

**Dreaming:** Mr Francis Firebrace at the rally in Apex Park, Nelson Bay. — Picture by DAVID WICKS

## Call for reconciliation at Port

By **ALEK SCHULHA**  
Port Stephens Reporter

A PUBLIC rally in Nelson Bay has declared that the time for reconciliation between indigenous and non-indigenous people in Port Stephens is long overdue.

Those attending the rally said that visible local remnants of the ancient culture of indigenous Australians in Port Stephens was 'at serious risk of being encroached, degraded and destroyed by council-driven developments'.

About 300 people attended the rally which was arranged to oppose two controversial land development projects in Salamander Bay.

Port Stephens Council proposes to develop 138 lots on land adjacent to Mambo Creek wetlands and 75 lots off Wanda Ave.

Opponents say both areas are important Koori sites in Port Stephens and should be preserved.

They said the Wanda Ave site contained sacred sites for women of the Worimi tribe. It was used as a birthing and initiation site for women.

Part of the area near Mambo Creek wetlands was a former midden.

The meeting called on the council to end development proposals at both sites.

It also called on the council to publicly acknowledge the existence of, show respect for and to conserve all sites of cultural and spiritual significance to the Worimi people as an act of reconciliation.

Among other motions adopted at the meeting were calls on the council to:

- Confer traditional Koori names on significant landscapes and systems, waterways, wetland areas, parks, reserves and leisure areas.
- Identify all sites and undertake measures towards their im-

mediate protection and conservation.

- Form a Koori consultative committee to advise and liaise with the council and other bodies on matters pertaining to Koori affairs.

- Refrain from acting on the recommendation to conduct an archaeological dig on the spiritual site in Wanda Ave.

An organiser of the rally, Ms Carol Ridgeway-Bissett, a member of the Worimi Aboriginal group and an associate lecturer in Aboriginal Studies at Newcastle University, said there were a number of vulnerable sites in Port Stephens.

Ms Ridgeway-Bissett said she was trying to arrange a meeting with Mr Bob Horne, MHR Paterson, and Mr Bob Martin, MLA Port Stephens, to make the Federal Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Mr Tickner, aware of the situation in Port Stephens.

# Koori studies arouse interest

● By JIM KABLE\*

**B**Y THE end of this year all State schools will have written their Aboriginal policies.

It takes many forms. For example, an Aboriginal perspective in history could be 'Australians as Immigrants-20th Century'.

One of my Koori (Aboriginal) students, Desiree Blissett, undertook to research her family tree and among other branches established links with Cummeragunga, subject of the TV series *Women of the Sun*, episode three and a place associated also with Pastor Sir Douglas Nicholls a former Governor of South Australia.

The new junior English syllabus encourages teachers to adopt a wide variety of approaches to the study of English though its most important aspect may well be the centrality of literature. Both Aboriginal writers and non-Aboriginal writers have written using Aboriginal themes.

The most important decision for the teacher is selecting materials that portray Aboriginal characters and issues with insight and understanding. In answering this question in favour of Aboriginal writers it is also worthwhile to present some literary contributions by non-Aboriginal writers as a contrast and to reveal historical perceptions.

With a junior class I have selected a number of approaches based on the syllabus which will lead us to explore a range of Koori Australia images.

Firstly, we have begun a class correspondence with students at Lajamanu School in the Northern Territory, where the first language of many of the students is Waibiri. Our first batch of letters have recently been sent and this will be followed up by further communication on cassette and video.

The class novel chosen is *The Traeger Kid* by Margaret Sharpe (APCOL, Chippendale, 1983). Although a non-Aboriginal writer, she is a noted sociolinguist who has worked in Central Australia.



An example of Aboriginal art by Melanie Edser, Year 7, Broadmeadow High.

The story follows a little Aranda girl, Patricia Bloomfield, as she attends school in Alice Springs, visits her homeland, takes a holiday with an aunt in Brisbane and visits relatives in northern NSW who speak the local Aboriginal language, Bunjalung.

It is a book which brilliantly demonstrates the differences between informal and written standard English. A number of group tasks including diary entries, cassette interviews, language surveys and a map of the action lead to a letter to the author in which some aspects of the book are discussed.

The class also studies various poems and short stories by Aboriginal writers, such as Kath Walker, Kevin Gilbert, Jack Davis and Archie Weller. These will be complemented by some non-Aboriginal writers such as Henry Kendall, Judith Wright and Roland Robinson.

Apart from these writers and



Another example of Aboriginal art by Kevin Morley of Broadmeadow High.

the focus and stimulus produced by all of their writing, I have asked the students to keep an eye out in the various print media and to cut out articles dealing with Aboriginal issues.

Finally, Aboriginal visitors to the class who will discuss their experience of being Aborigines, will clearly be a highlight of the term's work.

Our experience in spending a term closely reading and thinking about Aboriginal Australia and the writing and talking about it in this concentrated fashion will provide us with a solid frame of reference for further work in the future.

Hopefully, my students will then be aware of the issues to look for in evaluating literature which discusses Aboriginal themes and presents Aboriginal characters.

(\*Jim Kable is an English teacher at Nelson Bay High School.)

# Bush tucker display part of Fiesta

**HAMILTON's multi-cultural Fiesta 94 will include an inter-active display by Hunter bush tucker woman Carol Ridgeway-Bissett.**

Carol was born into the Port Stephens Worimi tribe in 1946, and she says she learnt many secrets of living with the bush as she grew up in Soldiers Point.

'I learnt things as a child when I didn't realise I was learning them,' she says.

Carol would go into the bush with other children and her mother and grandmother, and was shown which plants could be eaten, and which could be used for medicine.

Carol says she was also told not to go to some places in the bush and that other places were sacred.

Today, after seven years at Newcastle University, Carol is an associate lecturer in Aboriginal studies and writing a thesis on her tribe for her post-graduate degree in Social Science.

But Carol is also preparing to write a book about bush tucker.

She says she is still learning more about traditions from Worimi people who live to the north of Port Stephens, and is hoping to increase her knowledge of what she calls 'women's business'.

But much of her bush tucker knowledge is no secret, and she'll

be demonstrating it in the Culture in Action marquee at the Fiesta in Hamilton on October 23.

She says that as a child at Soldiers Point, she learnt to eat bush food including apple berries, native carrots, four corners and gee bungs.

She says the giant beach bean could be used as both food and medicine, and that uses for the paper-bark tree include a drink made from the blossoms and tea made from the leaves.

Carol says the tree's bark can be used for bandages and blankets, and in the construction of huts, canoes, as well as for a carry basket known as a *coolamou*.

Carol will be sharing her knowledge, and giving hands-on displays in the Culture in Action marquee.

The marquee will also host displays of the arts and crafts of various cultures including Tongan wood carving, Balinese sculpture, and Thai weaving.

But the marquee is only part of the the Culture in Action activities which include events like poets of life in Australia performing in Beaumont Street cafes.

Festival organisers say the Culture in Action events focus on oral culture, arts and crafts and folk-lore to celebrate living cultures in Hamilton.

# Tucking into bush nosh

Australians are discovering a new source of food that has been growing at their back doorsteps and which, Staff Reporter **ANDREW HARRISON** writes, is fast gaining acceptance on restaurant tables.

**P**ROVING there is more to Australian cuisine than lamingtons and pavlova, bush tucker is fast becoming an export earner.

Since commercial sales of kangaroo meat began in NSW in June last year, roo has been added to the menus of 1400 of Australia's finer restaurants.

Voted the best new retail product of 1993, kangaroo meat is exported to Belgium, Taiwan and Italy. Chinese, Thai and French chefs are embracing it and other Australian flavours in their traditional cooking methods.

There is nothing new about bush food. The average Australian, adult and child, knew more about botany 1000 years ago than they do today. Their botanic knowledge supplied them not only with food but with drugs and medicines and, in drought, water.

As the ABC's *Bush Tucker Man*, Les Hiddins, was keen to point out in his series, many early European explorers died of starvation in areas where there was abundant bush food.

But only recently have scientists and botanists begun discovering the potential of native plants.

A Newcastle University Aboriginal studies lecturer, Ms Carol Ridgeway-Bissett, and a Whitebridge botanist, Mr Don McNair, are attempting to catalogue the plants used by the indigenous Wornimi people and other Aboriginal tribes around Port Stephens.

In 1992 Mr McNair published a book called *The Flora of Port Stephens and the Myall Lakes Region*.

He said he had counted 560 species of flowering plants on Tomaree Peninsula, an area he believed to be 'as rich or richer than the whole of the Myall Lakes'.

Mr McNair said regaining the botanical knowledge of the Aborigines would take a long time.

'In my library there is a pile of books 10 inches thick written by white people on Aboriginal medicine but we have to see what the Aboriginal people say,' Mr McNair said.

Ms Ridgeway-Bissett, from the Wornimi tribe, is providing the knowledge that has been passed down to her from her family, and

research from her study of library records.

'When we were kids we were told a little bit about it but I suppose being kids we didn't take that much notice,' she said.

'I think it's good that we're getting recognition for the things that we ate.'

'When we ate it, we didn't have cancer, heart disease, diabetes. We were pretty healthy.'

'It is only all this introduced food that has made us sick.'

'We have a high rate of ill health which has been likened to Fourth World standards.'

The Wornimi were a resourceful people, Ms Ridgeway-Bissett said. They could make bread from bur-rushes and the poisonous bur-rawong palm, leaching the poison out by continuously washing the pulp.

Their diet changed as they moved through the various ecosystems of the area.

'But to do it justice you would have to come out with us to show you,' Ms Ridgeway-Bissett said.

Mrs Louise Duff, of Pindimar, is an ethnobotanist studying societies and the plants they use. Mrs Duff has researched the foods available around Port Stephens and teaches bush food plant identification at Raymond Terrace Skillshare.

Mrs Duff and her husband, Tim, also run a tour group called Eco-Escapes. The pair conduct treks through Myall Lakes National Park bushland and along the coast, pointing out which plants the indigenous people favoured and which shellfish make good eating.

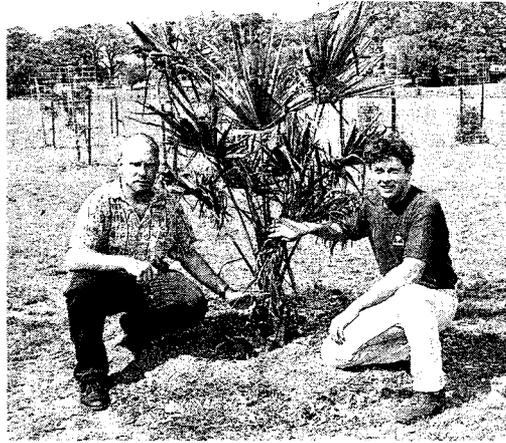
'It's amazing how many bush tucker plants there are,' Mrs Duff said. 'I don't know the exact figures but it seems that about seven out of 10 plants you look at are bush tucker.'

'There is an enormous variety of bush tucker plants and a lot could be grown and exploited commercially if people got it up and going.'

'There is a native parsnip which I think could be particularly good for cultivating.'

Another species Mrs Duff thought had commercial potential was New Zealand or warrigal spinach, an Australian equivalent to English spinach.

Sir Joseph Banks, the botanist on the *Endeavour*, served Captain



**User-friendly fronds:** Ian McKenzie, left, and Tony Prior, from Throsby Landcare, with a cabbage palm.

Cook warrigal greens and stingray in 1770.

Sir Joseph returned to London with seeds of the native spinach and soon Europeans and Americans were eating this plant as a summer green.

Mr Vic Cherikoff, who has worked in the bush food industry for the past 13 years, said the plant was introduced to Indonesia where it was still eaten.

An analytical chemist from the Sydney suburb of Gladesville, Mr Cherikoff began working with bush food in 1981, collecting samples and analysing their nutritional content. In 1982 he launched Bush Tucker Supply Australia to supply bush foods to Australian restaurants.

His company can supply products as diverse as wattle-seed Anzac biscuits, native herb crushed smoked roo pastrami, and warrigal spinach pesto in macadamia nut oil.

He distributes more than 50 wild foods and food products to about 500 customers including restaurants, airlines, hotels, caterers, retailers and the *Q&A*.

'Qantas is our biggest customer and also our biggest supporter,' Mr Cherikoff said.

educate the market,' Mr Cherikoff said.

The network of collectors that Mr Cherikoff has established provides employment for many Aboriginal groups and Aboriginal-operated pastoral stations.

A few of the foods are collected from the wild but Mr Cherikoff encourages his collectors to employ the organic farming and traditional Aboriginal harvesting techniques.

Novocastrians can see examples of bush foods at Throsby Landcare's bush tucker trail in Islington Park. The trail demonstrates the various foodstuffs and medicines used by Aborigines.

The program's project supervisor, Mr Tony Prior, said the plans for the area included a Koori garden that would also stock plants that provided bush medicines and plants with special spiritual values for the Kooris.

One initiative in the Hunter Region to develop an industry based on native foods was a recent seminar on aquaculture at the Hunter Institute of Technology's Kurri Kurri campus.

Among the species the course promoted were the silver and golden perch and the native crayfish, the yabbie.

The seminar, which attracted more than 100 people from the Hunter, NSW north and central coasts and Sydney, was sponsored by the Department of Education, Employment and Training's Office of Labour Market Adjustments.

The campus's rural and mining faculty director, Mr Tom Lantry, said the seminar looked at developing aquaculture as a supplement to farm income. He said the Kurri campus would offer a certificate in aquaculture later this year.

If there is going to be a large-scale native food industry in Australia, operators will have to be quick to take advantage of their heritage.

The Dutch and Israelis have mastered the cultivation of Australian wildflowers and compete with Australian growers in the world marketplace.

Australia's first commercial success with indigenous products, the macadamia nut, is grown in Hawaii for the North American market.

And Mr Cherikoff said some of the largest emu farms were in Texas and France.

Scientists see boundless benefits for Australian farmers switching from traditional livestock to kangaroos and emus.

They are very adapted to the Australian climatic vagaries and they are the species we should be rearing,' Mr Cherikoff said.

A pair of emus can produce at least 10 eggs each year, producing an average of about five chicks.

Sheep would at best produce two lambs in a year, but emus have no difficulty in raising six or seven chicks from a nest.

Emus, which were considered vermin in Western Australia in the 1960s and attracted a 50¢ bounty on their beaks, are now worth about \$800 a bird for their leather, oil and meat.

The Department of Primary Industry estimates that the kangaroo industry is potentially worth \$200 million a year.

Could roo and emu farming replace sheep and cattle?

'Put it this way, I don't believe that we're sustainable producing sheep. I believe we have been living off the fat of the land,' Mr Cherikoff said.

'Talk to anybody in soil conservation or the Department of Primary Industry. We know for a fact we have exceeded the land's carrying capacity for several decades, if not hundreds of years, from the inception of sheep and cattle grazing in this country.'

'The increased salinity, the desertification, and the various problems of soil erosion go hand-in-hand with overstocking.'

'What we should be looking at is what is a viable carrying capacity of these animals and how they should be farmed and what place Australian agricultural products has on the international market.'

Professor Michael Archer, professor of biological sciences at the University of NSW, agrees.

In November last year Professor Archer told a conference at Macquarie University that converting sheep stations to kangaroo farms could save many farmers from financial ruin, halt soil degradation and boost tourism.

'We could convert Australia into the environmental Riviera of the world,' he said.

'Tourists might even give up a date with Tom Cruise for a kangaroo roast.'

# Settlement wrought havoc on Worimimis

## When racism hits

Racial vilification has become a buzz phrase for the '90s but it can be difficult to define.

Acts which could be, although not exclusively, classed as racial vilification are a racist act or action that happens publicly and could incite others to also be racist.

Racial vilification is illegal in NSW. The aim of the law is to help people of all racial and ethnic backgrounds to live together in peace and dignity free from harassment.

To determine whether an act was racial vilification, an Anti-Discrimination Board fact sheet recommends checking three points:

- did the act happen publicly, in other words, did someone other than those directly involved see, hear or could have read it?
- how serious was it? If the act was relatively minor or a lighthearted racist joke, it would probably not be treated as racial vilification.
- was it an acceptable form of free speech, and therefore legal?

Complaints about racial vilification are handled by the Anti-Discrimination Board but can only be acted on if the person registering the complaint is a member of the racial or ethnic group that the act was directed against.

A complaint may also be registered by an organisation representing a member of the racial or ethnic group discriminated against.

In the past and present, Worimi people, like all other Aborigines, have a special view of their environment — all natural species and elements share the same life essence.

The land was a sacred trust that was passed down from generation to generation. The land was to be cared for in order to sustain all life forms. Sacred sights and the spiritual significance attached to them and their surrounding areas were highlighted, substantiated and validated through dance, stories, songs, art and ritualistic ceremonies throughout clan territory.

All tribal peoples had designated areas where they lived a hunter-gatherer existence. Land ownership did not apply to the Worimi as each tribe's territory related to ancestral stories of the Dreamtime and were preserved according to Aboriginal law. Therefore, no

Next Monday is Elimination of Racial Discrimination Day. To note it Worimi tribe member and Newcastle University lecturer **Carol Ridgeway-Bissett** writes about her tribe and the racism and exploitation it has suffered in Port Stephens.

Aboriginal sought land ownership in the European sense because of the spiritual links that connected them to the land.

Australian society, it seems, has been fed a rose-coloured history of British heroes on the frontier. But Aboriginal history is depicted differently.

### INVASION

Worimi people and all other Aborigines throughout Australia have fought since the invasion for the right to hunt, gather, preserve their sacred and significant sites and preserve their culture.

The brutality practiced



■ LEFT: Ms Ridgeway-Bissett — complaints of murder, loss of land and lifestyle

by European settlers in every state has been based on the presentation throughout Australian history of inhospitable and empty wasteland and was validated by the illegal British annexation theory known as Terra Nullius.

The myths in contemporary society continue to sustain this particular theory in order to justify acts of psychological and physical violence, plus the retention of domination by those who stand to benefit psychologically, socioeconomically and monetarily from Aboriginal subordination.

In Worimi territory,

Enright, Elkin (anthropologists), H F Ebsworth, William Scott and Robert Dawson of the Australian Agricultural Company documented the indigenous people's history.

### MURDER

Dawson often complained to government officials of the murders of Worimi people, but justice was rarely meted out to settlers who were guilty of murder by poisoned flour and beef, or by guns. Aborigines who fought to preserve natural food supplies, sacred and significant sites, and their own

people, were judged guilty by European standards, and were punished according to European laws.

At Port Stephens, Worimi people were moved onto reserves at Karuah and Sawyers Point, although the Ridgeway family continued to live on their traditional land at Soldiers Point until 1989.

### KING

Billy Ridgeway was crowned King of Port Stephens in 1908. His wife Queen Charlotte's coronation took place in 1912.

Although these titles were conferred on them by missionaries and the government, this seemed to be another example of tokenism towards Aboriginal people, and another form of cultural extinction for the rules of tribal society were enforced by tribal elders not kings and queens.

The Ridgeway family is scattered throughout Port Stephens, dispossessed of its tribal land while still spiritually connected to it. King Billy and some of his family were boat builders, housemaids, tradespeople and native workers for the Inland Mission. Today, some of his descendants are employed by local oyster farmers, the Department of Employment, Education and Training, the Commonwealth Employment Service, the Rose Farm, ABC Radio and the University of Newcastle.

### HELP

Like most Kooris throughout Australia the Ridgeway family members are trying to re-establish our cultural links with the past, to preserve our sacred and significant sites, our environment and our identity. We seek the preservation of all the above for future generations. Our past is our present and our future as well. We ask all non-Aboriginal Australians to help us in our struggle for social justice.

## Bahtabah Arts & Crafts

115 Lake View Parade, Blacksmiths

Aboriginal Cultural Centre set up by the Bahtabah Local Aboriginal Land Council



- Features genuine Aboriginal Arts and Artifacts from Aboriginal communities around Australia
- Didgeridoos, Boomerangs, Stone Axes, Wood Carvings, Bark Paintings
- Take Home a Souvenir



Phone (049) 71 4800 / Fax (049) 71 4589

# Aborigines opposed to Salamander development

By ALEK SCHULHA

Port Stephens Reporter

A WORIMI tribe member has slammed studies commissioned by Port Stephens Council into two controversial land development sites in Salamander.

Ms Carol Ridgeway-Bissett, a member of the Worimi Aboriginal group and an associate lecturer in Aboriginal Studies at Newcastle University, has arranged an indigenous peoples' rally to oppose the developments.

It will be held in Apex Park, Nelson Bay, from 11am on Saturday, August 13.

Speakers will include Ms Louise Campbell, of the State Aboriginal Lands Council, Ms Delece Ridgeway-Manton, the coordinator of an aboriginal refuge, Mr Mini Heath, sites officer for the Worimi Lands Council, Mr Bob Horne, MHR Paterson, Mr Bob Martin, MLA Port Stephens, and Cr Helen Brown.

The council proposes to develop 138 lots on land adjacent to Mambo Creek wetlands and 75 lots off Wanda Ave.

Opponents say both sites are important Koori sites in Port Stephens and should be preserved.

Ms Ridgeway-Bissett said the Wanda Ave site contained sacred sites for women of the Worimi tribe. It was used as a birthing and initiation site for women.

Part of the area near Mambo Creek wetlands was a former midden.

She said other areas which needed protection included the Birubi middens and a former burial ground on the site of the Soldiers Point Caravan Park.

The council commissioned a Sydney consulting firm to carry out archaeological and anthropological studies on the Wanda Ave and Mambo Creek sites.

A report said the archaeological work included a fully comprehensive field survey of both parcels of land.

It said the work focused on archaeological sites and areas of archaeological potential and the local Aborigines' interest in such sites and their protection and management.

The anthropological study included research into the known historical and anthropological documentation of Worimi history and culture and a series of interviews with relevant Worimi people.

Ms Ridgeway-Bissett said that the studies should have been carried out by a Koori person.

She also said an independent consulting firm should have been commissioned.

'The anthropologist didn't understand our culture . . . she told me she couldn't find anything about the women's waterhole,' Ms Ridgeway-Bissett said.

'She didn't talk to our people to find out about our culture . . . our tradition is oral.

'She spoke to the head of the Worimi Land Council, but there is a conflict between it and the Koori people.'

Ms Ridgeway-Bissett said it was difficult 'fighting to preserve our culture'.

She said she disagreed with the council commissioned report, which says that the Mambo Creek area has no specific anthropological significance that would warrant its preservation because of Worimi cultural traditions.

The report says the site has been effectively mined and an Aboriginal midden has been destroyed by mining activity.

In relation to the Wanda Ave development area, the report says that because of the general and specific meaning of the Wanda Ave wetlands to Worimi people, it should be preserved initially by the provision of a buffer zone of 50m around the wetlands.

Because of the objections, the developers have modified the layout of the subdivision, increased buffer zones and reduced development near the former midden site.

5/10/94

CLASSIFIEDS PHONE 82-0700

# Mambo decision is deferred again

Port Stephens Council has deferred a decision on a proposal to dedicate 75% of the proposed 138-lot Mambo Creek subdivision at Salamander to wetlands reserve.

Cr John Bartlett at last week's council meeting moved that the decision be delayed until all reports on the matter had been submitted.

"It is very pre-emptive to say 'let's go ahead and do this now'

when we haven't got all the information," Cr Bartlett said.

Cr John Nell, backed by Crs Maxina McCann and Brian Watson-Will, put it to the council to designate an area of lot 10 — 62 blocks — as a reserve.

"It's obscene to have housing going so far out into the wetlands," Cr Nell told the *Examiner* this week.

"It comes down to a value judgment."

The council has already spent \$31,000 on preparing a development application for the site which had the potential to gross \$9.8million.

The conservation of lot 10 — which would include the highest-priced blocks — would reduce this figure by about \$8million.

This would call into question the viability of developing the remaining 30 blocks.

Development of the Mambo site has been an issue for some time.

Last year the council called for more reports after claims that the land was sacred and significant to Aborigines and residents, backed by conservationists, called for the land to be earmarked for some form of eco-tourism or educational use.

The reports recently concluded the Aboriginal middens had been destroyed by mining 20 years ago, there was no evidence the area was sacred and that given recommended controls the impact of housing on the wetlands would be limited.

A firm supporter of the council's plan to develop the site is the Salamander project manager, Mr Damien Harrigan.

"We've had report after report recommending and concluding that if we introduce the controls and changes proposed then the impact on the wetlands can be overcome," he said.

# Heritage call for sacred site

Concerned Port Stephens residents and others will lobby the State and Federal Governments to have a water hole sacred to Aboriginal women given heritage listing.

Ninety people attended a recent rally on the bushland site bounded by Wanda Avenue, Kemp Street and Soldiers Point Road.

Carol Ridgeway-Bissett, said the land should be zoned 6A public reserved and receive heritage listing.

Mrs Ridgeway-Bissett, associate lecturer in aboriginal studies at the Wollotuka Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Centre at New-

castle University, said the roll-up to the rally was pleasing.

She said the water hole and the land around it were sacred to aboriginal women for initiation and birth rites and they wanted it left alone.

*PS Examined 6/4/99*

*PS Examined 20/4/94(?)*

## Wanda Avenue development would be a community loss

SIR — The proposed development of the Wanda Avenue area at Salamander Bay is an example of the continued elimination of highly valued urban forest considered by the community to be of aesthetic, arboreal and cultural significance to Port Stephens.

As is so often the case Port Stephens Council's consultants have weighted their assessment towards the dollars gained while the commu-

nity assessment is that this type of urban, old growth forest is priceless.

It is an irreplaceable habitat for scores of local bird species and the territory of the increasingly rare bandicoot, once common on the Tomaree Peninsula.

The claim that 43% of the 11ha reserve will be preserved is unconvincing. The impacts of development will degrade and probably destroy the ecological

value of the 43% to be "saved".

The development decision must now address a very highly-valued remnant of the ancient culture of our indigenous people — a Koori women's spiritual place.

In contrast the council stands to gain the dollar equivalent of two roundabouts.

**Darrell Dawson**  
For the EcoNetwork  
Port Stephens.

IS  
Exam  
16/3/94

# Red tape ties up bandicoots at Bay

by JENNY HAWKE

A National Parks and Wildlife Service suggestion to use fire to disperse bandicoots from land earmarked for housing has assuaged a Nelson Bay wildlife educator.

Mr Michael Smith wants to save bandicoots on the planned Port Stephens Council subdivision in Wanda Avenue, Salamander Bay.

He proposes moving them to either national park, crown or water board land to give them a better chance of survival and, depending on results, set a precedent for future developments.

But the NPWS has knocked his idea on the head, saying a "low intensity hazard reduction burn, confined to the area of the Wanda Avenue site" would give the bandicoots a better chance.

Mr Smith, who with volunteers has just completed a two-year trap and release study of native mammals on the Tomaree Peninsula, said the only place he found bandicoots was on the Wanda Avenue land.

## LICENCE

"Apart from ours, there has only been one caught in the area in 25 years," he said.

"The council applied on my behalf to get my licence changed to allow me to release the bandicoots in areas other than where I caught them.

"We had a conference with the NPWS, the council and the developer and I answered all their objections and questions.

"Then the council got this amazing letter back which made my jaw drop.

"I was denied permission and instead, the NPWS recommended that fire be put through the area just before it is cleared to allow ground-dwelling mammals to disperse into the surrounding habitat.

"What surrounding habitat? To get to the nearest habitat the bandicoots will have to cross roads and run the gauntlet of dogs in back yards, that's if the fire doesn't get them."

NPWS District Manager Ian



■ Anita Pillai, of Shoal Bay, with one of the bandicoots trapped in the Wanda Avenue land.

Nowacki said criticism by the Member for Port Stephens, Bob Martin, and Mr Smith is unfair.

"Where does the buck stop," he asked. "It stops with the people clearing the land."

He said Mr Smith's report said the service had recommended moving the bandicoots using a "bushfire".

## BUSHFIRE

"A low intensity hazard reduction is a fire, but not a bushfire," he said.

"It's a controlled burn."

The services environmental survey and research branch in Sydney had recommended the burn so the animals could disperse and felt they'd have a greater chance of survival using this method than being relocated.

"These people are reasonably familiar with the area but also know the whole of the State and



■ A close-up of one of the bandicoots.

relocation.

"The inability of fauna to adapt to relocation can be caused by the territorial behaviour of other occupants.

"If you put five more animals into an area occupied by 25

Member for Port Stephens Bob Martin, who condemned the service for its response, said the Minister for the Environment must impress on the service that many citizens are often more aware of the local flora and fauna situation than its officers

# Anger as bandicoots rescue plan is rejected



**Disappointed:** Mr Michael Smith, of Nelson Bay.

THE National Parks and Wildlife Service has recommended that a colony of native animals be burned out to allow a Salamander Bay residential subdivision to go ahead, according to a residents' group coordinator.

Nelson Bay surveyor Mr Michael Smith was stunned that the wildlife service had rejected his offer to voluntarily relocate a rare group of bandicoots to nearby bushland.

Mr Bob Martin, MLA Port Stephens, condemned the service yesterday.

Mr Martin said he would call on the NSW Minister for the Environment, Mr Hartcher, to enact policy guidelines allowing accredited people to move threatened fauna to safety.

He also wanted Mr Hartcher to liaise with the Department of Planning and set development requirements for fauna corridors within and adjoining subdivisions.

Port Stephens Council approved its own subdivision of 77 home sites off Wanda Ave, Salamander Bay, last October.

Work was planned to start next month but the project has faced a number of hurdles.

Aborigines assert the site was a traditional women's birthing, initiation and fertility area and home of a female tribal totem, the white-throated tree creeper.

About 30 women protested on the site last month.

Mr Smith was the coordinator of a residents' group that undertook a 19-month study of wildlife on the Tomaree Peninsula.



**Wildlife:** A bandicoot on Tomaree Peninsula.

More than 200 small animals were found. These included brushtail possums, various rats and mice and three northern brown bandicoots, which were caught on the residential subdivision site.

Mr Smith did not intend to charge money for the relocation of the bandicoots and had identified three alternative sites.

'But the national parks (officers) said the move could introduce disease to other animals or stress other animals. Then they wrote back and said burn them out. I'm so disappointed,' Mr Smith said.

The Newcastle Herald was unable yesterday to contact the National Parks and Wildlife Service's Hunter district manager, Mr I. Nowacki, whose name was at the bottom of the letter recommending the bandicoots be burned out.

— Paul Maguire

## Aborigines to stage Bay rally on Saturday

Aboriginal women and supporters will hold a rally at Salamander Bay on Saturday from 10am.

The rally, behind the soccer oval will be held to protest against Port Stephens Council plans to turn the nearby bush over to housing.

Women from the Worimi tribe argue the site contains a scared waterhole.

The rally which starts at 10am has the support of conservationists.

Worimi spokesperson Ms Carol Ridgeway-Bissett and others will speak at the rally.

Last month Port Stephens Council agreed to call in a consultant to test the claims from the Aborigines that the site, running between Wanda Avenue and Soldiers Point Road was significant to them.

If the development goes, ahead more than 70 blocks of land would be created.

The council maintains it has adopted adequate safeguards to protect the waterhole.

PORT STEPHENS EXAMINER WEDS MAR 23, 1994, P.13

# Rallies against 2 developments

by JENNY HAWKE

Conservationists are to join Aborigines and stage a rally opposing two controversial land developments involving Port Stephens Council.

The Port Stephens Wetlands Action Group and EcoNetwork have called an indigenous peoples' rally on August 13.

It will be held in Apex Park, Nelson Bay, from 11.30am.

Speakers will oppose the council's plan for two Salamander Bay housing estates near Wanda Avenue and adjacent to the Mambo Creek wetlands.

The Wanda Avenue site is important to Worimi women and contains a waterhole they say is sacred.

A Worimi tribe member and university lecturer, Ms Carol Ridgeway-Bissett, this week said the two groups were unhappy with anthropological and archaeological reports commissioned by the council.

They had paved the way for development of the Mambo Creek land and recommended that only the area around the

## Site 'sacred to Koori women'

waterhole on the Wanda Avenue site be preserved.

"The main reason is to save the Wanda Avenue site and waterhole and other important Koori sites in Port Stephens," Ms Bissett-Ridgeway said.

She said last time such a rally was called, more than 80 people attended.

Speakers would a State Aboriginal Lands Council representative, Ms Louise Campbell; Port Stephens MLA, Mr Bob Martin; Paterson MHR, Mr Bob Horne and Cr Helen Brown.

"We hope to achieve an awareness of the importance of saving Koori sites in Port Stephens for future generations," Carol said.

"It is important not only to Aboriginal people but to all Australians because it is their culture too."

## Kooris rally Saturday

A rally at Nelson Bay on Saturday will air grievances about two proposed Port Stephens Council land developments.

Local Aborigines, supported by conservationists, are to hold the rally in Apex Park from 11.30am.

Speakers will oppose plans by the council to develop two housing estates at Salamander Bay — off Wanda Avenue and adjacent to the Mambo Creek wetlands. Some Kooris say both sites are sacred but studies commissioned by the council were not conclusive.

PORT STEPHENS EXAMINER

## Aboriginal rally is postponed

Organisers have postponed a rally originally organised for this weekend to discuss the future of a site at Salamander said to be sacred to Aboriginal women.

The meeting was postponed until a date to be announced to enable involvement of a larger number of community groups.

As well as the issue of a waterhole, sacred to Aboriginal woman, in the proposed Port Stephens Council Wanda Avenue subdivision, the meeting will also discuss whether Lot 4 in the Mambo Wetlands should be developed as an education centre and nature reserve

PORT STEPHENS EXAMINER. WEDS MAR, 16 1994 P.6.

TO:

PS  
Examiner  
16/3/94  
p16

# Aboriginal rally is postponed

Organisers have postponed a rally originally organised for this weekend to discuss the future of a site at Salamander Bay said to be sacred to Aboriginal women.

The meeting was postponed until a date to be announced to enable involvement of a larger number of community groups.

As well as the issue of a waterhole, sacred to Aboriginal woman, in the proposed Port Stephens Council Wanda Avenue subdivision, the meeting will also discuss whether Lot 4 in the Mambo Wetlands should be developed as an education centre and nature reserve

## MESSAGE:

Port Stephens Examiner. Wednesday March 23rd, 1994. Page 13

## Aborigines to stage Bay rally on Saturday

Aboriginal women and supporters will hold a rally at Salamander Bay on Saturday from 10am.

The rally, behind the soccer oval will be held to protest against Port Stephens Council plans to turn the nearby bush over to housing.

Women from the Worimi tribe argue the site contains a scared waterhole.

The rally which starts at 10am has the support of conservationists.

Worimi spokesperson Ms Carol Ridgeway-Bissett and others will speak at the rally.

Last month Port Stephens Council agreed to call in a consultant to test the claims from the Aborigines that the site, running between Wanda Avenue and Soldiers Point Road was significant to them.

If the development goes, ahead more than 70 blocks of land would be created.

The council maintains it has adopted adequate safeguards to protect the waterhole.

## Heritage call for sacred site

Concerned Port Stephens residents and others will lobby the State and Federal Governments to have a water hole sacred to Aboriginal women given heritage listing.

Ninety people attended a recent rally on the bushland site bounded by Wanda Avenue, Kemp Street and Soldiers Point Road.

Carol Ridgeway-Bissett, said the land should be zoned 6A public reserved and receive heritage listing.

Mrs Ridgeway-Bissett, associate lecturer in aboriginal studies at the Wollotuka Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Centre at New-

castle University, said the roll-up to the rally was pleasing.

She said the water hole and the land around it were sacred to aboriginal women for initiation and birth rites and they wanted it left alone.

# Study raises doubts about Tomaree sacred site claims

PS Examiner

13/7/94

P1

## Way eased for 2 big subdivisions

Claims that two sites on the Tomaree Peninsula are sacred to Aborigines can only be partly substantiated, according to a report released on Monday.

The study's conclusions are a shot in the arm for two multi-million dollar land developments being pushed by Port Stephens Council.

The anthropological and archaeological study commissioned by the Council at the direction of the National Parks and Wildlife Service has already deepened a split in the Aboriginal community.

While the report is backed by the Worimi Land Council, a Worimi tribe member and university lecturer, Mrs Carol Ridgeway-Bissett, has challenged its conclusions.

She told the *Examiner* she would be taking the matter to the Federal Minister for Aboriginal Affairs.

One site the council wants to develop is behind Wanda Avenue at Salamander Bay and the other on an area which juts into the Mambo Creek wetlands at Salamander.

A start to work on the Wanda Avenue subdivision was blocked earlier this year by claims it contained a waterhole that was sacred to Worimi women.

The study just released argues the waterhole claim cannot be substantiated but that it should be preserved.

It recommended an archaeological dig on high ground near the waterhole and protection for a scarred Aboriginal tree before any work proceeds.

Further consultation with the land council and other Aborigines about the impact of the Wanda Avenue work on Worimi heritage was also suggested.



■ Mrs Ridgeway-Bissett — waterhole sacred.

□ CONTINUED PAGE 2.

# Study casts doubts on sacred site claims

□ FROM PAGE 1.

At Mambo Creek claims of a large Aboriginal midden were substantiated.

But the study concluded that sandmining in the early 1970s had destroyed the midden and it was no longer archaeologically significant.

Mrs Ridgeway-Bissett said all the Wanda Avenue land was significant to Worimi women, not just the waterhole.

"The Mambo wetlands will die if they put all those houses in there," she said.

"The scattered midden referred to on the Mambo site may not be of archaeological importance but the land itself is important to us and to our culture and religion.

"You would think the council would leave the little that's left alone for educational purposes."

At a public meeting on Monday Mrs Ridgeway-Bissett and environmentalists spoke out in opposition to any development of the two sites.

Newcastle environmentalist Mr Don McNair said any further development of the land around Mambo would ruin

the wetlands.

Corlette precinct secretary Mr Jeff Caldwell said the site should be used as a nature study and Aboriginal centre.

Results were tabled of a University of NSW survey which concluded 95% of nearby residents wanted land around the Mambo wetlands preserved.

But other reports prepared for the council said low density housing could proceed on the site.

Controls over stormwater, infiltration of ground water and buffers were suggested.

## BUFFER

The council's project manager, Salamander Projects, is pushing the development of more than 130 sites.

The Mayor, Cr Creighton, yesterday said he was pleased with the study's conclusions. He pointed out that the report confirmed a council suggestion for a 50m buffer zone around the women's waterhole.

The council expects to soon hold a meeting with the Worimi Land Council over the Wanda Avenue recommendations.

# Walk to show wetlands are not wastelands

Port Stephens people are invited to take A Walk in the Wetlands on Saturday April 23 to show them that wetlands aren't wastelands.

The Port Stephens Wetlands Action Group has organised the guided tour to start at 9am from Salamander Oval.

Noted conservationist, author and former Salamander Bay resident, Don McNair, will be guide.

The action group's Kassia Klinger said the group will supply maps and car pools to give people lifts from site to site.

Those going on the walk are asked to bring morning tea and repellent and to wear good walking shoes, hats and sunscreen.

## DAMAGE

Mr McNair said the idea of the walk is to show people the damage that has already been done to the Tomaree Peninsula's wetlands and areas proposed for development which concerned residents are trying to save.

"It is basically an orientation day of wetlands threatened now and those which have been sandmined in the past," he said.

The walk would start with the

## Focus on Salamander, Mambo

women's waterhole off Wanda Avenue and look at that site's drainage problems and move to Cromarty Bay then to Lot 4 in the Mambo swamp area.

The walkers would also look at a creek contaminated with green algae in the Salamander area, mined areas at the top end of Mambo swamp and, if there is time, Pig Island.

"Once the wetlands go, that's the end of the Blue Water Wonderland," Mr McNair said.

Ms Klinger said the walkers would also hear about the cultural heritage, eco-tourism, historical, bio-diversity and women's rights aspects of the wetlands issues.

If the weather is bad the walk will be postponed until the following week.

The tour will finish with lunch at Soldiers Point Bowling Club at 12.30pm.

The action group's next meeting is at the club on Saturday, May 7.

# YOUR SAY

## Councillors have forgotten their pledges of openness

SIR—In the last council elections several candidates stood on a Citizens for Open Government platform.

One aim of this group was to set up precincts which would allow a forum for residents to voice concerns regarding their own area and, to some small degree, participate in council decision making.

The precinct system was instigated and I believed that this was a major step forward for democracy at a grass roots level.

However, the recent "sit in" at the Wanda Avenue bushland site has highlighted either the lack of feedback from precinct meetings to the council or the inaction of the council to act on recommendations from these meetings.

The Wanda Avenue development was opposed vehemently at a precinct meeting in 1993 with reasons for opposition documented and tabled.

One of the points raised was the fact that this waterhole and land was very important to the local Worimis and documentation was presented to

this effect.

Carol Ridgeway-Bisset spoke about this site at a public meeting two years ago held at the Wanda Avenue site and attended by 80 people.

At this meeting were several councillors including Cr O'Brien who at the time supported the non-development of the area.

Both he and Cr McCann have seemingly forgotten the platform on which they were elected.

"No approval of major developments without community /precinct support" was one statement on their COG election leaflet.

These two councillors should remember why they were voted to the council two years ago and support a recession motion on the development of this land.

This land should remain undeveloped.

**G Cousins**  
The Yardarm  
Salamander

# Sacred site sit-in stops development

■ RIGHT: Ma Ridgeway-Bissett, second left, with other protesters at Monday's sit-in at Salamander Bay



Thirty women who staged a dawn sit-in on Monday near an Aboriginal sacred site at Salamander Bay have put the brakes on plans to develop a 77-lot housing estate.

Port Stephens Council which owns the land agreed late on Monday to a National Parks and

## Expert called in on claims

Wildlife request to call in an anthropologist to survey of the area.

It will test claims from the women that about 4ha of a bushland site bounded by Wanda Avenue, Kemp Street and Soldiers Point Road contains a sacred waterhole.

The women say it was used by females from the local Worimi tribe for birthing, initiations and to promote fertility.

Federal intervention has also been sought.

The Federal Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Mr Tickner, has been asked to order a halt to any proposed works.

Monday's demonstration was sparked by a belief that bulldozers were about to clear trees on the estate.

However, the council says that although the council had approved the subdivision in October tenders for the work had not been let.

It will take about two months for the anthropologist to complete his study of the area.

"Not enough of our sacred sites especially women's have been preserved," a Worimi spokesperson, Ms Carol Ridgeway-Bissett, said at the site on Monday.

"This place is very impor-

tant to us, as it's one of the few that has not been developed."

Mrs Ridgeway-Bissett is an associate lecturer in Aboriginal studies at the Wollotuka Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Centre at the University of Newcastle.

She said had she warned Port Stephens Council of her tribe's concerns last November but had received no feedback.

Yesterday the Mayor, Cr Creighton, said the council had already approved the project when approached by Ms Ridgeway-Bissett.

### INFORMED

As well, it had earlier contacted the Worimi Land Council which had informed the council it had no interest in the site.

He believed the council had balanced the needs of the environment with those of development in a fair manner.

More than 40 per cent of the site including the waterhole was being retained and would be surrounded by a 50m buffer.

But the Member for Paterson, Mr Bob Home, who is taking the matter to Mr Tickner, labelled the subdivision "an act of vandalism".



■ Ms. Ridgeway-Bissett — leave the whole area alone.

# Women call rally in waterhole campaign

by JENNY HAWKE

Supporters of a campaign to save sacred Aboriginal sites, including a women's waterhole at Salamander Bay, will hold a public rally next month.

The rally and forum on March 19 will call for backing for women from the Port Stephens Worimi tribe who want to halt a 77-lot housing estate off Wanda Avenue.

Port Stephens Council, which owns the land and wants to develop it, has not yet let tenders and is awaiting an anthropological survey on the site.

The rally is the latest move in a campaign which saw two weeks ago saw 30 women stage a dawn sit-in near the site.

The women say the site contains a sacred waterhole used by females of the local tribe for

## Site is sacred: Worimis

birthing, initiations and to promote fertility.

The demonstration was sparked by the belief that bulldozers were about to clear trees on the estate.

A Worimi spokesperson, Ms Carol Ridgeway-Bissett, said the council "should leave the whole area alone".

### CULTURE

She said the rally would discuss the waterhole and a lot of other issues of environmental and cultural importance.

People would visit the waterhole site in the afternoon and help clean up the area.

"We will try to explain why this site and others are so important to the Worimis and why they should be to Australians in general," she said.

"The council is proposing a 50m buffer between the houses and the waterhole but we think that if they build the houses they'll pollute the waterhole anyway."

She felt not enough sacred sites, especially women's, had been preserved.

Ms Ridgeway-Bissett is an associate lecturer in Aboriginal studies at the Wollotuka Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Centre at Newcastle University.

# Threat to halt Port project

## Council, wildlife service at odds

By GREG BEARUP  
Staff Reporter

A NATIONAL Parks and Wildlife officer threatened Port Stephens Council yesterday with halting its proposed subdivision at Salamander for a year if a proper study of Aboriginal sites was not forthcoming.

About 30 Worimi Aboriginal women held a protest in Wanda Ave, Salamander, yesterday morning, fearing that the council was going to move on the proposed subdivision site with bulldozers.

The council's general manager, Dr Ted Campbell, said that although the council approved its own subdivision in October tenders for the work had not been let and work would not proceed for at least six weeks.

The National Parks and Wildlife Service's acting cultural resources coordinator, Ms Jillian Comber, said that in September last year she had written to the council advising that an anthropologist would need to be employed to make a study of the development area.

Ms Comber said she was informed recently that the council planned to go ahead with work on the site this month and that the study had not been done.

'I told them that if a study was not done an interim order would be placed on the land, which would mean they could not touch it for 12 months,' Ms Comber said.

The Mayor, Cr Innes Creighton, said the council would commission



Site meeting: Cr Creighton talks to protesters yesterday.

— Picture by ROBERT McKELL

someone today to do the study.

When told of the threat of an interim order, he said: 'National Parks think they are all-powerful, don't they?'

Cr Creighton was critical of the service and said it had not replied to the council's correspondence late last year.

He had been surprised at the action of Ms Comber, whom he said had an opportunity for input

throughout the proceedings.

'What has been ignored is that four hectares, with a 50-metre buffer, had been set aside for the Aboriginal sites,' Cr Creighton said.

When the council approached the Worimi Aboriginal Land Council about the site in 1991, it had been told the land contained no significant sites.

Ms Carol Ridgeway-Bissett, a Worimi Aborigine, said on Sunday that the area contained sacred sites

for women of the Worimi tribe.

The area was used as a birthing and initiation site for women.

She has written to the Federal Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Mr Tickner, to see what could be done to save it.

A spokeswoman for Mr Tickner said yesterday that an application had been received from Ms Ridgeway-Bissett under the Heritage Protection Act but it could not be commented on at this stage.

## Advice sought on Aboriginal claims

AN anthropologist and a consultant will inspect two Aboriginal sites in Port Stephens this week to assess their authenticity as sacred sites.

One of the sites, at Soldiers Point, is claimed as an Aboriginal burial ground, part of which is located under the Soldiers Point Yacht Club.

It is asserted that the burial ground extends along the foreshore of the Soldiers Point Caravan Park and under part of the adjoining road.

The other site, in the Mambo Wetlands at Salamander, is believed to be middens.

Ms Carol Ridgeway-Bissett, an associate lecturer in Aboriginal studies at the Wollotuka Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Centre at the University of Newcastle, said both sites would be assessed.

The anthropologist, from the National Parks and Wildlife Service, will inspect the burial ground later this week.

A consultant, engaged by Salamander Projects Pty Ltd, will assess the middens this week.

Ms Ridgeway-Bissett said the middens were the remains of a 'really big camp' used by the Worimi tribe.

Salamander Projects has plans to develop between 130 and 140 housing lots on land that covers the middens.

— Alek Schulha