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General Meeting

24 October 2000

Castlecrag Community Centre 8pm

AGENDA

- * Willoughby Environment Man-
agement Plan
- * Warringah Transport Corridor
Land update
- * Castlecrag Federation Project
- * DCPI9 Heritage & Conserva-
tion

CASTLECRAG PROGRESS ASSOCIATION INC.

6/77 Edinburgh Road, Castlecrag
The Crag is edited by
Kerry McKillop (9958 4516) and
Elizabeth Lander (9958 5384).
Please send all correspondence and
renewals to above address.

Last Chance for Harbour Land

The Olympic Games focused the attention of the world on the magic of Sydney Harbour. While the main harbour serves as a working port, a transport artery, a natural resource and a national cultural asset, resolution of these competing uses remains problematic.

As featured in our articles this issue, the natural beauty of our harbour is best preserved in the bays and bushland of Middle Harbour. The Olympics have helped to highlight the value of this natural resource, but it is under increasing development pressure and the ability of the many agencies responsible for its management to meet their mandate falls short of the mark. We all have a responsibility to protect this natural resource for the benefit of present and future generations. In terms of the public land purchased in the 1950s for the Warringah Freeway Corridor, it seems that most Castlecrag residents are too busy enjoying the present to worry about the future.

On 20 August, the Castlecrag Progress Association held a public meeting to present and explain the situation regarding the Draft Planning Strategy for the surplus lands of this corridor. The turnout of Castlecrag residents was disappointing, although representatives of the other sites in Willoughby affected by the study attended.

In summary, the recommendations of the study are based on a political directive that the Government agencies (RTA and DUAP) should achieve the current land valuation (\$25-30 million) from the sale of the land, so that any blocks kept as public open space generate pressure for more intensive development on other sites. Residents affected by the proposals in the 'Willoughby Paddocks' area (Precinct 2) believe they have been unfairly treated as 120 medium density units are proposed for this area, while some of the Castlecrag land is recommended for retention as open space.

Unless an adequate political campaign can be mounted to get the State Government to reduce the target income from the land sale, even the modest areas of foreshore land on the Castlecrag peninsula recommended for retention as public open space may be sold off for development. The Progress Association believes this issue is of vital importance for Castlecrag, but we also recognise that an effective outcome will require the groups from the three affected areas to work together.

The Draft Planning Strategy is on public exhibition at the Council offices, Chatswood until 20 October. All residents are urged to inspect the document and make a submission to the consultants. In addition, it is of vital importance that we get into action and lobby our politicians to reduce the target income figure for the land sales. If we do not act now, we had better get an explanation together for our children on why we do nothing!

Bob McKillop

Behind the Scenes

With Spring and the Coles Express supermarket in action, our shopping centre has a new lease of life. Residents and visitors alike are taking advantage of the excellent range of restaurants and coffee shops to enjoy the village atmosphere.

It wouldn't be normal without complaints, and several people have approached me about the

narrow footpath area outside the new medical centre and the danger of tripping on tree roots. However, the trees are a feature of the setting, giving shade and character to the village.

The **Civic Place Project** is seeking public inputs to a Masterplan for the development of the Civic Place site in Chatswood with optimum open

space and community facilities. It will provide a vision for the future and, hopefully, will express the "heart and soul" of Willoughby City. MGT Architects have been appointed to develop the Masterplan. A series of public meetings will be held over the coming months.

Bob McKillop

Council News: What is 'e.restore'?

'e.restore' is Willoughby City Council's Environmental Restoration Program, funded by Council's new environmental levy. Over the next three years Council will be carrying out many projects to improve the health of waterways and bushland in Castlecrag and the whole of the Willoughby area. These include:

- * major works to rehabilitate creek lines and reduce stormwater pollution
- * creating links between bushland reserves to enhance bushland corridors
- * a community awareness program to reduce noxious weeds in backyards next to bushland
- * support for school environmental education activities
- * initiatives to increase environmental awareness within the broader community

As part of national *Weedbusters Week* (8th-15th October), Council and the Bushcare trailer will be at the **Castlecrag Quadrangle on Friday 13th October 12-2pm** with information on weeds in Castlecrag. Weeds are a constant threat to the unique bushland of this area, as they take over the native plants and reduce the biodiversity of the bush. Spring weeds to watch out for in your backyards are asthma and crofton weed, and camphor laurel and privet seedlings. Staff will be at the

Quadrangle to assist residents in identifying weeds and giving advice on the best way to remove them, so come along and see them! For those of you who can't make it on the Friday, Council will also be at the Quadrangle on a **Saturday morning in November** with information and advice on weeds in Castlecrag. Check the Community Notice Board at the Quadrangle for more details on this activity and other environmental information for Castlecrag.

For more information on these *e.restore* activities please call **Erika Klimpsch, Council's Catchment Education Officer** on **9777-7942**.

Castlecrag Bushcarers

Just a reminder about Council's ongoing Bushcare program in Castlecrag. Castlecrag has three Bushcare groups - Casement Reserve, Mills Lookout and The Scarp - made up of volunteer residents who carry out bush regeneration and native planting for 3-4 hours a month. These groups are supervised and trained by Council and have been crucial in restoring and conserving bushland in Castlecrag. However they always need more help, so why not join them on their next workday!

Casement Reserve Bushcare Group: Sunday 15th October & 19th November, 9:30am-12noon

Mills Lookout Bushcare Group: Sunday 8th October & 12th November, 9am-12noon

The Scarp Bushcare Group: Every Tuesday 8:30am-11am

If you are interested in joining any of these Bushcare groups, call **Cameron Bennell, Council's Bushland Officer** on **9777-7756**.



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Mangroves on our Middle Harbour Foreshores

Many who walk the beautiful foreshore tracks on Middle Harbour may have observed over the years an increase in the area occupied by mangroves. You can view these expanding mangrove swamps from the coastal forest pathway around Harold Reid Reserve and from the coastal walks of Middle and Castle Cove. What is the significance of this increase? Why is it taking place? Should we be concerned?

In order to answer these questions we need to be aware of at least some aspects of the biology and ecology of these marine trees. Here on the central coast of NSW we have only one species, the Grey Mangrove known internationally by its botanical name *Avicennia marina* var. *australasica*. Further north along our eastern coast three additional species occur: the Red Mangrove, *Rhizophora stylosa*, the Black Mangrove, *Bruguiera gymnorhiza* and the Milky Mangrove, *Excoecaria agallocha*. There are a number of other species in the more northern parts of Australia. With global warming we might predict that some of these northern species might eventually migrate southwards.

Mangroves belong to a number of very different families of flowering plants. All have developed physiological ad-

aptations that allow them to survive and grow in the saline environment of the inter-tidal zone of sheltered inlets and harbours and where rivers meet the sea. These remarkable adaptations enable them to grow and flourish in places where few other flowering plants can survive.

downwards. Botanists refer to these 'breathing roots' as *pneumatophores*. Their surface is covered with structures known as *lenticels* whose function is to allow the exchange of gases from the surrounding air to the living tissues. One of the important functions of the lenticels on the pneumatophores of mangroves is to enable oxygen to reach the roots that lie hidden below the surface of the mud. This mud is waterlogged and as a result is deficient in oxygen regarded as essential for the healthy growth of a plant. The fine roots hidden below the mud surface trap the silt; as they spread they enable the mangrove to colonize new ground; larger roots spreading from the base of the trunk anchor the tree.

Mangroves have on their leaves microscopic salt glands that secrete salt. In hot dry weather the leaf surface is often covered with minute crystals of common salt, sodium chloride. Even if you cannot see the crystals glistening in the sunshine just put the tip of your tongue on a leaf and you will certainly taste the salt. The secretion of salt keeps the salt levels within the plant below what would otherwise be toxic levels.

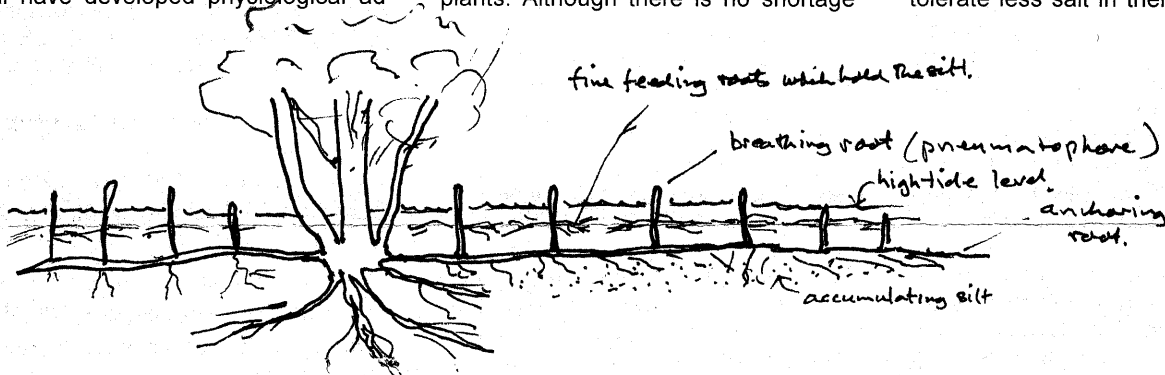
Observe the leaves and see how fleshy, succulent and brittle they are, rather like the leaves of many desert plants. Although there is no shortage

of water in the places where mangroves grow, the salt-water habitat has resulted in these trees having many parallels with a desert environment.

developed a root it drops (with its attached first two leaves) from the parent plant. If the seed falls at low tide it will probably plant itself in the mud. If it falls into water it will float away, sometimes for a considerable distance on the currents. If the already germinated drifting seed is caught in mud or sand at a favourable site, a new mangrove plant and eventually a mangrove forest may become established.

Biologically mangrove communities offer important habitats where many species of algae, fish, shellfish, crabs and other marine organisms grow, nest, breed and multiply. The mangrove habitat is an important resting and in some cases nesting site for migratory birds.

Mangroves can protect coastlines from erosion and serve to give some protection to the constantly changing coastline. The fine fibrous roots hidden just below the surface of the mud hold the silt particles carried on streams, rivers and tides from nearby eroding land. In this way in sheltered waters mangrove forests reclaim land. The mud surface eventually builds up so that only the highest tides flood the mangroves and they cease to flourish. As they die their place is taken by communities of coastal plants able to tolerate less salt in their environment.



aptations that allow them to survive and grow in the saline environment of the inter-tidal zone of sheltered inlets and harbours and where rivers meet the sea. These remarkable adaptations enable them to grow and flourish in places where few other flowering plants can survive.

Observe our Grey Mangrove when the tide is low. You will see a series of upright structures rising from the mud and radiating out from the center of each plant; these are highly modified roots that grow upwards rather than

of water in the places where mangroves grow, the salt-water habitat has resulted in these trees having many parallels with a desert environment.

Mangroves exhibit other fascinating adaptations. After flowering they produce a seed but this does not follow a development like most plants. Rather than a dry resting structure protected by a woody seed coat, the mangrove seed is green and fleshy and only protected by a membranous coat. This seed germinates while still attached to the parent plant. When the seed has

Eventually the salt content of the mud is leached out. The mangroves give way to non-salt tolerant plants and so in a natural succession, new land plant communities dominate, what was once open but sheltered water now becomes dry land colonised by land-plants. In our area these include the trees, *Melaleuca* and *Allocasuarina* along with numerous shrubs, grasses and herbs. Sometimes a zone of salt-marsh develops behind the mangroves and this is later colonized by trees and shrubs.

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Mangroves (contd)

The description in the previous paragraph is a very simplified and generalised account of the sequence that takes place often over hundreds or even thousands of years. But when catchments are rapidly altered and especially when they are poorly managed as a result of urban and industrial development, the whole process is greatly accelerated.

The black, silt-laden mud so characteristic of mangrove communities is chemically very complex. In a healthy unpolluted environment the mud does not have a particularly strong odor; but if the tidal waters are carrying pollutants, chemical reactions take place in these oxygen deficient habitats and unpleasant odours and toxic substances may accumulate. Such polluted swamps may give off various gases, the best known of which is hydrogen sulphide (bad egg gas). When mangrove swamps are in catchments in which industrial wastes are dumped, extremely toxic compounds may accumulate in the mud including dioxins and methyl mercury to name just two of the most poisonous substances known. It is therefore essential that governments rigorously monitor and control the inputs to these catchments.

It is recognised that upper reaches of Sydney Harbour especially on Paramatta River have highly contaminated mangrove swamp mud from earlier industrial sites and it will take many years for this to disappear although most sources of pollutants have now been removed. On Middle Harbour pollutants are mainly from storm water runoff from bordering and nearby land. Excess nutriment sometimes comes from sewer overflows where storm water has illegally been connected to the sewerage system. More difficult to control is the enrichment from surface runoff from overfertilized lawns and gardens and from the excrement of domestic animals (cats and dogs)! **It can be seen how important it is that the Middle Harbour foreshores are protected by as wide a belt of vegetation as possible as an absorbent buffer. The FBL (Foreshore Building Line) has values in addition to aesthetics and native plant and animal wild life habitats. The health of the harbour waters and the associated natural marine communities are essential components to be safeguarded if Sydney's claim to one of the world's greatest 'harbour-cities' is to be maintained.**

Here in Middle Harbour possibly the most serious pollutant threatening the waters is silt from accelerated erosion especially from inadequately controlled building sites. The muddiness of the harbour waters after heavy rains is an all too frequent occurrence. The silt clay particles and sand are rapidly creating shallow waters; into which mangroves are establishing and extending; their fine root systems hold and indeed build up the sediments; open navigable waters become muddy shoals; mangroves colonize and these areas eventually become dry land. Processes that might once have taken thousands of years now are taking fifty years or less. You may view the various stages in this process from North Arm Track and the northern coastal track in Harold Reid Reserve where Scotts Creek enters Castle Cove.

Clearly of great concern is the water quality that comes from the various catchments that drain into Middle Harbour. One can only speculate what may be leaching out of abandoned waste tips. Up until just five years ago Willoughby Council was allowing Flat Rock Gully to be used as a tip and place to dump unwanted land-fill. Water drains from this area via Tunks Park directly into Long Bay! We must be thankful for the concerted and sustained action of a few residents that this dumping was stopped and the area is now being restored as park-land.

Of current concern must be the way in which development of the large area of vacant Government and Local Government (RTA) land between Eastern Valley Way and Alpha Road is managed. The water from this catchment enters the south arm of Sailors Bay between Northbridge and Castlecrag. The management of this catchment is in need of a long-term strategy and this will be especially important during building developments.

Another related process can be seen at an early stage of development on the shoreline of Castlehaven Reserve and Sailors Bay between The Bulwark, Rockley Street and The Barbican. This shallow headwater once had a shark-proof swimming enclosure and the shore an attractive, natural, white sandy beach.

There are residents of Castlecrag who with nostalgia remember swimming and frequent picnics here. Visit this area now and you will find becoming established in the sandy intertidal zone several isolated mangrove trees probably less than 12 years old and associated with each is a patch of black mud built up from the silts accumulating in the relatively still waters of this inlet. While silt accumulation may be being accelerated by the moored boats, the real cause is the enormous silt load entering Middle Harbour from the lack of adequate management of building sites.

I have on more than one occasion shocked some of my fellow conservationists by suggesting that we must develop a long term plan to manage the mangroves in places such as Middle Harbour. On beaches such as below The Barbican it would seem desirable to remove the few offending mangroves. In another 10 years the white sandy beach may have disappeared forever. However in waterways such as Castle Cove some carefully managed dredging could be justified for mangroves can only establish above low tide level. Removal of the recently deposited silt and sand would prevent the further spread of the mangroves. Failure to approach these problems will in a relatively short time result in open water becoming land. And as we can see in places such as Tunks Park east of the bridge, the land is then drained and made available for other developments. I for one would vote for maintaining our beautiful waterways.

Carrick Chambers

(Editors' note: Professor Carrick Chambers, formerly head of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Sydney and Professor of Botany at Melbourne University, is a resident of Castlecrag and is active on many community committees)

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The Nature of Castlecrag: Thinking Ecologically

Recently we had on board our boat a US Navy Commander. She is also a keen bird-watcher, so we anchored at the end of Sugarloaf Bay, right up near the sand flats. Right on cue, the panic calls of the native noisy miners and magpies heralded the arrival of two huge white breasted sea eagles overhead. She was excited and delighted. She was also fascinated to see so many colourful members of the parrot family.

Almost any day, you can spot parrots amongst the green bushland of Castlecrag – I have on my list Black Cockatoos, King Parrots, Crimson Rosellas, Eastern Rosellas, Rainbow Lorikeets, Galahs and our raucous friend, the Sulphur Crested Cockatoo. Such colourful parrots are uncommon outside Australia. Thinking ecologically, it is worth remembering that all parrots nest in hollows. Other hollows-nesters are kookaburras, possums and gliders, Boobook Owls and the great Powerful Owl. Old trees – Bloodwoods, Sydney Peppermints, Angophoras, Scribbly Gums and others - provide the hollows. With their dead branches and scarred old trunks they may not always be conventionally "pretty", but they have the venerable character of great age.

Other birds love the high vantage points provided by dead branches such as the migratory Broad Billed Rollers, which perform aerial acrobatics on summer evenings as they catch flying insects. So, thinking ecologically, lopping dead branches or removing dead trees, unless there is a good safety reason, is counterproductive if we want to keep these birds.

Our own gardens and yards can contribute to the ecosystem. A single garden will commonly have perhaps eight species of native ant, fascinating to observe as they go about their activities. And ants provide excellent food for the Eastern Whipbirds which rarely venture from the thickest scrub of the bush or "overgrown" gardens. Whipbirds, which are more often heard than seen (surely, next to the Kookaburra, the most Australian of all bird calls), nest only one or two metres from the ground, and so their young are easy prey for cats. The pair in whose territory we live seems to have successfully raised a chick only once in the last six years. A thoughtful contribution which any garden should provide for small birds is a patch of dense, prickly, cat-proof shrubbery.

Some species which people remember from Castlecrag in the quite recent past, seem to have disappeared - such as wallabies and lyre birds. Ground nesting birds are no match for free-ranging dogs and cats.

The "Fingers of Green and Blue" of Upper Middle Harbour are also links in many ecological chains. Silvereyes, which until 8 years ago were quite common here in Autumn, now seem far less common. They are nomadic or migratory, and if parts of their movement corridors no longer have bush to provide food and shelter, perhaps they are not able to reach Castlecrag any longer.

Last March we saw a turtle in Sugarloaf Bay – probably a Green Turtle. Most turtle species in Australian waters are classed as endangered or vulnerable. Marine turtles take between 30 and 50 years to reach sexual maturity, and may live for many years in one place before they are ready to make the long breeding migration of up to 3000 km from feeding grounds to nesting beaches. It seems that our Fingers of Blue are making a contribution to the planet's turtle habitat.

One reason for taking our USA friend to Sugarloaf Bay was to see bird-life on the sandflats exposed at low tide. Alas, two unaccompanied dogs spent an hour chasing herons and sea-gulls. Wading birds, many of which visit us in summer from other parts of the world after long

migrations, have only a short time to feed each day when the low tide exposes the sand and mud flats. It is some time since waders in any numbers were seen in Sugarloaf Bay. If they are chased away frequently at low tide, one can hardly blame them for abandoning our bays.

Another critical part of Castlecrag's ecosystem is the soil – often taken for granted. Plants need soil. Soil absorbs rainfall and filters urban runoff. Soil performs a catchment task for the water quality of the creeks and estuary. The urban runoff from houses, gardens and roads adds toxic chemicals to the soil and overloads it with extra nutrients. Extra nutrients encourage weeds, but are not appreciated by native plants. And the trend in new developments is to increase the proportion of a house block which is covered by "hard" surfaces. This means that there will be less and less soil to perform ecosystem tasks.

Every time soil is covered with concrete, the impacts on waterways increase. Thinking ecologically is also thinking about the catchment. Walter Burley Griffin wrote:

'The acid soil of the Hawkesbury sandstone underlying the Middle Harbour headlands has furnished what is undoubtedly the cleanest, most delicate and varied native ligneous evergreen perpetually-blooming flora extant. For these reasons, no vegetation could be better to live with . . . it will persist through drought without watering and recover from abuse provided the peculiar nature of the soil is respected and manures with exotic seeds are kept out.'

For much of our bushland and catchment, we are lucky to have ecological processes which are in reasonably good shape, or which can be repaired or restored.

Bushland weeds, straying pets, pollution, loss of soil: with each new stress it becomes less likely that the impacts on the ecosystem will be reversible.

Can we imagine a Castlecrag without parrots, without Whipbirds, without Kookaburras, without old Angophoras and Scribbly Gums, without White-breasted Sea Eagles? Thinking ecologically is also thinking about the future quality of this place which is our home. It IS our own problem - or opportunity.

Lorraine Cairnes

*(A resident of Castlecrag, Lorraine Cairnes is an environmental consultant and author of *The Australian Natural Heritage Charter*)*

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Haven Amphitheatre News

The Haven Amphitheatre Management Committee is pleased to inform residents of two exciting events to round off the year.2000:

Jazz in the Afternoon

Sunday 22 October 4.30pm

As part of the Willoughby Spring Festival, and with the assistance of Willoughby City Council, we are bringing together Australian jazz legends, **Su Cruickshank** (vocalist), **Graham Jesse** (saxophonist) and the **Willoughby Big Band** under the musical direction of **Peter Walmsley**, for a jazz concert. Peter, one of Australia's renowned trumpeters, has been playing with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra at the opening and closing ceremonies of the Olympics.

Catch the free shuttle bus to and from the theatre, commencing 3.30pm outside Castlecrag Meats, at the corner of Edinburgh Road and Rutland Avenue. Tickets (\$15 adults, concession \$10, children \$5) will be sold only at the theatre on the day.

Antony and Cleopatra

After the success of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* earlier this year, the committee was able to entice the young actors of Bigeye Productions to perform again. This time the Egyptian queen and her lover Mark Antony come centre stage at the Haven in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*. Local actor Teresa Bell will be playing Cleopatra. This play is part of the senior English curriculum. There will be only two performances on **24th + 25th November**, 7.30pm. Tickets \$16, \$12 and \$8.

This production will be taking us back to the 1930s, the early days of the Haven when costume dramas were presented by the Grifins with lavish sets constructed by Bim Hilder, to celebrate the solstice. These will be two great events at the Haven, not to be missed. For more information call the Haven Hotline on 1902260532.

Howard Rubie

LOST

The Sugarloaf Bush Regeneration team has 'lost' two important tools – a mattock and a rake-hoe. They were kept on site in a small cave overhang. It was thought that they were well hidden and safe from any curious eyes. Unfortunately this confidence was misplaced. In late August the tools were missing.

They were important in removing weed tubers located deep in clay soil. It would be appreciated if they could be returned to the site or left at 66 Sugarloaf Crescent, Castlecrag (Phone 9958 8569).

Fox baiting program resumed

The first round of the fox baiting program in May in ten selected reserves around Willoughby proven to be a positive help in reducing fox numbers. A total of 37 baits were taken. All reserves **were closed to dogs** during May. A follow-up baiting program is being conducted during October, so bushland reserves are again closed to dogs. For more information contact Cameron Bennell, Willoughby Council's Bushland Co-ordinator on 9777 7756.

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