the concept would provide significant direct and indirect local employment opportunities and economic benefits.

Our proposal includes the extension of the cycleway/walkway to Thirroul village in the north and Kiama in the south, linking the **existing community owned parks** along the route. An important aspect of this proposal is the purchase by the State Government of the Sandon Point site. The Sandon Point site is an Aboriginal meeting place known as Kuradji, used for thousands of years by coastal and mountain tribes, who came down the still-existing track to the headland between two lagoons.

The Sandon Point site is crucial to the proposal, as it provides for public transport access by railway at Thirroul station, and is at the bottom of Bulli Pass for those arriving by car or bus. The site contains outstanding natural features, Aboriginal and European heritage values, and is highly visible from the escarpment lookouts. Several cleared areas at the site might be suitable for a visitors centre, interpretive centre, carparking, and bike hire, facilities which would need to be located at the northern entrance to the regional park. The site is linked by the Throsby Track to the Illawarra Escarpment and State Recreation Area.

The Sandon Point site is the last remaining coastal open space area in the northern Illawarra. It is the only remaining green link between the ocean and the escarpment. The wetland contains extensive grasslands and wet swales which are habitat for migratory birds listed under international agreements, flora and fauna species and ecological communities listed under the TSC and EPBC Acts. The Turpentine forest at the site is listed on the heritage register and is allied to the recently described ecological community Escarpment Blackbutt Forest (NPWS August 2002). No easily comparable ecosystem is found outside the Illawarra region.

Sandon Point - Kuradji is the site that welcomes visitors to the Illawarra.

Justification for the required expenditure of the purchase of the Sandon Point site is outlined below. This proposal provides a vision for the future of the Illawarra.

1. Jobs

The Regional Park would encourage tourism to the Illawarra, including international visitors, interstate visitors and Sydney residents. The location is ideal to promote to residents of western Sydney suburbs such as Campbelltown for day and weekend excursions. The Sandon Point site, at the northern end of the park, is readily accessible to the train stations and Bulli Pass. Jobs would be created by the increased tourist access to the Illawarra from Thirroul to Kiama, and the provision of recreational facilities such as bike hire shops, roller blade and skateboard hire, food kiosks, restaurants and cultural centers. Tourism jobs are expected to be created along the entire length of the Regional Parklands. Tourist accommodation centers would also need to be increased in number. **This proposal would provide many long-term jobs for Illawarra residents in a sustainable manner.**

The NPWS Regional Parks Policy Statement (1997) states that **"There are also direct economic benefits for local communities, particularly in terms of employment"**.

The range of employment opportunities will be varied suiting many levels of qualification and experience from entrepreneurs, small business, builders, designers, restoration ecologists, bush regenerators, maintenance staff and contractors.

2. Tourism

The Regional Park would provide a focus to encourage greater tourism. The park would offer a string of open space areas along the foreshores, linked by a cycle/walking track, and could provide services such as car parking, bike hire, skateboarding, wetland bird viewing platforms, picnic shelters, food kiosks, restaurants, heritage walks and information, and aboriginal heritage and cultural center. The parklands could also offer an outdoor venue for local artists, musicians and other performers. Extensions of the existing bicycle track have the potential to link other tourist facilities such as the Illawarra Grevillea Park and the proposed Bulli Mine Museum, and onwards along the Throsby Track to the escarpment. **The Regional Parklands would provide a great tourist attraction, particularly for western Sydney residents.**

3. Flood Abatement

The Regional Park would provide flood storage within the wetland area, allowing culverts under the railway to be enlarged, thus alleviating flooding in some existing housing areas by providing the necessary flood conveyance widths ie. the whole of area mapped as medium to high risk in the Hewitts Creek Flood Management Study. The wetland would be then able to operate under more natural conditions, restoring ecological function. **The park would benefit some local residents through reduced flood levels, thus reducing the costs of flooding to existing residents without compromising ecological values and at overall lower costs.**

4. Cost Benefit

The Regional Park would generate sustainable long-term income to the regional economy following the initial land purchase and set-up costs. These costs would be an investment in the future of the Illawarra from Thirroul south to Kiama. Environmental and heritage values would be preserved for future generations. **The Regional Park would provide substantial long-term benefits to the regional economy.**

5. Visual

The Regional Park will provide for restoration of the natural environment along with some tourist facilities on currently degraded areas. Bulli and Thirroul will remain as separate villages. **The Regional Park open space, wetlands and bushland, will be visually attractive from all viewing points.**

6. European Heritage

The regional park would link many of the Illawarra's European heritage sites. **European heritage values would be preserved for future generations. It is a crucial component of the Regional Park concept.**

7. Aboriginal Sacred Site

The Regional Park would preserve the Aboriginal heritage values of the Sandon Point site, thus providing a **tangible example of reconciliation**. Tourist and recreational facilities would be developed only in close consultation with local Aboriginal representatives. The wetlands and surrounds would be restored to as near natural condition as possible providing examples of Aboriginal food, medicinal and building resources. An aboriginal cultural center at the site would provide an opportunity to educate the community and overseas visitors about Aboriginal culture, and promote understanding. Other important Aboriginal heritage sites between Bulli and Kiama would be preserved and managed within the regional parklands. **The park would prevent the lands at and around Sandon Point, which contain numerous sacred and burial sites, artefacts, relics, landforms, as well as physical and spiritual significant values from being destroyed, and promote reconciliation.**

8. Flora & Fauna

The Regional Park would restore the wetlands and surrounds as much as is practically possible to original condition. Viewing platforms and walkways, as well as low fences and signage, would be utilised to prevent damage of the natural areas. Rangers would manage the area. Other sections of the regional parklands, such as Bellambi Lagoon, would also be rehabilitated and managed. **The park would enhance habitat, preserve endangered ecological communities and species, and provide opportunities for people to view and appreciate our natural heritage.**

9. Wetland Ecology

The Regional Park would allow for restoration of natural wetland function and ecology along the coast between Thirroul and Kiama, and provide viewing platforms and interpretive signs to educate the public. Suitable non-sensitive areas would be designated for appropriate recreational uses.

Natural wetland function and ecology would be restored and preserved.

10. Water Quality

The Regional Park would preserve and enhance the natural function of the wetlands between Thirroul and Kiama, thus ensuring that waters from the catchments are treated by aquatic vegetation. **The parklands would preserve and enhance water quality at the beaches between Thirroul and Kiama.**

11. Transport

The Regional Park northern end would be easily accessible by train from Sydney. People who travel from south-western Sydney by car to the site for recreation would do so once a week at most, and the creation of increased tourism facilities in the Illawarra promotes holidaying closer to home for Sydney and other New South Wales residents. **The park would not promote an increase in car travel.**

12. Legislation

The Carr Government offered a clear vision and long term commitment to the protection of urban bushland and regional open space within its Nature Conservation Strategy. The creation of regional parks has been an initiative of the Carr Government aimed at improving the lifestyle of people living in Sydney and regional centres, and provides an important legacy for future generations. The NSW Government needs to now urgently extend this initiative to coastal Wollongong and create a Regional Parkland System.

WE RESPECTFULLY ASK FOR EQUITY

The NPWS Regional Parks Policy Statement says, "In 1996 the Government amended the National Parks and Wildlife Act to create a new category of protected area to enable lands to be reserved as regional parks. The definition in the legislation specifies that a regional park is to include areas that have been substantially modified since European occupation and are:

- capable of providing open space and recreational opportunities for major regional population centres, and
- unsuitable for reservation or dedication as another category of land under the National Parks and Wildlife Act."

The primary focus of regional parks is to provide open space and recreation, however, the protection of conservation values is also an important management aim.

It should be noted that mining is not allowed in regional parks, as such the Illawarra Escarpment cannot be included as a part of the regional park. However, it can be reserved as a State Recreation Area, to provide recreation opportunities for the more agile and fit members of the community.

Conclusion

The creation of an Illawarra Foreshores Regional Parklands would be of benefit economically, socially and environmentally. The parklands concept builds on the natural features of the Sandon Point site, rather than destroying them.

The Illawarra is traditionally a region with high unemployment and low socio-economic benefits. The investment by the NSW State Government of land purchase and set-up costs would be an investment in the future of sustainable development in the Illawarra. The benefits would extend along the length of the park from Thirroul to Kiama, and provide a gateway to the southern Illawarra region.

This is a vision for future generations! An opportunity for the NSW Labour Government to add to its environmental credentials. It's an opportunity to show equity! An opportunity for a tangible message of **RECONCILIATION!** An opportunity to preserve this special place and raise its profile to **ICONIC** status. Its attributes are as great as the multi-millions dollar tourists attraction of the Blue Mountains and its Three Sisters, and include:

- Kuradji (Sandon Point) Where the Mountains Meet the Sea
- Epic Walking Trails that follow Aboriginal Trade routes - from Bundeena, Waterfall, Heathcote, Loftus or Sutherland through the National Park along the escarpment via the coast down the Throsby Track to the Bullii Mine Museum, Grevillea Park, Bulli Show Ground Dog & Trotting Track, Denmark Hotel along the Historic Tramway to the special meeting place of Kuradji – Sacred land and onto Kiama.

- Epic Walking trails that follow Aboriginal Trade routes from Cambelltown to Kuradji onto Kiama.
- Epic Cycleway Sydney to the Gong extended to Kiama
- Iconic World Class Surfing Place
- Renown fishing and diving
- Hangliding
- Nature trails, wetland boardwalks and birdwatching
- Whale watching

We respectfully ask: What is the TRUE cost of not saving Sandon Point's intrinsic and cultural values?