

# Native claim on Port beach

by MICHELLE MEXON

A native title claim on Bagnall's Beach will not change the public's use of the popular reserve according to one of the Aboriginal applicants.

Ms Carol Ridgeway-Bissett and Iris Russell and Mr Alex Russell have lodged an application for native title over 10ha of the popular beachfront public reserve.

The area is used by thousands of residents and holidaymakers and the beach is one of the few areas people can legally walk their dogs.

"We want negotiation and consultation to have a say in our heritage ... this is not about us closing off the area," Ms Ridgeway-Bissett yesterday told the *Examiner*.

Under the Native Title act, traditional owners of the land can move to protect and preserve the Aboriginal heritage and maintain the sites.

## SACRED

"While a lot of people consider Aboriginal heritage as only things you can see, the natural environment is one of the most sacred things to the Aboriginal people," she said.

"An example of what we are trying to do is to see no other kinds of flora, other than what is natural to the area, planted in the area."

Aboriginal heritage on the site included a midden, a canoe tree and a

## Public access will not change: Aborigines

record of a land grant in the area given to an Aboriginal family.

Ms Ridgeway-Bissett said there was never any intention to stop the public's use of the area.

The application, on behalf of the Worimi people who are affiliated with the Bagnall's Beach area, prompted a Mayoral minute at last night's council meeting.

Mayor John Bartlett called for the council to delegate authority to the general manager to conduct mediation on the application on behalf of the council.

This mediation would involve the applicants, council and the Native Title Tribunal.

# Anna Bay woman fights Aboriginal land council over housing



By GREG RAY  
Staff Reporter

MRS Debbie Fenwick does not recommend tin sheds for bringing up children.

After eight years living in one with her husband, son and two daughters at Anna Bay, Mrs Fenwick says she now wants a house.

But her efforts to put a better roof over her family's head have brought her into conflict with the Worimi Local Aboriginal Land Council, the organisation she wants to be her landlord.

The conflict has escalated to the point where the land council is threatening to suspend Mrs Fenwick at an extraordinary meeting set down for July 2.

A letter from the land council said Mrs Fenwick was accused of 'conduct detrimental to the best interests of Worimi Local Aboriginal Land Council'.

The letter said the detrimental conduct was her decision to seek help with her housing problem from the funding bodies that assist the land council to buy houses.

Asked about the matter, the coordinator of the land council, Mr Lennie Anderson, said the land council had tried hard to find a house for Mrs Fenwick and her family.

'We had \$450,000 from ATSIC (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission) and the Department of Housing to buy three houses in Port Stephens,' Mr Anderson said.

The houses could cost no more than about \$150,000 each, including legal fees and other purchase costs.

That was a difficult target to meet in Port Stephens, he said.

'What happens is the Department of Housing gets local real

estate agents to give them a list of possible properties,' Mr Anderson said. 'The department makes a shortlist for us.'

Based on her circumstances, Mrs Fenwick was high on the priority list for one of the houses.

But Mr Anderson said Mrs Fenwick did not like the first house she was shown because it was too small. The second was rejected because its yard was not big enough.

The third, a three-bedroom house on an 800-square-metre block at Corlette was too far from Anna Bay School.

'She wanted something in Anna Bay and there was nothing available there in the price limit,' Mr Anderson said.

He said Mrs Fenwick had then started looking for properties on her own account and had approached the Department of Housing over the heads of the Worimi Land Council.

'We objected because they're our houses and we're not being consulted,' he said.

Mrs Fenwick confirmed Mr Anderson's account of events, but said the land council should have done more to find a suitable house for her.

Mr Anderson said the council was striving to become solvent, but was being hindered by a political campaign against it.

He named a former Worimi secretary, Mr Geoff Gayler, among those involved in the alleged campaign.

Mr Gayler said yesterday that he was seeking an inquiry into the land council, for which he worked until April.

Mr Gayler, who is supporting Mrs Fenwick in her dispute, has also received notice that the land council will seek to suspend his membership at the July meeting.

Tin shed home: Mrs Fenwick with her husband William, son Steven, 11, and daughters April, 6, (left) and Kristie, 8. — Picture by WAIDE MAGUIRE

## Course covers ecotourism

The push towards ecotourism in Port Stephens has gained momentum with a new Skillshare course on the topic to start next month.

The certificate in ecotourism course is being run over 10 weeks in conjunction with the Tourist Organisation of Port Stephens (TOPS).

Manager of Nelson Bay Skillshare Bruce Evans says the course aims to give participants knowledge of the tourism/ecotourism industry.

"It will cover skills in customer service, in providing tour guide support services, in delivering short commentary and processing payment transactions," he said.

Mr Evans said graduates would be likely to either return to current tourism based workplaces or seek employment with an ecotour or tourism operation, or they may seek further training.

The 10-week course starts in February.

# Eco-tourist spotlight shifts to the Port

Close to 100 delegates from across Australia are expected to attend a three-day national ecotourism conference in Nelson Bay starting on Friday.

The conference themes include marketing and how to better promote ecotourism, as well as ecologically sustainable development, featuring best practice in whale and dolphin watching and technological innovations in energy conservation and waste management.

As the host region, Port Stephens will be extensively profiled and conference organisers have scheduled field trips for delegates to view the Port's

## Aborigine groups to speak

■ RIGHT: Ms Ridgeway-Bissett — local tours outlined



These include tours of the Tomaree Peninsula with the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, dolphin cruises and a dinner at Moffat's Oyster Barn.

The Port's tourism operators will also give short presentations on their products, business and ecotourism in the region.

The council's strategic planning, Ms Sarah Artist, says the conference will provide a boost to the Port's growing tourism industry.

A workshop session on Aboriginal eco-tourism will also be a feature of the conference.

Dr Heather Zeppel from the University of Newcastle will speak on Aboriginal-guided tours which aim to interpret Aboriginal lifestyle, culture and history in NSW.

Other speakers will be Carol Ridgeway-Bissett, from Burri Yunna Nature Tours Nelson Bay and Mini Heath from the Worimi Local Aboriginal Land Council.

PORT STEPHENS EXAMINER  
Weds OCT. 22. 1997. p. 2.

# New tour aims to show Port through eyes of Worimis

Going walkabout on the Tomaree Peninsula with an Aboriginal and eco-tourism bent is the aim of a new enterprise which gets underway next month.

Local Worimi tribe member Carol Ridgeway-Bissett who has moved back to Nelson Bay after several years working at Newcastle University is behind the venture and argues it is long overdue.

"There's a lot more interest than ever before about Aboriginal affairs," she said this week.

"People want to know what we're about and how we related to the land."

She said she planned to take regular tours through the Tomaree National Park and to other places and explain what certain areas meant to Aborigines.

## SACRED

She had already been approached by several resorts.

The tours would explain how the Worimis lived and outline the changes brought by white settlement.

"No-one has told that story and it should be known," she said.

As well she would offer her services as a consultant on local Aboriginal heritage sites and host story telling sessions for schools and other education centres.

Ms Bissett was born into the Ridgeway family at Soldiers Point and has lived on the peninsula for most of her life.

More recently she worked as a lecturer with an Aboriginal affairs unit at Newcastle University.

She has been an opponent of Port Stephens Council plans to develop a housing estate off Wanda Ave, Salamander Bay, which she says would intrude on a site scared to Aboriginal women.



■ Ms Ridgeway-Bissett — No-one has told the story.

## Koori tours start soon

A new tour to show Port Stephens through the eyes of the Aboriginal people is due to start later this month.

Local Aboriginal activist, Ms Carol Ridgeway Bissett, says the environmental tours will be marketed to schools, colleges and tour operators.

"The tours will be open to anyone and include a look at our different eco-systems, dune systems, rainforests and general environment," she said.

"Koori culture is based on the environment and you can't separate the two ... all our laws and spirituality is based on the land and the environment."

Port Stephens Examiner  
 Weds Feb 5 1997. p. 9.

Port Stephens Examiner Weds. Jan 15 1997. p. 3.

# Wanda land report due soon

by MICHELLE MEXON

After seven years of debate, the fate of a Port Stephens Council owned Aboriginal sacred site at Salamander Bay looks set to be resolved next month.

Aboriginal activist, Carol Ridgeway Bissett is calling for a 13ha parcel of land which she says was a waterhole sacred to women of Worimi tribe to be set aside as a community reserve.

"We are hoping the council will consider setting the land aside for a community reserve, with a management plan set up to look after the site," she said.

This week the Port council's special projects officer Mr Jim Neely said he was preparing a report to be put to a council meeting next month.

It would deal with the future of the 70-lot residential subdivision the council

## Aborigines want housing rejected

plans on the site and the requests from the Aborigines.

Ms Ridgeway-Bissett also expressed hopes the site will be named by the Worimi people.

A traditional owners group, the Mariangel Nurri Heritage Committee will seek the have the area preserved. This group, with community, land and water corporation representatives and an aboriginal archivist from the National Parks and Wildlife Service will work towards preserving all Aboriginal heritage in this area.

"People in the community have a perception everyone on the Land Council is part of the Worimi people but you don't have to be a traditional owner to sit on a land council.

"The land council will take a back seat to the new heritage group."

Council's special projects officer, Mr Jim Neely is preparing a report on the issue to go before a meeting late next month.

Ms Ridgeway-Bissett said the preservation of the area from residential development was important

She said it was used by the Worimi women as an initiation and birthing site. It is said to be scene of a massacre of Aboriginal women and children in the 1800s.

Newcastle Herald Weds, March 12, 1997. p. 3

## Council forgoes \$2mill to save Aboriginal site

ABORIGINAL activists and environmental groups have won their seven-year battle to save one of the most significant parcels of land in Port Stephens.

Port Stephens Council overturned last night its 1992 decision to develop a 76-lot subdivision on a 11ha site known as the 'Worimi Women's Waterhole'.

The wetland is an Aboriginal sacred site and was used by the Worimi people for birthing and burial purposes. It is also a significant wildlife corridor and is home to one of the Tomaree peninsula's most significant colonies of koalas.

The council will ask the State Government to declare the site a reserve or a national park.

The council decision means it will forgo the \$2million it expected to gain from the development of the council-owned subdivision.

The site is bounded by Wanda Ave, Muller Rd and Kemp St, Salamander Bay.

A packed public gallery cheered last night as councillors voted 9-2 (Cr Steve Busted was absent) to protect the council-owned site.

Cr Darrell Dawson (East Ward) said the council had to move to protect the site or it risked a large-scale public outcry.

The proposal was given the go-ahead in 1992. The development consent was due to lapse in October if work had not started on the subdivision.

# YOUR SAY

## Massacre claim is unsubstantiated

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SIR — In regards to your article by Michelle Mexon (*Examiner* January 29).

It is hard enough now for Aboriginal people in the area without Ms Ridgeway-Bissett (formerly just plain old Carol Bissett), trying to drive a wedge between the Worimi and the community in general.

Ms Ridgeway-Bissett should present any evidence of the massacre at Wanda to the Worimi people at the correct time and place, rather than running off at the mouth in the *Examiner*.

As for Ms Ridgeway-Bissett's claim that there are no traditional owners sitting on the Land Council, she is totally away with the fairies.

If Ms Ridgeway-Bissett bothered to attend meetings she may become aware that there were others whose name isn't Ridgeway-Bissett who can also show that their forebears were also original inhabitants.

■ From last week's Examiner

Jeff Bugg  
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