



Amnesia as a Political Tool

STOCKTON SAND MINE LEASE EXTENDED

by our guest reporter -
newcastle's own - ben praccus

The Stockton sand dunes stretch roughly 32km from Anna Bay in Port Stephens, to Stockton on the northern side of Newcastle harbour. They encompass the largest continuous mobile sand mass in NSW, and are spectacularly visible in stride from the Newcastle foreshore. Great rolling sand dunes rise out of coastal forest, leading down to the sweeping tracts of beach.

The Timeline Backdrop - Culture, Environment and Industry

Before European settlement the Stockton dunes were used by a group of Worimi Aborigines, the Maaialgal. The Maaialgal have a long history of sustainable land control in the area. Their legacy of shell middens can still be seen today, documented in 110 locations, while a 2000-year-old skeleton was found in 1995. There are a number of indigenous claims currently lodged upon areas of Stockton Bright. There are a variety of opinions from within the indigenous community, ranging from those wishing to preserve their cultural heritage and national park status, through to full scale support for mining.

During the 1870's, farmers began clearing timber from the surrounding coastal forests and making tracks around the dunes. Further clearing occurred in the 1930's as a result of shanties built for those who couldn't afford other accommodation. In 1974, the worst living storms in memory hit the area and the Norwegian bulk carrier 'Sygna' was forced aground on the beach. It is there that she still rests, rusting to this very day. With reference to the current problems of dune stabilization that Stockton beach experiences, observers will note that such historical parlance is often called into play to justify mining concerns. The shallow shouts of 'well they fucked it before us' (in souped up language of course) ring high in the salty air.

Ecologically, Stockton Bright is a goldmine (excuse the pun). It is the largest remaining unprotected dune system in NSW. It's unique conservation value lies primarily

in the mixture of sand dune wilderness and dunal vegetation communities. The dune is sparsely vegetated with patches of Spinifex grass and also the exotic species Bitou Bush, originally introduced to the East Coast by mining operations as a dune stabiliser. Unfortunately it was a spectacular failure, and is now the subject of many coastal regeneration projects, as it is the most prevalent weed species of coastal NSW. As the transgressive dune moves inland it moves over the woodland scrub and forests which back onto the Bright. There are three major communities found.

Between the bare sand mass and the open dry sclerophyll forest, woodland communities including Banksia shrubland or dry heath, with the occasional mature tree, can be found. The open forest itself consists of the dominant species of Smooth-Barked Apple, Blackbutt, Red Bloodwood and Banksia Serrata. Coastal scrub communities are common in the lower, interdunal depressions. In other openings in the dense scrub thicket, Bracken and Lomandra grow. These interdunal depressions, or swales, are discrete catchments draining directly to the groundwater.

The Stockton Bright Flora assemblage is indicative of a series of communities strongly linked to the geomorphology of the coast. This series is characteristic of the Eurunderee embayment which runs north to Seal Rocks. Good examples of this assemblage have been noted for inclusion in the coastal National Parks Estate. This has been proposed for Stockton Bright, and was listed in the NSW Government's Coastal Policy as early as 1995.

There are an abundance of native species within the Bright, including The New Holland Mouse, Brown Antechinus, Common Dunnart, Northern Brown Bandicoot, Bush Rat, Eastern Grey Kangaroo, Red necked Wallaby, Swamp Wallaby, Swamp Rat, Long nosed Bandicoot, Echidna, Brushtail Possum and Ringtail Possum. Endangered species include the Tiger Quoll and Brush

Tailed Phascogale, Squirrel Glider, and the Koala. The area also has a great biodiversity of bird species. One of Australia's most endangered birds, the Little Tern (of which only 30 pairs attempt to nest in NSW), also has Stockton beach as one of its nesting sites.

The original mining site was interim listed by the Australian Heritage Commission as an 'Indicative Area', and was considered for inclusion in the National Park proposed for the Stockton Bright Region. This takes us back 5 years to the promises Bob Carr made before the 1995 state election to declare a national park across the length of Stockton Bright. Still there is no national park. On the contrary, Mineral Deposits Ltd has now successfully extended the area covered by their license

Lack of Political transparency

In April 2000, Mineral Deposits stated that a National Park could not be safely created at Stockton Bright because unexploded bombs (from the WWII shelling range) would create a threat to public safety. In response, Environment Minister Bob Debus stated that the Government was

still committed to establishing a 'nature reserve' at Stockton Bright - the watered down version of a national park (a nature reserve allows for mining operations).

On the 31st March, Cabinet very quietly revoked Mining Reserve 3050 to 3053 (covering World War II artillery rangeland), reserves that had previously restricted mining in the promised National Park. This action was taken before an Environmental Impact Study (EIS) had been exhibited or director's requirements for the EIS decided.⁽¹⁾ With these facts in mind, the statements by both Mineral Deposits and Bob Debus have become glowing examples of cloudy political handshaking and lose whatever integrity they may have hoped to hold!

Why Stockton Bright ?

The Fullerton Cove and Stockton deposits, while low grade, are attractive because of the relatively high rutile content (38 to 50%) in the heavy mineral suite, and the benign treatment characteristics of the free-flowing aeolian sand. Mineral Deposits took over the lease from BHP and began mining the Fullerton deposit in 1997. Extensions to cover 12 further units were granted earlier this year. The mining will come with-

in 190 metres of the beach at the southern end, varying between 300m-1km at the mid-northern end. The lease covers 995 hectares of which they plan to mine 595 hectares of rutile, zircon, monazite and ilmenite over a 21-year period through open cutting and dredging methods.

Strong community campaigns concerning Stockton Bright mining operations have been running for over 30 years. The Flora & Fauna Protection Society proposed the establishment of a Coastal Park as far back as 1967. In 1995, the community finally felt it was being heard, but over the past 5 years, Bob Carr has managed to successfully plug his ears. One wonders whether the Premier has much of his memory left. Perhaps he suffers from amnesia. If history is anything to go by, it is quite common among this species of political animal.

-Article written expressly for YOUR information by BP
(No, I am not a petroleum company)
-Ben Praccus.

⁽¹⁾ The word for word article appears in the New South Wales Government Gazette N0.42, 31 March, 2000 p2719

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BOB CARR PLUGGING HIS EARS?
THAT DOESN'T SOUND LIKE
OUR COPPER BOB!