



**Sharon Grierson MP
Federal Member for Newcastle**

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Coal River National Heritage Listing

MS GRIERSON (Newcastle) (9.15 p.m.)—I rise tonight to support the nomination of Newcastle's Coal River Heritage Park to the National Heritage Register, and to give our region's thanks to all those who are working so hard to preserve and promote our unique history. Particularly I would like to mention the dedication of the Coal River Working Party, a research group of staff, commercial and community members based at the University of Newcastle, which submitted the National Heritage nomination for the Coal River precinct.

It is often an uphill battle to get recognition for the role the Newcastle region played in our nation's history. This battle was exemplified when we were lobbying over the past couple of years to have the Coal River Heritage Park included in a serial World Heritage nomination for convict sites around Australia. Despite Newcastle being the first site of secondary penal punishment and the birthplace of our nation's coal industry, and despite our constant badgering of the then Minister for the Environment and Heritage, Newcastle was unfortunately excluded from that World Heritage nomination.

Earlier this month, the list of sites was announced, including areas of the Old Great North Road from Sydney to Newcastle. Despite my disappointment that the Coal River site was not among the final nominations, I wish that serial nomination every success and hope that the eight important sites that were chosen make it onto the World Heritage List. Showing typical Newcastle fighting spirit, however, our local advocates have pressed on with a nomination for the Coal River site to be included on the National Heritage List and it is that nomination that I would like to offer my full support for tonight.

The Coal River Heritage Park is the birthplace of Australia's coalmining industry and marks the site of the discovery of coal and the first coalmining undertaken in the southern hemisphere. Research undertaken by the Coal River Working Party in 2005 proved the existence of the first coalmine through video and photographic evidence of the continued survival of the first adits beneath the concrete ramparts of Fort Scratchley. In terms of uniqueness the coalmines at Signal Hill, located, surveyed and photographed in 2005, are by far Australia's oldest surviving mining heritage. No similar

workings whether by convict or free labour survived from the first half of the 19th century.

The Coal River Heritage precinct is situated on and around the southern headland of the Port of Newcastle comprising landmarks now well known around the world, such as Nobbys Headland, Macquarie Pier, Fort Scratchley, Signal Hill and the Convict Lumber Yard. These places all have special significance and they gained national exposure in June when the *Pasha Bulker*, a coal ship, ran aground on, and then was salvaged from, Nobbys Beach. That this huge coal ship came to grief fair in the middle of this heritage precinct really does deserve special comment.

Firstly, a great debt of thanks is owed to the emergency crews and salvors who were able to free the ship without causing environmental damage. Secondly, it demonstrates the significance of the Coal River site today in that an industry begun by convicts over 200 years ago is still being conducted in and around the immediate area. Indeed, looking back further, historians have noted that the local Awabakal people, the Indigenous people of the area, are the only Indigenous people recorded to have utilised coal for fuel, and that the area was a significant industrial and trading centre long before Europeans arrived.

So our industries have changed—and they continue to change with our focus now on high-tech clean coal—and it is highly significant that they are still carried out right in our city among our people. The Coal River Heritage Park is indeed a place of living history. Its distinctive and attractive natural landscapes are coupled with historic sites and archaeological remains. It is in the heart of our city and so remains accessible and with good management preservable.

Related to its significance to the coal industry, the precinct also tells the story of the economic development of Newcastle. With convict and later free labour, we established the colony's first export industry in coal, while the site was also of great importance in commerce and developing other resources for the colony such as timber, salt and lime. As in the energy area, we are now extending ourselves into innovative industries such as aerospace, high-end manufacturing and engineering. On the issue of how the site represents our convict history, I would like to quote from the nomination document:

The Coal River Heritage Park represents an important chapter in the history of convictism in Australia indicative of the transition from a punitive convict settlement to a free settlement ... It is emblematic of the shift from punishment to profit, from convict society to civil society through economic and cultural development ... Most convict sites are no longer living sites, whereas the Coal River Heritage Park makes tangible the links between convict industry, subsequent development, and the present-day.

The nomination document is a fascinating read and I would recommend it to anyone interested in history. It is a powerful statement about Newcastle's heritage and its contribution to our national development. It is this link between our past and the present day which makes this site so important to Newcastle and to the story of our nation. It is for this reason that I fully support the nomination for National Heritage listing.