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# Sandon Point

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## Bushland Management Strategy 2003 and beyond

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### 1. Introduction

#### 1.1 Why we need a Bushland Management Strategy for Sandon Point

This Strategy is a vision and a statement of guidance for the future wellbeing of the natural resources of Sandon Point.

There have been many historical impacts upon Sandon Point ranging from industrial development, to clearing of vegetation, land and water degradation. Today there is the added pressure for development and residential subdivision.

This document has two main purposes. The first is to highlight the existing conservation values of the natural features of Sandon Point. The second is to strengthen community involvement in the custodianship of Sandon Point through a clear statement of management and planning that is aimed at consolidating ongoing community consultation.

Recent actions at Sandon Point have shown that the Illawarra community already embraces sustainable natural resource management as a fundamental consideration.<sup>1</sup> It is believed that even greater enthusiasm can be nurtured through knowledge, with further community involvement fostering an already strong local and regional identity with Sandon Point.

Even though economic and social pressures continue to diminish Sandon Point's natural and cultural assets, a complex environmental legislative and policy framework now formalises community expectations and influences the decision-making process.<sup>2</sup>

***This Strategy was conceived to be one of the many voices of the community that seeks to be heard within these processes.***

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<sup>1</sup> A Community Picket Line supported by the NSW Labour Council was established on site March 2001, attended 24 hours a day to lobby for the preservation of Sandon Point (see Plate 3). The picket remains at the time of publication.

<sup>2</sup> Illawarra Catchment Management Committee, *Illawarra Catchments Beyond 2000*

## 1.2 Location and History of Sandon Point

Sandon Point is located at the southern end of Thirroul Beach between the Illawarra Railway line and the Pacific Ocean, approximately 13km north of Wollongong. The name Sandon Point is not shown on mapping of the study area, but essentially the site encompasses the northern slopes of Bulli Point as shown on Map 1: Locality Map. The site covers an area of approximately 61 hectares with boundaries that can be generally defined by Thomas Gibson Park and Corbetts Avenue to the north, O'Brien Street and Sommerville Street to the south, the Illawarra railway line to the west and the Pacific Ocean to the east.

Three defined creeks flow in an eastward direction through the site; from north to south, Hewitts Creek, Woodlands Creek and Tramway Creek. A fourth unnamed watercourse appears as an overflow of the Tramway Creek wetland north of the main Tramway Creek line. A formal paved bicycle path traverses the site from north to south. Several formal and informal walking tracks also traverse the site

Sandon Point is comprised of a number of separate parcels of land under different ownership. As well, each parcel of land has had previous and existing landuse activities that have altered the natural topography, drainage and vegetation cover.

These alterations can be traced back to the use of a significant proportion of the western sector of the site for industrial development associated with coal mining activities, materials storage, historical coke works and refractory operations which provided clay firebricks and refractory cements used in steel manufacturing.<sup>3</sup> Today Sandon Point is affected by a variety of different land use zoning classifications.

Little rehabilitation work has been undertaken on any of the extraction or old stockpile areas. As such, some areas are degraded from earlier environmental impacts. An active Coastcare group is continuing to successfully regenerate and stabilise the dune and hind dune areas using a combination of assisted natural regeneration and revegetation.

Several significant cultural heritage items hark back to the industrial history of Sandon Point. These include the 1867 railway link between Bulli Colliery and Sandon Point Jetty. The site comprises embankments that indicate the route of the line. The rarity of this site lies in it being one of the few of the Illawarra Colliery tramways where the route is intact between the mine and the coast.<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, during 2002 earthworks related to the Stockland residential development have destroyed this historic item.

While no visibly discernable signs of the pioneer settler's Woodlands Cottage are obvious, evidence of horticultural garden plantings are apparent. As the original cottage was destroyed by fire in the 1920's, these horticultural remnants are more likely to be connected with the property that was constructed after the fire and thereafter occupied for approximately fifty years.

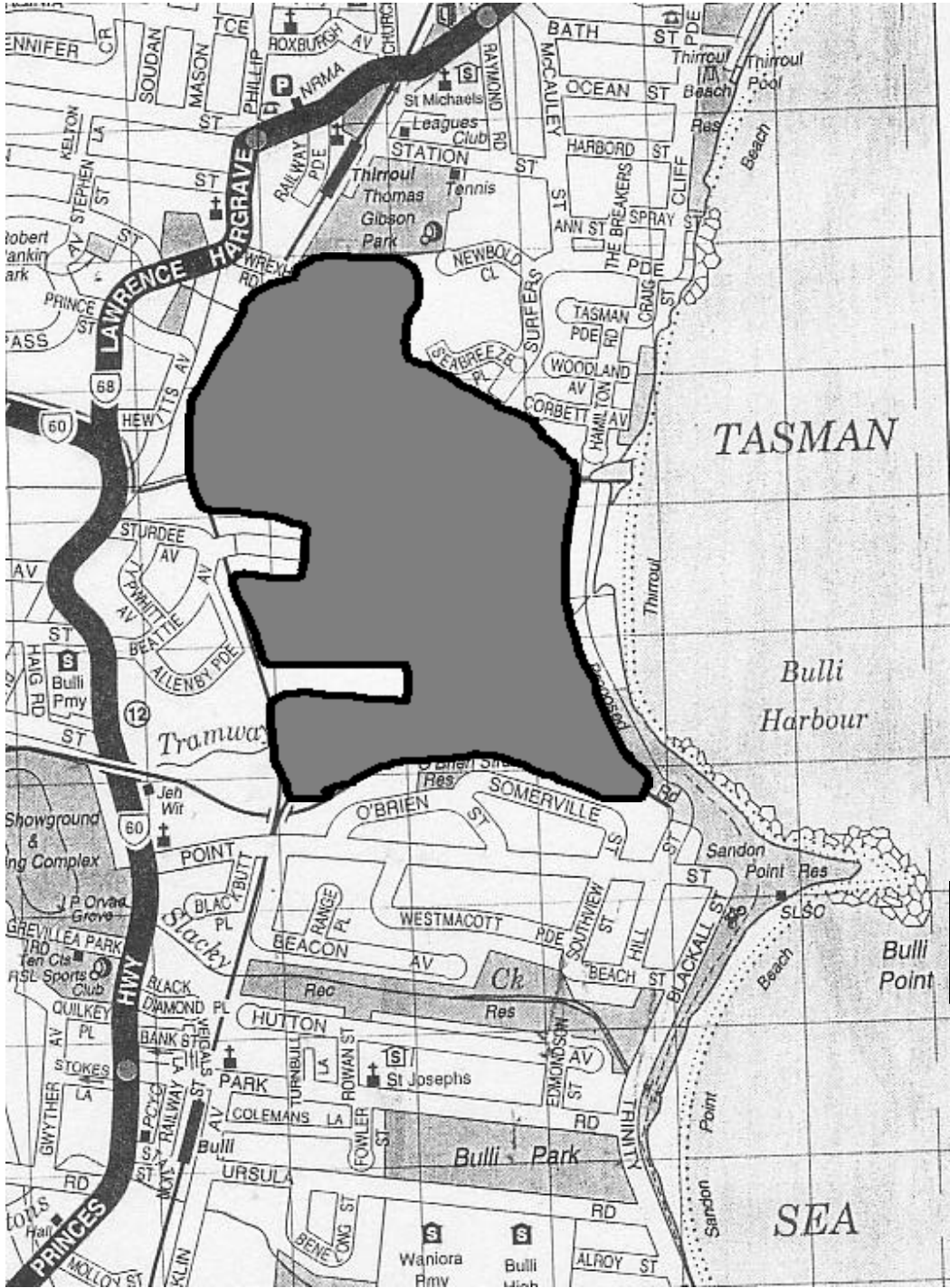
Other alterations to the site include the diversion of the natural path of Woodlands Creek with piping, uncontrolled filling and associated stockpile areas. In association with the Surfers Estate development by Ray Hannah Motors in 1992 sections of Hewitts Creek were reconstructed and the alignment of the creek altered using rock filled gabions. A large stockpiling of material remains south of Hewitts Creek in the floodplain area, residue from the engineering works of this residential subdivision immediately north of Hewitts Creek.

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<sup>3</sup> Quality Environmental Management for Wollongong City Council, *Local Environmental Study, Sandon Point* (1993). P1-2

<sup>4</sup> Quality Environmental Management for Wollongong City Council, *Local Environmental Study, Sandon Point* (1993). P3-30

Map 1: Locality Map



Assessment Area



Sandon Point has been under pressure for residential development since the late 1980s and early 1990s. In 1993, a Local Environmental Study (LES)<sup>5</sup> was prepared to accompany a Development Control Plan (DCP 94/17).

Stockland Pty Ltd purchased parts of the Sandon Point site in July 1999 and subsequently prepared a plan depicting a staged development over the site. A Development Application (DA) for Stage 1 (affecting Zone 1 in the southeast portion of the site) was lodged in July 2000 and for Stages 26 (south of Tramway Creek in Zone 2) September 2000. Following a subsequent refusal to the DA's deemed by Wollongong City Council, the decision was appealed by Stockland Pty Ltd in the Land and Environment Court in April 2001. Consent was granted pending Stockland Pty Ltd meeting a range of conditions. The DA for Stage 11 (north of Hewitts Creek in Zone 8) was lodged in August 2000 and has yet to be determined. Subdivision work has been carried out since April 2002 on Stages 1-6, accompanied by widespread community objection and calls for Government intervention.

The Sandon Point Aboriginal Tent Embassy was established in November 2000 to bring attention to the site's cultural importance, and is located on the dune area at the centre of Thirroul Beach. A Community Picket Line Supported by the South Coast Labour Council, attended 24 hours a day by volunteers, was established on site March 2001 to lobby for the preservation of Sandon Point.

Regardless of areas of environmental impact, Sandon Point is still considered strategically important because of its location adjacent to the Pacific Ocean and the potential to create a continuous green corridor linking the coast with the Illawarra escarpment. The site is also highly valued for its significant coastal wildlife habitat and local aesthetic appeal.<sup>5</sup>

### **1.3 Catchment Significance of Sandon Point:**

#### **Recognition of the natural constraints of the landscape**

The landscapes of the Illawarra are dramatic and dynamic. Living within this remarkable landscape involves exposure to its extremes: flooding, landslip, fire and erosion.

In part of a state-coordinated approach to managing these issues within catchments and sub-catchments, catchment management committees and later regional catchment management boards have been developing total catchment management strategies in consultation with local communities and stakeholders. The concept of total catchment management focuses attention on the benefits of coordinated planning and the importance of relationships between action and impacts. It suggests that it is easier to understand how the different relationships function on a whole catchment basis. This is a step forward from the long held philosophy of isolating small components of the catchments in planning issues where in fact the larger picture should be considered.

Furthermore, the mechanisms that comprise a catchment – land, water, plants, humans and other animals – do not exist in isolation.<sup>6</sup> In examining all these elements that comprise the landscape, consideration must always return to their place within the greater ecological system.

Sandon Point has been subjected to numerous impacts that have altered the form and location of the creeks throughout the area. Of the two major systems crossing the site, the Hewitts/Woodlands creeks system has a considerably larger catchment area (3.7sqkm) than that of Tramway Creek (0.4sqkm). The Hewitts

<sup>5</sup> Quality Environmental Management for Wollongong City Council, *Local Environmental Study, Sandon Point* (1993). P1-2

<sup>6</sup> Illawarra Catchment Management Committee, *Illawarra Catchments Beyond 2000*. p11

Creek system includes land from the Illawarra Escarpment down to the coast and as far as Thirroul Beach. Tramway Creek catchment comprises the northern area of Bulli and the southern area of the site. Tramway Creek also receives runoff from the adjacent Slacky Creek catchment during severe storm events owing to capacity restrictions at a railway embankment culvert that directs excess flows eastwards along Hobart Street to Tramway Creek.<sup>7</sup>

The natural course of Woodlands Creek, prior to the piped and gabion diversion into Hewitts Creek saw a confluence of Woodlands and Tramway Creeks in the hind dune wetland of Tramway Creek. The natural course of Woodlands Creek has later been referred to as an “informal diversion for high flows”.<sup>8</sup> This summation denies the natural hydrological and catchment significance of Woodlands Creek and the ensuing storm event natural overflow across the floodplain between Woodlands and Hewitts Creeks. Hydrological data collected as part of the 1992 LES relies on factors reflected in conditions existing at the time, those being the highly distorted flow regimes of the altered creeklines.

In September 2001 Stockland Pty Ltd commissioned Connell Wagner/Sainty and Associates to undertake a Flora and Fauna Assessment of Sandon Point as part of the DA process. Management recommendations and actions associated with the proposed development of the Stockland Pty Ltd-owned portions of the Sandon Point site pertains primarily to the width and length of the vegetated riparian zones to be preserved for the three main watercourses.

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<sup>7</sup> Quality Environmental Management for Wollongong City Council, *Local Environment Study* (1992) p3-30

<sup>8</sup> Quality Environmental Management for Wollongong City Council, *Local Environment Study* (1992) p3-31

**Plate 1:** Aerial photograph of Sandon Point, 2001



Zoning



Creeks



Roads/Paths

Scale = 1:6,500



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**Plate 2:** Aerial photograph of Sandon Point, 1938

