



Camden Head Pilot Station

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The Burra Charter (the Australian International Charter for the Conservation of Monuments and Sites [ICOMOS]) states that the significance of a place is embodied in:

- *Its fabric and its setting*
- *Other evidence of its history*
- *Its association with the community (1)*

Significant places are those which help understand the past, which enrich the present and which are likely to be of value to future generations. The significance of the Camden Head Pilot Station is derived from a number of environmental, historic, social and representative criteria but above all because of the integration of all those attributes.

The Pilot Station site is listed as being of significance in the Port Macquarie-Hastings Council's Local Environmental Plan (LEP). The Statement of Significance reads:

"The Camden Head Pilot Station is a rare surviving in tact group of related buildings providing physical evidence of the living and working conditions of the pilot and boatmen." (1)

The Burra Charter advocates a cautious approach to change. Do as much as necessary to care for the place and to make it useable, but otherwise change it as little as possible so that its cultural significance is retained (2).

As a group of historic buildings the Pilot Station needs to be cared for by a planned maintenance and repair program based on knowledge of the buildings and their fabric with regular inspections and prompt preventative maintenance and repair.

In addition to these requirements management of the property will comply with other statutory requirements including the LEP of Port Macquarie-Hastings Council.

The property derives its significance from its:

- *Natural and cultural heritage values*
- *Value as a unique community facility*
- *Role as a centre for environmental education and awareness*
- *Unique confluence of environmental, cultural heritage and social values.*

The Statement of Significance is the foundation for the ongoing management of Camden Head Pilot Station. The site's natural and cultural heritage values affect every aspect of the day to day and long term management of the property and have been translated into appropriate policies, plans and procedures for managing the use and conservation of all components of the property to ensure all management decisions observe standards appropriate to the site's significance.

Such management will recognise not only the need for a high standard of conservation management but the need to balance this with public use of the site and with the need to generate income to sustain the sites significance and values.

1.2 HISTORY

The Birpai Aboriginal people are the traditional custodians of the lands and the waterways throughout the Hastings area. Currently the Pilot Station site falls within the boundaries of the Bunyah Local Aboriginal Land Council (LALC).

“There has been much confusion about which traditional tribal groups occupied the Camden Haven area. Tindale (1940 & 1974; cited in Collins, 1998) identifies the Ngamba ‘tribe’ as traditional inhabitants of the area; however, the homeland of the Ngamba has been located by some researchers in the Brewarrina area in north-west NSW. The Ngamba people are believed to have moved to the New England region during disruptive times in the late 1800’s. They then moved to the Camden Haven area in the early 1900’s, an area which was already occupied by the Birpai.” (3)

A number of shell fragment sites are located within close proximity to the Station at the corner of Bergalia Crescent and Camden Head Rd and around Gogley’s Lagoon suggesting the area was used by Aboriginal people in their day to day hunter-gatherer lifestyle. (4)

Oral histories from Aboriginal Elders the late Mrs Pat Preece and Mrs Lois Davis taken 15th February 2002 by Annie Bolitho, the first writer in residence at the Pilot Station, provide evidence of a link between the site and Aboriginal people living in the Camden Haven in the 1920s - 1960s. (5)

European settlement of the Camden Haven occurred through the 1820’s and 1830’s associated with the main penal settlement of Port Macquarie. The first permanent European settler in the area occupied land at Laurieton in 1872 and by 1890 the Camden Haven was regarded as one of the main centres of the northern timber industry. (3)

The Camden Head Pilot Station site is Lot 300 Development Plan (DP) 39655, an area of 2278 square metres of Crown Land at Camden Head zoned 7 f1 - Environment Protection-Coastal. (2) It adjoins a 4 hectare Crown Land recreation reserve managed by Port Macquarie-Hastings Council. The Pilot Station site has access through a carriageway easement over that reserve. The site contains a three bedroom weatherboard cottage, a former boatshed now a spacious workshop/ studio, an historic signal shed and a double garage.

The Camden Head Pilot Station overlooks the entrance to the Camden Haven River inlet, Pilot and Wash House beaches and is adjacent to Kattang Nature Reserve, managed by the Parks and Wildlife Division of the Department of Environment and Climate Change.

Land was reserved at Camden Head for a Pilot Station on 18th October 1890. The Pilot Station operated on this site between 1890 and 1990 first as a Pilot Station and residence during the coastal shipping era, then as the operational base and residence for the Maritime Services Board District Officer and from 1975 until its closure in 1990 as the District Officer’s residence. (6)

The first Pilot’s residence on this site, a Federation style building, indicated on an 1898 chart (Appendix 1) was unfortunately destroyed by fire and was replaced with the current residence circa 1950. Some time after 1954 the current boatshed/workshop was built on the site from recycled materials, primarily from a boatshed located on the southern training wall. The signal shed was also rebuilt in this period and the garages refurbished.

From 1990 to 1999 the Station was leased for rental accommodation and for care-taking purposes. By the time the Station’s management was transferred to the community in 1999 it had fallen into disrepair.

In 1998, a group of local residents under the auspices of Camden Haven Community College (the College) responded to the then Department of Land and Water Conservation’s (DLWC) call for expressions of interest for community re-use of the site. Based on a Feasibility Study (7) their proposal was successful and in 1999 DLWC appointed the College to manage the property for cultural, environmental and community purposes.

With grants from the NSW Ministry for the Arts, DLWC and the then Hastings Council, the Pilot Station Committee commenced work coordinating the restoration of the buildings, regeneration of the surrounding bushland and initiated a range of community, cultural and environmental programs and events. Building restoration work commenced in 2001 and was completed in 2003.

1.3 NATURAL HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE (ENVIRONMENT)

The Camden Head Pilot Station is situated in an outstanding natural environment and can play an important role in encouraging environmental awareness and stewardship of the area’s natural heritage values.

KATTANG NATURE RESERVE - The Pilot Station's eastern boundary adjoins Kattang Nature Reserve which is listed on the Register of the National Estate. Kattang Nature Reserve preserves significant coastal biotic communities and important geomorphological features with high scenic value. It supports a wide range of coastal vegetation communities, including wet and dry heathland, littoral rainforest and headland complexes. It also provides habitat for a diverse range of wildlife, including threatened flora and fauna including birds protected under international agreements. The reserve contains the spectacular scenery of Perpendicular Point and sharp vertical cliff faces along its south eastern boundary. These prominent features were recognised in 1987 during a National Trust of Australia survey of coastal rocky headlands. (3)

The Pilot Station's immediate environment also includes Pilot and Wash House beaches, the coastline around Perpendicular Point and bushland reserves containing significant ecosystems such as Wash House Wetland, Wash House Beach intertidal community and native vegetation communities on Crown Land reserves.

WASH HOUSE WETLAND - This evolving ephemeral hind dune wetland is a low dune swale immediately east of the Pilot Station and was formed by the deposition of sand after the building of a seawall at the Camden Haven River inlet was completed in 1972. Studies of this wetland commissioned by the Pilot Station in 2001/2002 and funded by Coastcare, indicate a high degree of floral and faunal biodiversity including five species of frogs, including the rare Eastern Toadlet. (8) & (9)

WASH HOUSE BEACH INTERTIDAL COMMUNITY - The rocky platform intertidal community of Wash House Beach/Perpendicular Point was the focus of a major study in 2002 commissioned by the Pilot Station and funded by Coastcare, which documented its habitats and biodiversity and compared them with other locations within the Manning Shelf bioregion. It established 5 habitats and identified 103 species which was the second highest count of all locations previously surveyed. It also found 15 species that were not found on other shores. The research suggested an ecosystem rich in species and diversity and worthy of further study and preservation. (10)

The surrounding reserve P39665 Lot 301 and a portion of R78791 contain six different vegetation communities including Endangered Ecological Communities such as Littoral Rainforest (11) and Themeda Grasslands (12).

An extensive bush regeneration program led by local residents and the Pilot Station Bushcare Group has been ongoing on the site since 1998. The Draft Camden Head Pilot Station Vegetation Management Plan (13) was produced in May 2000 to guide volunteer and professional bush regeneration work on the site. Work by the Bushcare Group has also led to improved access to Pilot Beach and the protection and interpretation of Wash House Wetland by installing a raised boardwalk and information panel funded by a Coastcare grant.

The bushland surrounding the Pilot Station is used for a variety of passive recreational purposes such as walking, picnicking and nature study. It is also used as a thoroughfare to popular Pilot and Wash House Beaches.

1.4 CULTURAL HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

In the 1840's the timber industry was the lifeblood of the Camden Haven. The establishment of farming, fishing and an oyster industry soon followed and by the late 1880's Camden Haven Inlet was a busy port with steamers and ketches using the wharves inside the estuary. On the 18th October 1890 the NSW Department of Navigation reserved 4 hectares of land for a Pilot Station.

The Signal Shed erected in 1890, was the first building on the site. It was fitted out with 46 pigeon holes to accommodate the 46 signal flags used by the Pilot. The Department of Public Works began work on breakwaters in the Camden Haven Inlet in 1898 with stone quarried from the base of North Brother Mountain (Dooragan). Construction continued during the early 1900's until the completion of the northern breakwall.

In 1903 three cottages were removed from Trial Bay and relocated at Camden Head. These cottages together with a boatshed and wharves were located on a nearby site on the south side of the inlet adjacent to the present entrance of Gogley's Lagoon. Three timber piles from the old wharves are extant

but no other physical evidence remains of the cottages or that boatshed. Two fenced graves mark the entrance to this site and comprise part of the heritage listing of the Camden Haven Maritime Group.

The Pilot's job was to signal from the flagpole to ships wishing to enter the estuary. A triangular formation used black and white balls to indicate the status of the channel. Sometimes ships stood off for days waiting for the signal to enter. The bar was notoriously dangerous and the role of the Pilot Station became essential to the well being of the Camden Haven.

Following the destruction by fire of the original dwelling, a new timber dwelling was erected circa 1950. For many years the Station was remote from the township, accessible only by boat or sandy track. There was no electricity until 1958 and town water was not connected until 1970.

1.5 SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE

The history of the site and its role in the development of the whole Camden Haven district ensures the Pilot Station has strong social significance. The circumstances surrounding the transfer of management of the site to the Camden Haven Community College and its subsequent use for a variety of community, environmental, cultural, educational and recreational purposes further strengthens its social significance.

Community consultation and participation has been an important benchmark for the management of the Pilot Station since the first proposal for community use of the site was raised in 1998.

Community consultation occurred through the early stages of the Feasibility Study and the transfer of the property, and has continued since. It is reflected in the composition of the Pilot Station Committee and in the focus on community involvement through the various programs and residencies that are presented at the site. It remains an essential element of the Management Plan to incorporate processes that help to increase community involvement with the site and enhance community stewardship of the Pilot Station's natural and cultural heritage.

1.6 CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

The Camden Head Pilot Station has cultural significance on local, national and international levels.

Watermark, Australia's only international nature writing event was initiated by foundation Pilot Station committee members and in 2003 the Pilot Station Committee and the College auspiced the inaugural *Watermark* event which is now presented biannually. From 1998 to 2004 the Pilot Station also hosted national and international nature writers by Watermark Literary Association. The literature of nature and place continues to be fostered by the Camden Haven based Watermark Literary Association. (13)

The Pilot Station also provides a focus for the role the arts can play in enhancing community well being, for expressing community identity and values.

A major Pilot Station program since 2001 has been to host in partnership with the former Community Cultural Development Board of the Australia Council the only national residency for outstanding Australian community cultural development artists. For two months each year the Pilot Station and the local community has been enriched by a series of outstanding artists who live at the Station and work with the community sharing their experience and skills. (14)

The Camden Haven community is rich in arts and cultural organisations and this interest is fostered by the work of the College. The Pilot Station is a potential source of inspiration, education and a venue for all such groups.