

# Making the city green: the creation of public greenspace in suburban Sydney, 1940 - 1992.

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## **ABSTRACT**

The creation of greenspace in cities is often spoken of as if it were the result of orderly planning or regulation. Sydney did have a plan to conserve greenspace on the urban fringe but the 1948 Cumberland County Planning Scheme carried little real power to implement this goal in the face of population growth and expansion which was far higher than had been predicted. Working class residents in Sydney's south western suburbs after World War 2 did not wait for planning or regulation. These people in low-income and newly subdivided suburbs expected little from government and took matters into their own hands, dragging local councils along with them until they had assembled a string of locally-managed and, at times, locally-constructed greenspaces along the banks of the Georges River for which they then demanded the designation of 'national park'. In doing so, they were building on a long history of Aboriginal and then early settler occupation of these lands in collective recreational, cultural and highly socialised uses. They had seized on two of the key characteristics of the 'national' park as it had been defined in the United States and in Australia in the later nineteenth century: as a site for protection of indigenous 'nature' and as a democratic space 'for the people'. Some of their management strategies are today decried as damaging to the environment, but the local park committees saw themselves not only as carving out and creating public recreational spaces but as protecting and extending what they understood to be 'natural' native floral and faunal environments, which was one of the reasons they demanded the 'national park' designation.

This paper explores the underlying factors in this grass roots making of greenspace. A historical case study approach which draws on both social and environmental history frameworks allows an exploration of the sustained conflict between popular conceptions and official views of the meanings of 'nature' and a 'national park' in an urban setting. It indicates that the concepts of 'nature' and the 'native' have changed significantly over the last 50 years and that the accusation that local groups damaged pristine environments is misleading. It explores just what 'the public' meant in relation to city greenspace. Often socially unrepresentative and, as time went by, consistently failing to recognize

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growing cultural diversity, these local committees nevertheless fostered a strong sense of local control and entitlement, which was accompanied by a high sense of local responsibility for the parks. They formed a part of what can be seen as the broad origin of the present day environmental movement, which includes not only the regularly-celebrated band of middle class bushwalkers, but also these local groups of suburban, working class mums and dads. In order to understand the commitment of these communities to the greenspace in their area, to trace their impact on the quality of the urban environment and to glimpse their sense of betrayal when their control was removed in the 1990s, it is necessary to explore the histories of the place and its people.

## HISTORIES

The Georges River is a major river in the heart of one of Sydney's most dense population belts and now one of its most socially conflicted. This long river arises in the Southern Highlands and runs north through Campbelltown and Casula before it makes a sharp easterly bend at Cabramatta, running fresh to Liverpool then becoming salt by the time it flows past Bankstown and Salt Pan Creek to its junction with the Woronora River, and then on to Botany Bay and the coast. The river moves from relatively open plains above Liverpool into sandstone country as it skirts around Bankstown, cutting through steep escarpments with only narrow flat banks. These have sequences of salt tolerant vegetation, moving from some fringing mangroves to salt marshes and reed beds to the higher ground with stands of casuarina and oak.<sup>1</sup> The cliffs are steep here and in some areas in the early days the mangroves grew thickly on the narrow littoral areas, but in others the salt marsh zones were far wider, giving a vista of open spaces running down to the river. Even along that extensive tidal saline estuary, there are creeks and freshwater springs, like Salt Pan Creek which breaks through the cliffs from the broad Cumberland Plain to the north and which guaranteed fresh drinking water to the indigenous communities who regularly camped there as they moved along the river.

This country was heavily populated before the British invasion in 1788. Thawaral, Gweagal and Gandangara speaking peoples used the river intensively for harvesting fish, mussels, riverbank vegetation, birds and animals like swamp wallabies.<sup>2</sup> There remain beautiful art sites in the cliff caves overlooking the river, like the stencil gallery above Sandy Point on the southern bank opposite Picnic Point, where the vivid prints of many hands suggest the large gatherings of people which must have occurred there. Although Aboriginal people themselves remained in the area, most of their lands on the river were alienated to private owners by grant or sale within a few years, in the hope that agriculture would flourish.<sup>3</sup> However there were two types of the soil along the river. One was rich, fertile soil arising from Wianamatta shale, which supported agriculture well, leading to a proliferation of farming where fresh water was plentiful. The other areas, particularly on the lower saltwater reaches of the river, had soils derived from Hawkesbury sandstone which were less fertile and where combined with rugged sandstone escarpments made these riverbanks neither arable nor easily accessible.

The sandstone areas became increasingly obvious on the parish maps. The private properties began to change hands and as they were subdivided into smaller farms, the details had to be drawn onto these maps by hand, with new boundary lines and careful labeling recording the new owners and dates. But the areas which were proving infertile were never filled in with these ever-multiplying pencil annotations: they never changed hands because noone wanted to buy them. But that does not mean those areas were not used! The initial settlers themselves were a mixture of English military supervisors and convict workers, any of whom were Irish, which shows in the names on the early maps, like IrishTown for Bass Hill, and Morgans and Reilly's creeks. The economy they developed was a mixture of cash wages from working on the larger agricultural properties, domestic production from household gardens and chickens in the growing number of residential blocks clustered round the townships off the river and from fishing and shooting, especially once rabbits became prevalent, in the undeveloped bush areas closer to the river. Harvesting the sandstone country could be lucrative: soap making for example required alkaline ash and those who could harvest the mangroves which provided the best ash could

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<sup>1</sup> Doug Benson & Jocelyn Howell: *Taken for Granted: The bushland of Sydney and its suburbs*, Kangaroo Press, Royal Botanic Gardens Sydney, 1990, pp 26-7; 49-55.

<sup>2</sup> Pedr Davis: *The Hurstville Story: A history of the Hurstville Municipality 1887-1987*, Hurstville City Council, Marque Publishing, Hurstville, 1986; Sue Rosen: *Bankstown: A sense of identity*, Hale and Iremonger, Marrickville, 1996.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p45, drawing on map of Bankstown from 1843 showing all grants and the whole area alienated. Mitchell Library, State Library NSW.

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earn some cash from doing so.<sup>4</sup> Added to those who used the sandstone for economic reasons were the many people who cut across these bush areas just to get from one place to another, as walking remained the most common way to travel until well into the twentieth century. So while there were no red survey lines being drawn on the parish maps of the sandstone areas, there were many tracks worn through the undergrowth as people traveled from one place to the other or as they went fishing, hunting or gathering wood from the scrub or mangroves on the shoreline, or as they went seeking privacy and discretion for many reasons, from secret sexual dalliances to illegal coursing and gaming.<sup>5</sup> The swampy areas like that between Morgans Creek and Little Salt Pan [Reilly's] Creek remained less accessible and the early rumours of cattle duffers hiding stolen stock there persisted, but there were never going to be many witnesses who would choose to confirm those types of rumours. The first aerial photographs in 1930 confirmed the presence of these foot tracks, some worn deeply into the earth, reflecting the uses of generations of working people as they went about their livelihood and their leisure in the bush.<sup>6</sup> What happened in the 'blank' areas on the map was not uninteresting, it was just invisible to the law, to the surveyors and to the property market.

The creation of public space, indeed the creation of the 'public' itself, can be seen drawn onto the maps for the first time in the 1890s and the early years of the new century. Reductions in working hours and the introduction of the Saturday half holiday combined with the slowly developing rail network in the later decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to generate increasing popular interest in recreation. Rivers were far more popular for both family and young people's leisure in those periods than were surf beaches and as the market for leisure increased, riverside 'pleasure grounds' began to emerge in great numbers on Sydney's rivers. These were privately run entertainment venues, all advertising their natural landscapes and bushwalking, but adding to the experiences with a multitude of entertainments like private zoos [as at Brereton's at Lambeth St, Picnic Point], razzle-dazzles and glittering evening dance halls [like those at Parkesvale opposite Morgan's Creek]. Many hundreds of people visited the pleasure grounds on the Georges River, many arriving by steam ferry or paddlesteamer from the rail head at Como, to enjoy for picnics, bushwalks and swimming, which led to a new consciousness of 'the public'. The government eventually moved to claw back some of the privatised land along the foreshores to service and support this public usage of the pleasure grounds and the river. First jetties and landing spaces began to be 'reserved for the public' in order to facilitate the river transport, then a narrow strip of 100 feet above the high water line was resumed by government to become public access reserve. And then too came the parks, resumed and set aside for the public in some of the gaps which had for years had no marks on the maps at all. Moving westerly across this area there was Peakhurst Park on the Georges River [later renamed Oatley Park] just east of Salt Pan Creek in 1887, then Padstow Park early in the 1890s and then the 'public recreation' reserves, like Picnic Point in 1898 and others on into the new century. Finally there were the public baths like those on the river near Brereton's Pleasure Grounds, in Lambeth St, in 1907.<sup>7</sup> The enthusiasm for the river continued well into the early 1930s and spurred the pressure for extension of the rail lines, which slowly snaked out from Belmore to Bankstown [1909] and eventually, after many demands from Kingsgrove to East Hills, with the first sod turned in 1927 although fully electrified trains did not run till 1939. The expectation of new stations and better transport, both out to the river and into the city, led to a flurry of subdivisions in the 1910s and 20s along the various proposed [and often mistakenly proposed] routes for the new lines. The rising subdivision of old larger properties was leading to increases in population in the area as had the establishment of the Soldier Settler agricultural programs at Milperra, Hillview and Chipping Norton in

<sup>4</sup> Bird, J.F: 1982 'Barilla Production in Australia' in D.J. and S.G.M. Carr [eds] *Plants and Man in Australia*, Academic Press, Sydney, 1981: pp 274-280.

<sup>5</sup> Jaqueline Davies, Dorothy Mulholland and Nora Pipe: *West of the River Road*: Towrang Publications, 1979; Robert J. Haworth: 'Bush Tracks and Bush Blocks: The Aerial Photographic Record from South-West Sydney, 1930 – 1950' *ANZ Journal of Person-Environment Studies*, 49, 1995: 32-42, p37-8

<sup>6</sup> *ibid*, pp 32-42.

<sup>7</sup> Parish maps for Bankstown, Canterbury, Holsworthy and St Luke's parishes, NSW Dept of Lands, Online Resource for Historical Maps,

the aftermath of World War I.<sup>8</sup> The penetration of light industry began in the 1920s as well, opening up new employment opportunities and adding to the momentum of subdivision occurring on the Wianamatta shale soils off the river.<sup>9</sup>

### **IMPACTS OF EARLY SETTLEMENT OF THE RIVER**

The river environment had been shaped over many centuries in a dynamic relationship with Aboriginal harvesting, but the pressures on it accelerated greatly with the first impacts of European settlement. As a consequence, changes occurred in the riverine environment and on its banks, from that first decade of new forms of harvesting. The river banks were an important indicator of such changes as they were the physical setting for the interface between humans and nature. Even if people were fishing and so noticing changes to the underwater habitats, they still had to negotiate the bank conditions in order to cast their lines or launch their boats, while swimmers and picnickers were always acutely aware of the sand and mud components of the bank and the view from land to river.

The impact of soap making on the mangrove stands was significant, causing them to retreat in many areas where the harvesting was most intense.<sup>10</sup> Just as significant may have been the changes in native grazing pressure on the shore and wetland vegetation: swamp wallabies grazed on both mangroves and saltmarshes, but caused greater impacts on mangroves. Aboriginal hunting of wallabies may have declined with severe population loss from invasion violence and illness, but on the other hand European hunting was increasing. The shifting balance between the two, and so the varying numbers of wallabies surviving, meant that the relationship between mangroves and saltmarshes became more unstable than it had been prior to European intervention. This again may have led to mangrove retreats in some areas where wallabies could increase but in others it may have led to mangrove expansion landward into the saltmarsh area as the wallaby population declined due to increased harvesting.<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, a major impact on the shores from the very first was the effect of the extensive clearing for agriculture which was occurring on the middle and upper reaches of the river. As soon as clearing commenced, erosion began to increase from the shale soils, leading to a greater burden of silt being washed down river with any rain, with far more coming in what could be catastrophic flooding like that in the 1870s. Such changes in riverine sediments further destabilized the relationships between bank vegetation types, often leading, although in complex chains of causation, to the expansion of mangroves either at the expense of the inland salt marshes or, in rare cases, into the water on broadening silt sediments.<sup>12</sup>

### **'PROGRESS' & SOCIAL TENSIONS BETWEEN THE WARS**

The Aboriginal population in the area was rising during the interwar period, in a result of active dispersal policies by the State Protection Board which was trying to break up Aboriginal communities and scatter people into the general community. An increasing Aboriginal population was by no means welcomed by the neighbouring white community. This was precisely the period when local [Anglo-Irish] community organizations were emerging and seeking to shape the suburb's social and physical environment. The Salt Pan Creek Progress Association [later to call itself Padstow Park, as a less 'detrimental' name for such a 'promising and beautiful' suburb<sup>13</sup>] was organizing in 1913, a Progress

<sup>8</sup> Rosen: *Bankstown*, pp 94-6.

<sup>9</sup> Terry Kass: *Western Sydney Thematic History*: State Heritage Register Project, NSW Heritage Office, Online Publication 2005, pp 45-9; Rosen: *Bankstown*, pp 94-6. There was, however, a false hope in all these subdivisions. Peter Spearitt in *Sydney Since the Twenties*, (Hale & Iremonger, Sydney, 1978, pages 91-113) points out that in the 1940s Bankstown had one of the highest rates of unsold subdivisions in the city, as the overoptimistic subdivision of the 20s and the impact of the Depression in the 30s had slowed their sale.

<sup>10</sup> Bird, *op.cit.*

<sup>11</sup> Peter Clarke, UNE, cited in Robert J. Haworth: 'Changes in Mangrove/Salt-Marsh Distribution in the Georges River estuary, Southern Sydney, 1930-1970', *Wetlands (Australia)*, v.20, 2002: 80-103, p99.

<sup>12</sup> Paul Adam and Jay Striker: *Wetlands of the Sydney Region: Inventory*, National Estate Grants Program 51, Nature Conservation Council of NSW, Sydney, 1989: 11-13; D.J. Dunstan: 'Some Early Environmental Problems and Guidelines in New South Wales Estuaries', *Wetlands (Australia)* 9 (1) 1990: 1-6; Haworth: 'Changes in Mangrove/Salt-Marsh Distribution', p99

<sup>13</sup> Monica Garside: *Padstow Park Progress Association History, 1913-2001*, Padstow Park Progress Association, 2001, p9

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Association had formed at Kogarah Bay in 1921, another at Lugarno in 1922 and one at Herne Bay well before 1930. The Sandy Point Progress Association did form until 1951, well into the post war years, reflecting the lower population and slower growth on the southern side.<sup>14</sup> They were forming in the heyday of local and regional public use of the river frontages for picnics, swimming, boating, fishing and many other forms of leisure. Many private pleasure gardens were still operating and the public was increasingly using the few public parklands which had been reserved over the previous decade or so. The slow extension of the rail network was bringing more Sydneysiders to the rivers on weekends and holidays. The local progress associations along the Georges River hoped to take advantage of the high and growing interest in river activities to expand their communities and to enhance their economic and cultural opportunities.<sup>15</sup> The increasing populations in the 1910s and 20s were settling in a dense pattern, fostering close knit communities and facilitating community organization. The local progress associations were both expressing and shaping the local sense of these emerging communities and of what they understood to be 'the public'. It did NOT include Aborigines. A number of the Progress Associations protested in 1926, seeking council intervention, although unsuccessfully on that occasion, to remove Aboriginal residents from their land on Salt Pan Creek. The Depression slowed this process of community formation and assertion but it was to reemerge strongly through the 1930s. It was a sense of community which was racially limited and class defined, with the Anglo-Irish component of the population self-consciously beginning to flex its demographic strength to exert control over the directions in which their community might develop.<sup>16</sup> The pressure to force Aboriginal families to move reemerged in 1930, 1935 and then 1937, with the Progress Associations objecting to Aboriginal people's presence not only on the grounds that their residences might be unhygienic or their behaviour objectionable, but that they spoil the beauty of the place in a 'growing' suburb.<sup>17</sup> By 1941, having achieved the task of sending at least some of the Aboriginal community east to La Perouse, the Progress Associations were targeting another class of 'undesirables'. Padstow Park Association requested Council to 'remove an encampment of Gypsies from Howard Road' at the same time as it removed an ant bed from the same street.<sup>18</sup>

These Depression years were, however, tumultuous ones for the majority Anglo-Irish population of the area as well as for Aboriginal people and the Roma. Assertive local politics were expressed in a jingoistic Australian nationalism<sup>19</sup>, a high involvement in the ALP and the emergence of the powerful Labor figure and twice Premier Jack Lang, based at Bass Hill [the old IrishTown]. Lang drew a loyal following from many among the district's working class and tradesmen. When he was sacked by the Governor in 1932, for refusing to pay State government's interest on loans from English banks, a current of angry resentment flowed around the electorate, leaving a bitter distrust of government. The Depression was an extremely difficult time for the area, with high unemployment and brutal evictions of tenants who could no longer meet their rent payments,<sup>20</sup> but this did not reduce the area's population. There was the innovative Hammondville scheme on the southern bank of the river, just to the west of East Hills, established by the Anglican Church in 1933 in response to the eviction of inner-city, rent-paying families.<sup>21</sup> More randomly, squatter camps and shanty towns of the unemployed and the evicted

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*; Louise Singleman *Secrets of Sandy Point: A History of Sandy Point*, Sandy Point Progress Association, Narellan, 2002, p63; DJ Hatton, *The Kogarah Bay Progress Association 1921-1981*, DJ Hatton, Sans Souci, c. 1981

<sup>15</sup> Garside, *Padstow Park*, 2001; Andrew Molloy *Padstow a brief history in photos*, self-published, Padstow, 2004, p73-74; Patrick Mullins: 'Progress Associations and Urban Development: The Gold Coast, 1945-79' in *Urban Policy and Research*, 13 (2) 1995.

<sup>16</sup> At that stage still the dominant ethnic group in the local population, with the Irish still prominent in Bankstown, despite a substantial group of Italian market gardeners around Fairfield and scattered throughout other areas like Padstow. Molloy *Padstow a brief history in photos*, p73-74; Beverley Earnshaw, Ch 2 'Salad Bowl of Sydney', in her *The Land Between Two Rivers : St George in Federation Times*, Kogarah Historical Society 2001 pp 17-32

<sup>17</sup> *Propeller*, 16 Jan 1931; *St George Call*, 3 Mar 1939; *Propeller*, 3 Mar 1939.

<sup>18</sup> Andrew Molloy, *A History of Padstow*, self-published, Padstow, 2003. p 24 citing PPPA minutes of request to Bankstown Council

<sup>19</sup> The Australian nationalism of this area is strongly inflected by the high influence of the Irish-descended population's continuing anti-British sentiment, as evidenced in many of Paul Keating's statements on history and the nation while he served in Federal Parliament.

<sup>20</sup> Nadia Wheatley: 'The Unemployed Who Kicked. A Study of the Political Struggles and Organisations of the NSW Unemployed in the Great Depression', MA Honours Thesis, Macquarie University, 1976, unpublished.

<sup>21</sup> Haworth, p 40. Hammond Care Homes: history: <http://www.hammond.com.au/aboutus/history.html>

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began to rise on the remaining 'vacant' but privately owned land along the river, using the resources of the sandstone areas and encroaching too onto the public parks where there were some amenities like running water and road access for the long tramp into the urban centres where work might be available.<sup>22</sup> So the instability and movement of the Depression increased the sense of an uncontrolled rise in the population and particularly of the potential threat to the open and 'unused' lands of the district.

### **NEW THREATS TO THE SANDSTONE COUNTRY**

The conduct of World War 2 had revived the economy and delivered many of the technologies which had been foreshadowed in the interwar years but had never arrived in the stagnation of the depression. Once the war was over, jobs were still plentiful and local industries which had boomed in the war years, like de Havillands aircraft manufacturing, were expanding with a new peacetime air industry emerging. People were on the move too, taking up the subdivided blocks unsold from the interwar years and increasing pressure for more of the five acre market gardens and chicken farms on the shale of the northern side of the Georges River to be subdivided for newly-married couples who had been delaying setting up homes until after the war.

The recognition of this escalating demand for new housing blocks as well as of an increase in private motor vehicles led to a plan for the orderly development of the city under these boom conditions. This took shape as the County of Cumberland Planning scheme, released in 1948 and confirmed in 1951. The primary goal was to meet demand for more housing but to do so in way which conserved open spaces and farming around the city in a 'green belt' and which protected and indeed expanded the greenspaces within the city perimeter along the natural features like rivers. The Cumberland County Council was established to manage this plan's implementation across the whole of the Sydney basin and it mandated a freeze on subdivision along the lines of these identified 'greenspace' areas including Georges River around Herne Bay, Salt Pan Creek, Padstow and Picnic Point. This attempt to limit subdivision in the area stood in contradiction to the desires of local organisations like the Progress Associations and Chambers of Commerce to facilitate subdivision and foster 'development' of the newer suburban centres, as well as the popular sense of the rising need for housing which had been generated from the Depression evictions and camps and the new, post war optimism to establish new families in the district.

The freeze ensured that in the early years after the war, while there was a proliferation of fibro, owner-built cottages, the new residents kept to the small blocks in the existing subdivisions on the shale soils, making the settled areas still more densely populated rather than spilling over into the infertile sandstone areas.<sup>23</sup> There were still the grid-like patterns of street alignment and residential building, sticking to the rich Wianamatta shale soils on the upper lands rather than moving into the sandy soils towards the river. As long as the local domestic economy depended on a garden and chooks in the back yard, the houses being built by the new low-to-modest income owner-builders needed to be close to the railway lines and on shale soils away from the river. Yet rising affluence meant that the domestic vegetable garden became less important in a family's economy, while the increasing availability of privately owned motor vehicles in the 1950s made proximity to the railway stations less of a necessity. The sandy soil escarpment country along the river became an ever more attractive target for new residential expansion and indeed to offer its owners substantial resale profits for the first time since European settlement. In 1957, the County of Cumberland conceded to the pressure and the freeze on subdivision in the area fell, much to the delight of the local Progress Association, who reported that:

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<sup>22</sup> Davies, *West of the River Road*, p 21 for descriptions of camps along Lambeth St and East Hills parklands.

<sup>23</sup> Haworth 'Bush Blocks' p 35

‘The beautiful suburb of Padstow with its neighbouring boundaries has shown marked activities through lifting of the Green Belt restrictions on development, in allowing valuable sub-divisions to be opened up for residential purposes.’<sup>24</sup>

### **DEFENDING THE FORESHORES**

There were many new residents of the local communities along the river, although few came from far outside the area. Many young couples were the children of older Bankstown or Belmore families, who had moved from the more densely settled township areas to the more spacious outer edges of the Wianamatta shale in search of a home of their own on a larger block of land. The changed demographic mix, with more younger people and more children, altered the momentum of local politics and opened up some tensions within the organizations speaking on behalf of the ‘community’. The Padstow Park Progress Association is an example. It was an active lobby for more parks within the suburb and for better roads, curbing, guttering and sewage, to everyone’s satisfaction.<sup>25</sup> But in its desire to encourage subdivision and to push the State government to overturn the freeze on private residential development in sandstone country, it was acting against the growing numbers of local people who saw the greenspace in the area as already severely limited and feared the loss of the sandstone country, with its natural bushland and its waterfrontage and for whom the threatened loss of the foreshores endangered not only their sense of the beauty of the suburb but also their expectations of leisure and recreation in relation to the river.

In 1949, a group of residents formed the Picnic Point Regatta and Recreation Areas Development Association [PPRA]. This organization does not easily fit the patterns described of urban movements as being concerned either with the provision of infrastructure, control of local politics or development of lifestyle. While Progress Associations of the area were comfortably in this frame, the Regatta Association had an orientation towards engaging with ‘nature’ in the city, although infrastructure and lifestyle were clearly elements within its goals.<sup>26</sup> Picking up the themes of the 1936 Deepwater Boating club formed to lobby for boating interests on the river, the Regatta association had a focus on the river and its foreshores and held regattas among other events to raise funds. But its most consistently stated overall goal was to save the foreshores from privatized development.<sup>27</sup>

The PPRA was made up of local people, with women among its members but with a public face which was exclusively male. Most of its members would have called themselves working class or small business people whose priorities were local community activities and access. It had grown out of the Progress Associations and the school tuck shops and sporting associations, where parents developed bonds across the suburb as they did so made sandwiches and coached the under-12s. In later years, it was proudly recalled that Col Joye’s father, George Jacobson, was one of the founding members of the PPRA and later the Georges River Trust.<sup>28</sup> Like Joye’s own enthusiastic, community rock music style, playing in the 1950s with his brother’s band The Joye Boys, for suburban dances in the Bankstown Capitol theatre and local sporting dinners<sup>29</sup>, the elder Mr Jacobson’s long involvement with the PPRA emphasized the ‘home grown’ and locally-oriented focus of the group. This was the *lived* process of community building, with only modest resources and few spaces in the now densely packed residential areas. These suburbs were by no means as disadvantaged as the emerging Green Valley and other Housing Commission areas where families were being dumped with no infrastructure close by near

<sup>24</sup> President’s Report, Padstow Park Progress Association, 1957, cited Garside: *Padstow Park*, p26.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, p24; *Leader*, 12 Oct 1961, p 7.

<sup>26</sup> Mullins, ‘Progress Associations’ pp68-9

<sup>27</sup> Georges River National Park/Parklands Trust *Annual Reports* 1965, 1966, 1968.

<sup>28</sup> *Torch*, 29 Apr 1992.

<sup>29</sup> Biographies of Col Joye and brother Kevin Jacobson at the Roots of Australian Rock and Roll: <http://www.ozrockshop.com/history/rocknew.htm> and the encyclopaedia of Australian and NZ music, HowlSpace <http://www.howlspace.com.au/en/joyecol/joyecol.htm> suggest the cultural context of the period and place. For Joye’s singing association with Aboriginal singer Vic Sims, see ABC site: <http://www.abc.net.au/message/blackarts/music/s640236.htm>

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Liverpool. But they were nevertheless struggling economically, with little cash in family incomes to spare for supplementing the meagre recreational facilities and poorly managed ‘natural’ areas. The major public greenspace in the district had for over 150 years been the *de facto* public access to the sandstone country all along the river and now that was under threat in two ways: because the riverbanks seemed to be rapidly degrading and because the foreshore land was suddenly potentially saleable for private, and more affluent, residential purchase. Yet if the PPRA was initiated by the early working class ‘baby boom’ families of the first subdivisions, it and the later Georges River Trust came to reflect the interests too of the incoming owners of the homes being built in some of the sandstone areas. Many were small business people from the nearby commercial centres like Padstow, who wanted to move to a larger home, could by this time afford more than the aging fibros and didn’t want to move out of the area. They were still local, but their more secure financial situation reflected the consolidation of the economy of the area and the community’s rising interest in accessing the sandstone country and the river.<sup>30</sup>

Accounts of the parklands gazetted in 1961 as National Park stressed that the primary aim of this group had been to save the river foreshore ‘for the people’:

‘The park was created to prevent building out of the Georges River foreshores.... Local organizations had worked for years to have the land adjoining the river *preserved for public use*. Much of the land adjoining the river is already privately owned. ...too few waterfront areas close to Sydney are reserved for public use’<sup>31</sup>

Later statements by community members, councilors and Trust members reiterated that so much river bank land is ‘already in private hands’ that the Trust was trying to save the rest so it is ‘*preserved for all time for the benefit of the people*’<sup>32</sup>, to be kept ‘*for posterity*’.<sup>33</sup> ‘The Trust’s aim was to *preserve the foreshores of Georges River for recreational use*. Much of the river bank area had *already been built on*.’<sup>34</sup> As P. Thompson, a local man and former Trust member explained in 1983: ‘With residential development rapidly expanding in the area the Association feared that development could spread to the River *foreshores which would be lost to the public*. To prevent this, the Association set about having the area bounded by Henry Lawson Drive and the River from Picnic Point to Salt Pan Creek proclaimed a national park’.<sup>35</sup>

The foreshores they wanted to save were neither pristine nor stable. The changes in the riverine environments which had begun with the first European agriculture appear to have accelerated in the years over which the population began to rise in the area. Major flooding in the 1950s added more silt to the banks at the same time as it exacerbated the increased burden of nutrients in the water because of sewage from rising populations and from more high-input farming on the shale soils, while the dredging left deeper beds which increased flow rates and further eroded the shoreline. The populations in the district, even those of relatively recent arrival, were witnessing a rapid expansion of the mangroves on the waterline. Photographs taken by the Salt Pan Creek Progress Association in 1914 show an open shoreline but aerial images from 1930 were already demonstrating mangrove expansion in comparison.<sup>36</sup> The increase in mangrove area after 1930 was even more rapid. The Engineer at Hursville Council reported in 1968, in relation to Lime Kiln Bay, just to the east of Salt Pan Creek:

<sup>30</sup> Interview, Val and Elliot Goodacre, 2003, Georges River project

<sup>31</sup> *Leader* 8 Mar 1962 p 1

<sup>32</sup> *Propellor* 15 mar 1962, p 2

<sup>33</sup> *Leader* 8 May 1963 p9

<sup>34</sup> *Leader* Aug 23, 1967

<sup>35</sup> P. Thompson, Oct 1983, former Trust Member, ‘Georges River State Recreation Area: some early history’ in Georges River State Recreation Area’ Local History Vertical File, Banskton Local Studies collection, Bankstown City library

<sup>36</sup> Molloy, *History of Padstow*, p 160, citing Betty Goodger in the Bankstown Historical Society newsletter, 1992, p 12

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‘The mangroves in this location are quite a new development’.<sup>37</sup> In the following year, the Shire Engineer stated that:

‘The siltation rate in the Georges River and the bays off it is such that the mangrove swamp areas are rapidly increasing. A comparison of the mangrove area in air photos taken in 1937 and those taken in 1962 show a tremendous increase in only 24 years.’<sup>38</sup>

The Engineer’s statements revealed the widely-held distaste for the mud and the mangroves, which no doubt coloured many popular attitudes to the shoreline environment. ‘It is’, the Engineer went on, ‘tragic to see the waterways silting to this extent and anything that can rid the river of these unsightly mudflats and foul mangrove swamps should be applauded by everyone’. Such emotive responses no doubt added a layer of prejudice to the ways with which mangroves were dealt and complicate our assessment of popular environmental attitudes. However, later analysis of the aerial photographs by Haworth<sup>39</sup> has confirmed the Engineer’s assessment of a rapid expansion of the mangrove stands in the area. In Lime Kiln Bay, for example, immediately east of Salt Pan Creek, the mangrove cover increased from 16% in 1930 to 58% in 1941 and then to 71% in 1970. Little Salt Pan Creek, to its west, increased its mangrove cover from 5% in 1930 to 37% in 1970. Salt Pan Creek itself was almost clear of mangroves in 1930, but the cover there had risen to 23% in 1930 and leapt to 53% in 1970. In Lime Kiln Bay, Little Salt Pan and other areas the mangroves had advanced landward, at the expense of the saltmarsh. On Salt Pan Creek itself, because of its own uniquely heavy silt burden derived from clearing on its upper reaches in the shale soils, the mangroves had advanced both landwards, cutting into the salt marsh, and also seaward, filling in the open water on the greatly increased silt mud flats. The open water visible from the air decreased from 50% in 1930 to only 22% in 1970. The sense of loss of accessible and open water was even further compounded by the rising presence of dumped rubbish, rubber tyres and metal car parts, and often cars themselves, settling half submerged in the spreading mud and clearly visible from the high rail crossing over Salt Pan, which ironically gave something like a daily aerial view to the many locals from East Hills, Panania, Revesby and Padstow who travelled daily for work or school. Such direct observations of rapid changes to the way the river could be accessed and viewed were a part of the way local residents thought about saving the foreshores for the public. The Picnic Point Regatta Association’s goal was not pursued with any intention of stabilising the present situation. In fact, they were acutely aware that the shores were already severely damaged by settlement and were in need of urgent repair.

### **HOW TO SAVE THE FORESHORES? LOCAL GOALS**

The Association, like the Padstow Parks Committee, began immediately in 1949 to lobby government for the resumption of private land to gazette more public parkland along the river shore. Their focus was the Lewis Gordon estate, one of the few large estates to have remained intact along the river frontages. It lay at Picnic Point, between Fitzpatrick Park and Lambeth St, both now public lands but in themselves only small patches connected by the narrow public access along the water line. The Lewis Gordon Estate was a deep property which contained escarpment as well as waterline and mud flat, offering a range of different environments and a substantial area to bring into public hands. By 1955 it appeared the Regatta Association had achieved its goal: the Lewis Gordon Estate was acquired by the Cumberland County Council and was about to be transferred to the Bankstown Council. Within weeks, however, Cumberland announced it would cooperate with the State government’s intention to build a major electricity terminal on the escarpment on the estate, transferring only a proportion of the estate to the Bankstown Council. Disappointed, the Regatta Committee insisted it would continue to seek the

<sup>37</sup> Dunstun, 1990: ‘Some Early Environmental Problems in NSW Estuaries’, p3, citing Shire Engineer in Hurstville Municipal Council [HSC] minutes 5 Sept 1968.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, citing HSC minutes, 6 Mar 1969.

<sup>39</sup> The following data and an extensive analysis of the causes and complexities of the changes to mangrove distribution in this area are found in Haworth, 2000: ‘Changes in Salt-marsh distribution’, pp 90-100.

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incorporation of the remainder of the property, including the river shoreline, to public parkland use.<sup>40</sup> It was not till 1969, however, that the remaining areas of the Lewis Gordon estate, comprising 300 acres, were finally handed over to be incorporated into the parklands.<sup>41</sup>

The Association was committed to increasing the parklands and if resumption of private land was not going to do it, there were other options which seemed both attractive and feasible if only funding could be found. The major need for greater public use of the river foreshores was more space, and this could be achieved through what was then known as 'reclamation'. The limited amounts of land available on the Georges River frontage were intersected by wetlands, swamps and creeks. Flooding had been a sustained problem on the coast and so areas of standing water continued to be seen not as fragile ecosystems with major roles in breeding and maturation cycles for fish and birds in surrounding habitats, but instead as land which was unnaturally waterlogged after flooding or ineffective natural drainage.<sup>42</sup> This prolonged but unnatural water-logging was understood to have been exacerbated by the rising levels of rubbish and waste accumulating in such areas as population increased. This situation had most recently been exacerbated by the post-war development of the Herne Bay housing settlement on what had been the open ground of Doctor's Bush before the war years and the sewage from this poorly resourced low income settlement poured largely untreated into Salt Pan. Wetlands were as well seen as being breeding grounds for mosquitoes carrying disease and so the draining of wetlands was understood too as a necessary part of the construction of a modern 'healthy' city. Draining seemed to be not just a useful technology in potentially increasing arable or recreational land but in fact a restoration of an assumed earlier and 'natural' state. Thus the term used for draining wetlands was 'reclaiming' lands, as if in the proper state of affairs, at some time in the past, they would have been dry land and available for human purposes.

Many people across the country were enthused by the technological advances which the Second World War had stimulated. Much of attention was directed at the application of innovative engineering strategies to rivers. The Snowy River Scheme was an example on a massive scale, but there were many minor projects embarked on in same spirit. The 1950s and 1960s saw dramatic numbers of new small scale drainages of swamps and marshes on coastal rivers, often carried out privately, with increasingly interventionist approaches to environmental management.<sup>43</sup> Eventually taken up in some areas by Local Government and then by Water authorities, the result was more intervention in the 1950s and 1960s into riverine environments than had ever occurred before. The PPRA plans for their urban river were exactly in line with this enthusiasm for drainage in rural riverlands.

The belief that the Regatta Association was justified in the 'reclamation' of wetlands and swamps, and the removal of mangrove flats in order to do it, was held just as enthusiastically as the Association's other goal which was the protection of native flora and fauna and indeed the creation and expansion of sanctuary areas, where native birds and animals could be protected multiply, and where native flora could flourish, along side imports of native plants from across the continent. This approach to 'conservation', which isolated the effects of changes in one species or habitat from changes to another, and which valued the 'bushland' setting as a way to showcase, almost in museum style, a range of 'native' flora, was clearly very different from the recent recognition of ecosystems and the vulnerability of biodiversity. Yet despite the limitations of such species-specific approaches, the 'bush'

<sup>40</sup> Davies, *West of the River Road*, p38; *Leader*, 12<sup>th</sup> October 1961.

<sup>41</sup> Georges River Parklands Trust, 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Report, 1969: p2.

<sup>42</sup> Adam and Striker, *Wetlands Inventory*, p 36.

<sup>43</sup> Lucas, Damian: *Shifting Currents: A History of Rivers, Control and Change*, unpublished PhD, UTS, 2004; Heather Goodall, *Evans Head* and area. An Historical Report, re Native Title determination before Federal Court, prepared October 2003.; Maximilian Solling: *A Region in Transition: the dispute over 'making the most' of the Manning River fishery*, unpublished MA, UTS, 2005.

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and a vivid immersive experience in native environments had always been a sought-after quality in the advertising of the old Pleasure Grounds and it remained a key element of the Regatta Association's understanding of the need to protect the river foreshores from development. It was not just to have places to hold a picnic or have a wash while on a boating expedition, but rather to have be able to do these things at the same time as being able to explore and enjoy and learn from the safely-conserved *essential* qualities of the 'Australian' and 'national' environment. There were strong elements of appreciation of what was later to be understood as 'wilderness' in this local approach. Firstly, however, the Association was aware of the escalating impacts of rising population and knew they were not acting on a pristine environment. Secondly they did not see 'wilderness' as being impaired by having the 'improvements' of picnic areas, toilets, washrooms, barbeque areas, and boat ramps to facilitate their access. On these very small areas of land, they felt it was appropriate to have a flora sanctuary behind a wire fence, to protect it from 'vandals'. The expectations of the Association were interestingly democratic: they assumed their task was to provide 24 hour access to robust facilities and that the citizens of the area would then act to care for the environments they visited there and enjoyed.

Neither the 'reclamation' of wetlands, nor the protection and improvements to 'native environments' could occur without funding and resources. The Association had an active membership who carried out extensive fundraising including social evenings, dances, picnics and regattas. Yet this went nowhere near close enough to funding the extensive reclamation, facility and sanctuary construction work which the Association envisaged. The answer appeared to lie in the commercial opportunity offered in 1955 when the Regatta Association won the rights to a 'permissive occupancy' over the bed of the Georges River in the area, in the form of a sand lease. Dredging and sandmining was contentious. Bankstown Council and local residents had objected strenuously in 1937 when the State Government had allowed a dredging operation to start in the Georges River near Picnic Point on the grounds it would cause erosion of the banks and damage the bed of the river but by 1941 the Council itself was applying to begin sand mining operations. The Padstow Progress Association supported the Council dredging to reclaim foreshores at Salt Pan in 1943.<sup>44</sup> In 1955, and perhaps because of the Regatta Association's severe need for funds, there do not appear to have been any qualms. An arrangement was struck between the Regatta Association and commercial sand miners which allowed a percentage of the profits to return to the Association and for it to utilize some of the sand to facilitate its own reclamation plans.<sup>45</sup> Members of the organization continued to have reservations about dredging, however, although little was understood about its damaging effects at the time while the problems caused to the natural environment by increased silting in highly built up areas like the upper Salt Pan Creek were only too evident.<sup>46</sup> What was clear was that the Trust needed funds. By 1966 the Annual Reports show that dredging produced the major part of the Trust's modest income, although even a proportion of the dredging profits had to be grudgingly returned to the Government in taxation.<sup>47</sup> So there was little possibility of doubts about dredging being expressed in public for some time to come.

The Regatta Association finally wanted to ensure the coordination of management of the river would go beyond the limitations of any one municipal boundary and would recognize the importance of seeing the river as a continuous flow, in which damage inflicted up river had consequences for all below, rather than considering impacts only within one local government area. It began to lobby for a multi-council Trust which would oversee the consolidated parklands it hoped to bring into existence. The idea of a multi-authority trust, which approaches today's catchment-wide approach to river management,

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<sup>44</sup> Rosen, *Bankstown*: p 117.

<sup>45</sup> Davies *West of the River Road*, p 38.

<sup>46</sup> Kevin Howard, 'An Essay on Contemporary Change and Prospects of the Georges River', essay written for Diploma of Environmental Studies, Macquarie University, 1973, p 11 Howard, b 1938, was a Trust member from 1975. He was the Health and Building Surveyor in Bankstown Council in 1985 when he was again reappointed to the Trust. NPWS Archives SR 109/32.

<sup>47</sup> Georges River National Park Trust, 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Report, 1966.

had been mooted during by Liverpool Council when the severe flood of 1950 made it evident that no one council could plan or cope effectively with major flooding.<sup>48</sup> But the Regatta Association took the idea forward and lobbied to establish a Trust made up largely of local people, two of whom were to be from each of the three participating councils, Bankstown, Hurstville and Sutherland, while two were from the Regatta Association [and later ‘the community’] while another was to be a specialist in conservation matters. The National Park was announced by the State Government in 1961, with the Crown Land of all of its 8 original parks protected collectively under the Native Flora and Fauna Act. The Georges River National Park Trust was formally established early in the following year.<sup>49</sup> The Regatta Association continued to act as mentor to the Trust, handing over its sand lease in 1964 to the Trust and, feeling it’s work was being done effectively by the Trust, the Regatta Association dissolved itself in 1968.<sup>50</sup>

### WHY LOCAL PEOPLE WANTED A NATIONAL PARK IN 1961

These were the goals of the PPRA, but why did they want to call their park ‘national’? Although there was as yet no State legislation to define or manage National Parks, there had been parks designated as ‘national’ for 80 years in Australia by then and there was as well a wide popular knowledge of the idea being put into practice in America and Canada.<sup>51</sup> The detailed objects of the PPRA in 1949 allow us to explore the multi-faceted character of this community group’s concept of a national park, to see how this idea was circulating outside official discourse.<sup>52</sup> There were four main grounds on which the PPRA based its claim that their parklands deserved the status of ‘national’.

Firstly the group saw the land as ‘public’, that is, it was to be saved for and used by ‘the people’. This had a particular local salience: although functioning as *de facto* Common, much of the parkland had been nominally in private hands since first settlement and the danger the PPRA was trying to confront was its loss into an even deeper form of privatized house block development. But the concept of ‘the public’ was a key one in the development of the ‘national park’ concept in the United States where such parks were a symbol of the new democratic forms of the liberal settler state. In this Australian suburban community, which had had a turbulent working class history and which continued to have a high proportion of low income residents, such parks also stood for the promise of democracy as much as for qualities of the landscape which they encompassed. This symbolic political dimension of the concept of public ownership and access was frequently raised in phases like ‘for the benefit of the people’ in all the PPRA and early Trust literature. When the local custodianship of the park was threatened in 1967 and removed in 1992, the protests were all expressed in the language of ‘the people’, of the ‘workers’ or ‘battlers’ and ‘the public’. This was, a very concrete sense of the ‘public’ and the ‘people’: it was, first and foremost, *local* people who were understood to be ‘the public’ rather than any abstract, generalized and distant ‘public’. It was too a class based concept. In this sense the local, working class community embodied and expressed ‘the nation’ and this underlay the claim that this park was indeed ‘national’. This was not a top-down reformers’ approach but a populist and local self-help, self-advancement, school-of-arts approach, in its emphasis on the ‘youth of the district’ it was making very clear its assertion that ‘WE are the public’. Yet it was not parochial or isolationist, as there had always been a strong awareness of the Georges River as an attraction for people from a wide area from the early days of the Pleasure Grounds. But the concept of ‘the national’ was a confident assertion that we, as the local people, are part of the ‘national’ and indeed reflect, ‘the national’. The concept had also an

<sup>48</sup> *Leader*, 12<sup>th</sup> Oct, 1961, p7.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, 12<sup>th</sup> Oct 1961; 8<sup>th</sup> Mar 1962 p11. There was no act of parliament formalizing either a National Parks administration or the structure of parks themselves. Instead there continued to be Crown Lands which could be reserved for public use and a Native Flora and Fauna Protection Act to protect the wildlife within those reserves.

<sup>50</sup> Davies, *West of the River Road*, pp38-39.

<sup>51</sup> Karen R Jones and John Wills: *The Invention of the Park*, Cambridge: Polity, 2005 pp 64-91

<sup>52</sup> Davies, *West of the River Road*, p38.

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underlying exclusionary precept: the Progress Associations had taken a role in forcing local Aboriginal people away from their residences during the 1920s and 1930s and although there were clear differences in outlook between the Progress Associations and the PPRA, there can be little doubt that the Regatta Association vision of 'the public' and 'the nation' was monocultural at this stage.

Secondly, its 'national' claim lay not only in its acquisition by and for the local people and 'the public' but in its need to be protected with the full power held by 'the nation'. The PPRA believed, quite rightly in the light of the intense pressure to subdivide, that the parklands would continue to be vulnerable to the demand to subdivide and sell off to ever more affluent home owners. The 'public' lands needed therefore to be protected in the most secure form of title and the PPRA believed this to lie in the designation of 'national'. The sustained interest in acting to save the foreshores from development was always stated in terms which linked ensuring the access of 'the people' for 'posterity'. The national park idea was not only then about a concept of 'the people' or the public, but about the most secure way to protect such a place, in the face of the intensifying encroachment of private development. Again, an undercurrent may have been the continuing desire and need to embed a secure 'belonging' for Anglo-Irish settlers onto the environment, a continuation of the assertiveness of local politics in claiming an unquestioned ownership over an imagined pristine land. Nevertheless, the most urgent, very real threat in the 1960s was not to white settler Australian ownership but to public, local ownership and access and it is in these terms that the parks were championed. In more recent years, the issue has reappeared, and now race and ethnicity have been dramatically foregrounded in a way that was not the case in the 1960s, when the cultural dominance of Anglo-Irish Australians in the area was taken for granted.

Thirdly and just as fervently held, was the belief that this parkland deserved the 'national' designation because it was 'native' and 'primitive' bushland, not just any landscaped greenspace. The early documents of the PPRA and Trust make clear that 'saving the foreshores' meant conserving native vegetation and animals, and this was spelt out more clearly in the late 1960s. The first secretary of the new Trust R.J. Stephens explained 'much of the land adjoining the river is already privately owned. This had limited the extent of the park to Crown land and frozen lands...and because of their rugged character, the Trust will leave many of these areas in their native state.'<sup>53</sup> The 8<sup>th</sup> Trust Report explained that 'while some areas of parklands had been developed and others would be developed, the greater part would be left in its natural state'.<sup>54</sup> The following year, the Trust explained further: 'It must be realized that it was never intended for the Parklands to become a big picnic area but to protect and preserve the natural surroundings of the area not only for this but for future generations'.<sup>55</sup> There was little awareness of the concept of 'ecosystems' among early local campaigners for the park and there was a diverse and eclectic approach to what might be understood as 'native' or 'primitive' in the specific Georges River context.<sup>56</sup> Yet there is little doubt that the inclusion and protection of 'native' species was of defining importance in local conceptions of what a national park should be, despite the limitations of space and the needs for mesh fences and other protections which the Trust felt it needed to impose on its flora reserve.<sup>57</sup> But this was a 'native' nature which could and should be enhanced, to make it more accessible, more didactic and more enjoyable. So that it was consistent that the Floral Reserve should incorporate native flowering plants from Western Australia in order to impress on visitors the beauty of native blooms, rather than that only the ones indigenous to the actual Sydney riverine environment should be propagated and displayed. The approach to 'native' nature had at least something in common with Brereton's zoo at the Lambeth St Pleasure Grounds in exhibiting

<sup>53</sup> *Leader*, 8 Mar 1962; *Propeller*, 15 Mar 1962. R.J. Stephens himself was an employee of the Dept of Lands.

<sup>54</sup> *Leader* 7 Aug 1968.

<sup>55</sup> Georges River Parklands Trust Annual Report no.8, 1969

<sup>56</sup> Howard, 'Change and Prospects' p1.

<sup>57</sup> *Leader* 3 Apr 1963

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and entertaining, but its focus remained on the 'national' flora not on an aesthetic concept of displaying exoticism or beauty from elsewhere.

The final element in this popular conception of the National Park was recreation for youth, as a national goal and responsibility. This idea was a complex of beliefs about the importance of outdoor exercise and the Australian climate for health, but it reflected too an environmental nationalist expectation that team sports, outdoor exercise in the surroundings of iconic Australian landscapes was particularly important for building the national identity. Underlying all of this, was a rising national and a specifically local post-war anxiety about young people under the impact of modernity, particularly in the newer suburbs with many teenagers growing up together. The PPRA's first meetings gave voice to what was a widespread fear about teenaged boys and the rise of juvenile delinquency.<sup>58</sup> So the wider educational role of native parklands had an urgent and immediate edge for the residents of the new working class suburbs of the Georges River. Overall, however, the national park campaigners had a fundamental expectation that the park would serve human purposes, in this combination of didactic, social and national roles. This assumption of the didactic role of and social benefits to be gained from, access to open spaces **both** for organized sports **and** for observation and appreciation of native bushland and animals was characteristic of the PPRA and of wider views at the time. The goal of this national park idea was to facilitate and encourage human activity and the early campaigners saw no inconsistency in assuming that it was human needs and goals which should be paramount in the park's management. This androcentric approach was a very different one than the ecocentric approach which is currently dominant in most natural resource management agencies and particularly in NPWS. It is not so different, however, from the early conservation movement associated with Myles Dunphy and the bushwalkers of the mid twentieth century, usually credited as the forerunners of the wilderness movements of the present day.<sup>59</sup> Dunphy too had an androcentric approach in which supposedly pristine bush areas were to be protected, but not for themselves alone nor to protect their biodiversity, but rather so that an elite of sensitive human beings, most attuned to the values of these wilderness environments, might better appreciate them.

### **WHAT DID THE TRUST DO FOR THE GR PARKLANDS?**

Local pressure through the Trust did maintain the momentum to expand the public land included in the Georges River Parklands. The early lobbying for the Lewis Gordon estate eventually won an additional 300 acres for the park and in 1963 some further land was resumed to be included as well.<sup>60</sup> Other small patches were added over the years in an arduous process which shows up on the Georges River National Park file maps in the NPWS Archives as painstakingly coloured sections showing parts revoked [yes, there were some strategic revocations to pass land over to neighbouring councils as purely recreational land], parts included, negotiations with private land owners, the Commonwealth, Roads agencies, electricity utilities and councils. In 1975 there were further fragments added in what became Yerambah Lagoon and other parcels of land at Padstow Heights. Then the former Commonwealth land on which a Beacon had been located was handed over to the Trust on January 1982 and there were further attempts to gain land adjacent to Fitzpatrick Park just west of Mill Creek. Ultimately, the Trust had been able nearly to double the area of the Parklands, from 426 acres in 1961 [approx 173 hectares] to 785 acres [326 hectares] in 1991.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Davies, *West of the River Road*, p 38

<sup>59</sup> Myles Dunphy bought a home at Oatley on the Georges River. His son Milo Dunphy also a keen conservationist grew up around the river. He recalled taking a Bren gun up the Georges River in a boat with friends shooting at trees on shore, also shooting in the Oatley Park bush and swimming. See Peter Meredith, *Myles and Milo*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1999, pp 149,151.

<sup>60</sup> *Leader* 3 Apr 1963; 8 May 1963.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*, 29 Oct 1991.

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There was, however, very little environmental protection which the designation of National Park could offer, despite the lobbying on the part of its Trust and supporters. Just over one year after the declaration of the National Park in 1961, the president of the Trust and member of the PPRA, R. Kerslake reported in April 1963 that all the river swimming enclosures had had to be closed because of severe pollution, arising from sources which were largely faecal but included industrial runoff and council dumping.<sup>62</sup> Eventually the Trust had to take away the wire netting to convince people they really were no longer allowed to swim. A special report to the State Government by its Analyst Mr Ogg in June 1962 had demonstrated widespread and severe pollution, and pinpointed the major contributors as being many of the official agencies discharging sewage and pollution directly into the river along its length, like the Fairfield Sewage Plant and the proliferating government temporary housing settlements, like the NSW Housing Commission area at Herne Bay and the Commonwealth Migrant Hostel at East Hills and its various Defence Forces settlements like the Moorebank Army Camp.<sup>63</sup> Trust members knew it was the opinion of the Metropolitan Medical Officer Dr Hay that, 'It will never be possible to make the Georges River safe for swimming again'.<sup>64</sup> The Trust had few solutions to propose other than to support the strong Local Government and resident demands for major expansion of the sewage system and treatment process, to replace the old nightsoil carts and flows of untreated sewage into the river. Other than that, it could only lamely suggest the construction of a freshwater artificial swimming pool near the polluted Georges River to offer a safe place to swim.<sup>65</sup> The Georges River continued to be one of the most polluted waterways in the State until well into the 1980s.

Yet popular usage of the National Park area kept on increasing and the Trust argued that despite the severe problems with the river water's quality, visitor numbers were expanding because of the improvements they had been able to make to the amenities like running water, shelter sheds, barbeques and toilet blocks. Increased numbers of people were using Fitzpatrick Park, according to 1965 Annual Report, which documented over 2000 people who were regularly using the park on busy days. There continued to be many companies which used the parks within the GR National Park complex to hold their Works Picnic Day or their Christmas Party for employees' children. De Havillands Aircraft Industry held regular Christmas Parties at Fitzpatrick's Reserve and after their 1966 party, they booked again for 1967.<sup>66</sup> The Kelloggs food company [based in Botany] used the Georges River park regularly in this way and in 1982 organised a helicopter landing to bring Santa Claus to the picnic.<sup>67</sup>

### **GOVERNMENT REJECTION: THIS IS NOT A NATIONAL PARK: 1967**

The parklands on the Georges River were known as a National Park for six years, but this was a time when the State had no formal body of legislation concerning 'national parks' or their management. In 1967 the NSW Government passed the National Parks and Wildlife Act which established the NPWS and formalized a hierarchy of parks with the designation only of some as 'national'.<sup>68</sup> And Georges River was not on the list! The legislation enshrined 16 parks as 'national' in its new order, while 54 other parks might be given the less imposing title of 'State Park' or nature reserve. There were three 'National Parks' in some proximity to the urban centre: Ku-ring-gai Chase and the Royal, along with the Blue Mountains National Park marking the far western limit.<sup>69</sup> The explanation given by the Government for dropping the Georges River was that the: 'accepted world concept of National Parks

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<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, 3 Apr 1963

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, undated photocopy but internal dating indicates 1962, held in Hurstville Local Studies Collection.

<sup>64</sup> Howard, 'Change and Prospects', p8, citing Don Whittington, *The Effluent Society*, Thomas Nelson, Melbourne, 1970. Howard's reference is important considering his long serving role as a Trustee on the Georges River Parklands Trust from 1975.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, 3 Apr 1963.

<sup>66</sup> Georges River National Park Annual Report, No 5, 1966.

<sup>67</sup> Kelloggs Employment Officer to Mr Thompson, NPWS and GR Trust, 19<sup>th</sup> August 1982, NPWS Archives, file 109/49.

<sup>68</sup> *Leader* 4 Jan 1967, 23 Aug 1967; *Torch* 23 Aug 1967.

<sup>69</sup> NPWS Table of Reserves, generated 12 Oct 2005.

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was that they embraced spacious land areas....<sup>70</sup> The smallest of the 12 newly recognized National Parks was 15,400 acres, the smallest of the 54 State Parks was 1310 acres, while Georges River National Park was 426 acres. Even with its still-unsecured Lewis Gordon addition it was only going to be 700 acres.<sup>71</sup> The Georges River parklands were of course so small because of their urban context of rapid alienation and high development pressure. Only the accident of the sandstone soils and then the energy of the local community had saved the foreshores for long enough to be protected at all. It could have been argued that the rarity of bushland in the urban areas added to the value of the fragment remaining. Instead, it was size which was to be the defining factor.

The local reaction was shock. 'Bill Will Strip Park of Status' and 'Georges River Parkland Fights for Existence' screamed the headlines in the St George *Leader* and the Bankstown *Torch*. Not only concerned about an insult to the community, Trust members feared the loss of 'national' status would lead to even less funds for the parks' upkeep. The State government had consistently contributed around \$5000 annually to the Parklands' work, but given the ambitious program which the PPRA and Trust had planned, they were in urgent need of every cent they could get from local government and from the royalties from dredging. Now the dredging income was in doubt, however, because for the first time in 1967 a Government department began to express concerns about its environmental impact. NSW Fisheries pointed out that dredging would jeopardize the grassy river weed, *zostera*, which in turn was a food source for blackfish and other species. Fisheries would agree to further dredging only if strict conditions for maintenance and restoration of the *zostera* beds were met, which made the dredging uneconomic.<sup>72</sup> The Trust expressed its frustration at what it regarded as unnecessary intervention, with some bitter statements, like Hurstville Alderman Armstrong's jibe that the Government appeared to feel that people were less important than fish spawning grounds<sup>73</sup>, reflecting community sentiments which rejected an ecocentric prioritization of flora and fauna over human needs. Fisheries refused to withdraw and the dredging program had to be reorganised.<sup>74</sup> If the Trust were to lose not only the dredging income but also the State government funds, it would be in severe difficulties even to maintain the existing amenities, let alone continue to 'reclaim' and 'improve' the parks. Its only option, the Trust reluctantly announced, would be to impose and raise fees for parking, boat ramp use and hiring facilities.<sup>75</sup>

### ***NOR ARE YOU THE PUBLIC: CONTESTING THE PUBLIC, THE NATIONAL AND THE NATIVE***

The Georges River Parklands Trust, now renamed, functioned through the 1970s and most of the 1980s by juggling its modest and insecure funding sources and with its ex officio local council members rising in influence as the pragmatics of day-to-day maintenance overtook the parks. Little further 'reclamation' work took place after the 1960s but there continued to be work needed on the ongoing projects like the native flowering plant nursery and the Yerambah lagoon. 'Vandals' became a greater expense than had been anticipated and the needs of day-to-day maintenance was a constant drain. The local government systems for routine maintenance and construction work were drawn on heavily, supplementing in kind what the councils could not afford to give in cash, and increasing the Councils' sense of authority over the Trust itself.

All this while, the district continued to change both demographically and economically. The Trust had managed to secure some sections of the sandstone escarpment country, like the Lewis Gordon foreshore

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<sup>70</sup> *Leader* 4 Jan 1967.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> *Torch* 23 Aug 1967, *Leader* 23 Aug 1967.

<sup>73</sup> *Leader* 4 Nov 1968

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 23 Aug 1967; 4 Nov 1968.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 7 Aug 1968; 22 Oct 1969

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areas and some other fragments added in 1975 for the parklands. But much of the remaining sandstone was rapidly subdivided into private residential sites through this decade. The orientation of homes and the routes of the expanding road network turned away from the railway lines and towards the river, literally and philosophically turning the river communities from front to back. By the mid 1980s, there were signs of tension between members of the Trust, with some focusing pragmatically on day to day management issues while other, newer, members with environmental interests wanted a broader policy approach which tried to tackle longer term issues and laid more emphasis on environmental concerns.<sup>76</sup> The population changes were reflecting a more diverse migration process during the 1970s and there were now a growing number of non-Anglo and certainly non-Irish residents in the area. Yet the Trust composition remained determinedly monocultural and Anglo-Irish. One of the very few Trust documents to acknowledge the changes noted in 1982 that:

Ethnic family groups make up a fair proportion of our visitors. It is obvious that our park areas provide facilities for both passive and active recreation for these people, thus enabling speedy assimilation to the outdoor Australian way of life, especially the children.<sup>77</sup>

The State government began to assert more influence in 1982 when it reconstituted the Parks as a State Recreation Area, and moved to ensure older members of the Trust resigned and the emphasis on local affiliations among Trust members was reduced.<sup>78</sup> At this point, the question of who the Parklands were there to serve was raised explicitly. A.J.Chaplin, government-nominated Liaison Officer on the Trust wrote to the Administrator of State Recreation Areas to insist that 'The Trust must accept the concept of a State Recreation Areas as being a regional rather than a local park'. Essentially, the local community members were being told that they were neither 'the public' nor did they embody 'the national' as they had once seen themselves to do.

In 1987, the State government moved again to loosen the structural links between local government and the Trust. The ex officio positions now were to be for State agency representatives, including one from National Parks. The Local Councils were told that their aldermen could apply to among the 5 'citizen representatives' on the new Trust, but that there would be no formal representation of Local Government. Councils all along the river made representations and sent deputations to various State ministers and agency heads, but were told in effect that the 'national public' was a wider population than just the local community.

When in 1991 the State Government finally moved to reinstate the Georges River parklands as a national park, it was at the cost of winding down of the Trust altogether and imposing the uniform NPWS management regime onto the parks. There was to be no more local voice, however flawed it may have been, in the management of these parks. The designation of National Park was widely welcomed as being more protective, but it meant the imposition of a very different management approach onto the Georges River parklands. In line with the rising awareness in the broader community about the precarious conditions of biodiversity across the state, and particularly in urban settings, NPWS had a standard set of constraints about how National Park land should be used. Yet many of the key changes at Georges River had little to do with biodiversity and suggested far more closely the needs of a cash strapped state agency with needs to implement uniform staff, insurance and funding approaches. Those which generated most concern in the local area were the imposition of an access charge in the form of greatly increased fees for parking and for boat launching permits [up by 150%], with particularly hard proportional cost impact on smaller boat owners.<sup>79</sup> Then there was the restriction

<sup>76</sup> B. Scholer to Bob Carr, 15 June 1987, NPWS Archives, file 109/32

<sup>77</sup> Mr LeClerc, Address of Welcome, from GR SRA Trust, 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of Trustees of SRAs, 28-29 Oct 1982, Bankstown. Held in NPWS Archives, file: 1992/201/290

<sup>78</sup> Reconstitution of GR State Recreation Area Trust, NPWS Archive, file: 109/32.

<sup>79</sup> *Torch*, 29 Apr 1992

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of opening hours from 24 hours per day to the hours between sunrise and sunset; the prohibition of any dog access, even on leashes and finally the suggested removal of some of the ‘amenities’.<sup>80</sup> Many of these measures had been foreshadowed or indeed implemented by the Trust, but on a smaller scale and in the context of the severe fund shortage for maintenance and ongoing development.<sup>81</sup> The shift in 1991 was depicted by opponents, as a shift from a more androcentric to a more ecocentric approach to park management, and from a more ‘local’ to a more regional orientation befitting its status as ‘national’. The outgoing Chair of the Trust, Ian Ford, commented that:

...a good decision had been made, but said flora and fauna would come first, people would no longer be able to walk their dogs in the area and there could be a downgrading of recreational facilities<sup>82</sup>

Such changes were in direct conflict with many of the elements of the local community’s understanding of what a ‘national park’ would involve. The shift away from prioritizing local needs and uses, the reduction in access through charges and opening hours and the shift away from facilitating human recreational uses meant that the change had removed some of the central qualities of both the ‘national’ and ‘the public’ from the very place-based way in which that concept was understood by the parklands’ founding community. The very clear message taken home by many in the local community was that ‘YOU are NOT “the public” ‘.

The local response was rapid and bitterly expressed by Labor party parliamentarians and councilors who reported that they were being inundated by public complaints. The area’s politics remained deeply inflected by class, despite the gentrification which had occurred as the sandstone escarpments with river views brought in a new, more diverse and more affluent body of residents. Not until the end of the 1990s did the renewal and gentrification processes turn back to these older areas and begin to tear down the old fibros, replacing them with enormous McMansions, often with a boat parked in the drive. In the early 1990s, the core of citizens in the longest settled and most densely populated areas of the river’s northern municipalities remained largely working class. Certainly the political structure was strongly rooted in the language and practice of Labor politics and labour affiliations. The area was particularly hard hit by the high unemployment of the period from 1990 to 1992, ironically occurring under the Federal Labor leadership of Paul Keating, the area’s own son and a characteristic product of its assertive nationalism. Those worst affected were the youth of the area, that very generation whom the original Regatta Association had seen as most at risk of ‘juvenile delinquency’ and most to benefit from the many roles of the parks. There may also have been, however, an undercurrent of hostility and resentment from the older residents towards the rising affluence of the newer homeowners of the sandstone country, whose presence must by 1992 have been generating seismic shifts in the social landscape of the area.

The wide and sustained protest over the NPWS assumption of control should not be read only as a narrative of local heroes defending a place-based movement for social justice. Many such protests suggest a further key element in the response to the shift to NPWS control which is the widespread rejection of contemporary bureaucratic and remote ‘big government’. Complaints are frequently made against the National Parks and Wildlife Service because it is one of the few frontlines of a State government in its *collective* dealings with local communities. Many other dimensions of contemporary governance are enacted by isolating and individualizing the so-called ‘clients’ as they deal with agencies like CentreLink. The Parks service, on the contrary, is charged with dealing with both the most informal and also the potentially most collective of activities, open park usage. In this sense it comes to bear the expression of collective anger about alienation and loss of control over ‘modern’

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<sup>80</sup> *Leader*, 29 Oct 1991; *Express* 12 Nov 1991.

<sup>81</sup> *Leader*, 7 Aug 1968

<sup>82</sup> *Express*, 12 Nov 1991

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distant government at every turn. Rural landholders find a target to complain about many aspects of State and Federal government through railing against the ‘off park’ interventions of NPWS monitoring of Threatened Species or Native Vegetation protection procedures, or by accusing the Service of failing in its ‘on-park’ responsibilities to maintain effective pest eradication and fire hazard reduction in its rural parks, thereby endangering all its neighbours who have ‘real’ commercial properties. The National Parks Service was also widely blamed during recent severe bushfires in the heart of Sydney and specifically in the Georges River National Park, but the uneasy relation of the complaints to reality was suggested by the fact that protesters blamed the Service BOTH for failing to burn off and for burning off too vigorously. In many cases, such complaints reflect sectional interests protesting their loss of economic, class or racial privilege, but more widely the accusations reflect a general suspicion of and disenchantment with bureaucratic governance.

Nevertheless, the tone of the Georges River letters was that of a still largely working class community reacting to the disruption to its sense of direct and collective ownership of the parklands and rivers. Their angry protests were expressed through letters and petitions as much as the statements of local politicians and were all framed in terms of class and place, insisting on the social injustices of excluding, not only the poorest and least advantaged of the community, but those who had put the most into saving the foreshores and indeed creating them as parklands. The Mayor of Bankstown was one who spoke not only for himself but his constituents in saying:

I and many other community representatives gave our time and energy voluntarily for over 30 years now only to see the park in the hands of professional bureaucrats whose only achievement has been to drastically reduce park attendance.... Georges River Parklands are an area which should be enjoyed by as many people as possible and not become the domain of only those with high incomes.<sup>83</sup>

There were many letters sent to parliamentarians from local residents from all along the river expressing as much anger and frustration.<sup>84</sup> One Canterbury resident wrote:

I was disgusted... with so many of us out of work and the recession it's a bit much to pay and I myself won't be going back. I'm sad because I liked my fishing in the upper Georges River as it was safe and good fishing.<sup>85</sup>

Pat Rogan, State Labor MP for East Hills argued that it was local people who had had the foresight to set aside parkland for future generations.

It was indeed these people who raised funds for the building of the existing boat launching ramp. At the same time the park was established the developers already had their eyes on this beautiful waterfront land. Having won the battle to keep this landing public ownership, the public is now being denied access to this scenic area by the increased charges.<sup>86</sup>

The ultimate expression of the deep sense of betrayal felt widely across the river lands was the call from Bankstown Council, arguing it was expressing the views of many citizens and supported by Pat Rogan, in calling for the restoration of community control over the Georges River parklands by abandoning the National Park designation they had fought so hard to gain. The Trust itself had of course called for the imposition and ongoing increase in park user fees, but the issue now was felt to be

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<sup>83</sup> R. Buchanan to Chris Hartcher, Minister for the Environment, 26 Aug 1992, NPWS Archives, A 1732 Correspondence, Enquiries, ministerials representations Georges River National Park

<sup>84</sup> For example, see JS Richards of Illawong to State MP for Sutherland, 19 Mar 1992, NPWS archives, A 1732, Correspondence, Enquiries, ministerial representations Georges River National Park; Michael O'Brien (Revesby) to Minister for the Environment, Tim Moore, 10 Feb 1992, NPWS archives, A 1732. Correspondence, Enquiries, ministerials representations Georges River National Park

<sup>85</sup> Canterbury resident W. Aitken to Pat Rogan, 10 December 1991, NPWS archives, A 1732, Correspondence, Enquiries, ministerials representations Georges River National Park

<sup>86</sup> *Torch*, 29 Apr 1992, 5 Aug 1992.

about the injustice of facing raised fees at the same time as losing a voice.<sup>87</sup> The Alderman and ex-Trust member Max Parker argued that access had been reduced, the local community had been excluded from decision making and the level of maintenance had fallen off. Council had resolved on February 16, 1993 to seek 'the Georges River National Park area being returned to the people as a recreation area.'<sup>88</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

This historical analysis allows at least four key points to be identified in the process of the creation of suburban greenspace. The first is that the local groups, including the Progress Associations but particularly the river, park and recreation-specific organization, the PPRA, were essential in maximizing the amount of foreshore which could be placed into public hands as greenspace. The State-level planning instruments, and notably the County of Cumberland Plan, were unstable at local level and open to the intense pressures of high population growth and the demand for related infrastructure, pressures which led the County Council, for example, to agree to the insistence by State Government that a major electricity substation be placed on Lewis Gordon estate at Picnic Point. Neither State nor Local Government could be relied on in the Georges River area during the period of most rapid subdivision and suburbanization. It was the presence of the Progress Associations then the Regatta Association and finally the Georges River National Park Trust which sustained the lobbying and pressure which allowed the retention and extension of public greenspace along the river.

Secondly, these local groups held a different concept of what constituted a 'national' park than that encompassed by official definitions. The local, popular concept is revealed in this history: it was the local groups which campaigned for and demanded this designation for their parklands long before the State Government offered it in 1961, then which protested its removal when the title was taken away in 1967 and which finally mourned the imposition of the conflicting State definition when it was imposed in 1992. As we see this local, popular concept expressed in these three conflicts, we can identify the broader elements it contains but also see the local inflections which were shaped by the times and by the immediate conditions.

- (i) The 'public' character of national parks, as places which were 'for the people' and so embodied the spirit of modern democracy, had particular resonance for the assertively nationalist and working class Anglo-Irish majority of the district's population. These factors meant it was of particular importance for them to be able to proclaim a local park as 'national' and 'for the people'.
- (ii) The 'native' quality of the environment was similarly a widely held assumption about national parks, nurtured by the settler colonial need to embed claims to newly acquired and unique lands which were said to be 'virgin' and 'pristine', awaiting conquest and settlement. The conception of 'native' held by these local groups in this case was not based on the recognition of the interdependence of ecosystems but instead was species-specific. It failed to appreciate the impact which intervention to conserve or remove one species might have on another. And they expected 'native' landscapes to be improved with androcentric amenities like running water and toilets and barbeques. Nevertheless, they were accurate in their assessment that the environment in the Georges River foreshores held substantial proportions of 'native' flora, fauna and landscapes because these had been protected from development from the earliest settlement by the accident of the presence of the relatively infertile sandstone geology of the areas.
- (iii) Both the landscape and the people both therefore warranted the protection of the designation 'national' and the local groups claimed this status both because of the importance of the local public and landscape but also because the very specific threats to the foreshores in this locality were so real and

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<sup>87</sup> *Leader*, 7 Aug 1968

<sup>88</sup> *Torch*, 5 Aug 1992, 31 Mar 1993.

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urgent. So they argued the lands deserved the highest level of protection possible, which was that offered by the recognition of its 'national' status.

- (iv) Finally, these groups sustained the view that a national park should serve the purposes of the nation, ultimately defined as its people. This conception of an androcentric or human-centred purpose was also widely held, and was not dissimilar from the underlying goals of the groups most usually identified as wilderness conservationists like Myles Dunphy. The local inflection in this case involved the concern of this baby-boom area in the post war climate about the rising generation of young people, and particularly of young men, who it was feared were spinning out of control into the social and personal wasteland then termed 'juvenile delinquency'. This anxiety was widely expressed in all western cultures, but in a set of newly expanding suburbs like those of the northern banks of the Georges River with little recreational infrastructure, many low income families and a big proportion of teenagers, the needs to offer healthy, educational and community-oriented recreational experiences seemed particularly urgent. Saving this generation of young people and fostering an enduring sense of 'the nation' was a powerful motivating factor for the parklands campaigns.

The third key point is that the local community organizations were under no illusion that the environment of the river and its parks was pristine or stable, despite their conviction that it represented 'the native' landscape. They were acutely aware of the recent and rapidly escalating changes which were occurring and understood that at least some of the causes lay very directly with settlement and modern development. Siltation was very evident, as was the escalating sewage and industrial pollution of the waterways and the visible detritus of modern life, in the council tips and the rusting car bodies protruding from the mud. While the precise and complex causes of the mangrove expansion were not well understood, they were all a part of what could only be perceived as a rapid deterioration of the quality of the environment. So the Regatta Association and other local groups were not seeking to freeze and preserve the current situation as if it were 'natural'. Instead their desire to 'save the foreshores' as bushland was consistent with their belief in the urgent need and responsibility to intervene in the damage being done and restore the more 'natural' conditions which many of them could remember having existed only decades before.

Finally, when the National Parks Service assumed full control of the parklands in 1992, restoring their national park status but dissolving the local Trust, this confronted not some entrenched and self-serving local power elite but instead the deeply held convictions of many people in the community that the parks had been their creation and their responsibility. At the time, this district was undergoing a severe impact from the current Recession and those particularly badly affected by unemployment were young people, the very group for whom the original Regatta Association had hoped to secure the most benefit from the parks. This made the district's population even more vulnerable in a time of rapid change in the community in regard to class and ethnic composition. A rising sense of social and economic instability and, for some, extreme vulnerability, generated a concerted protest which was invariably expressed in terms of class and local entitlement. There are important roles to play for park management authorities like National Parks and local government in widening social representation in environmental decision-making beyond the narrow social and cultural limitations of these early local committees. However, removing the local, social responsibility for and ownership over public green space which they had generated will only undermine city environmental sustainability. A more constructive approach would be to recognize the highly valuable community commitment to saving and conserving and maximizing access to greenspace. Such a commitment should be celebrated and embraced as a base on which to build a more representative and diverse management structure and process which appreciates local custodianship.

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