



Medals galore at National Kayak Championships. See page 6.

Avoca Lagoon – Worst on the Coast!

For the third year running Avoca Lagoon has the dubious honour of being rated the worst for water quality, not just on the Central Coast, but in the bottom 5% for NSW. A big, fat 'F' rating.

What is being done about it? Not much, unfortunately, but we are making a start. A packed meeting of locals met with Council officials on June 10th to find answers. The result was an informative presentation on Council's management of Central Coast waterways. It turns out a lot of good work has been done by Council, but most of its over the hill at Terrigal.

At Avoca, apart from an audit, there has been no remedial work and no funding allocated for future works. We've been told there will be no short fix and it will be a long-term effort before we get to see any improvement. Residents are rightly dismayed at the low priority given to the worst performing lagoon under Council's management.

Following our meeting with Council, we hope a more positive, active way forward may be provided to get something done.

We're asking Council for:

- A budgeted strategic plan for the rehabilitation of the Lagoon and foreshore.
- Implementation of an Avoca sewerage pipe inspection program and allocation of capital funds to rectify identified issues.
- A review of storm water outlets and remedial actions to be put in place.
- A plan for reinvigoration of the once prolific wildlife.
- Formation of a working group between ABCA and Council.
- Assign a Council official to be responsible for ensuring Avoca lagoon works are undertaken to the agreed strategic plan.

We understand funding is a problem but believe the worst waterway contamination on the Central Coast needs a higher profile. Local businesses and tourism deserve better. We look forward to working with Council to develop and implement works to improve water quality and amenity of Avoca lagoon. (State government grants may be the answer).

We also thank Council staff who attended our meeting for their genuine interest and will to move forward.



(for more on our 'F' rating, see <https://www.yourvoiceourcoast.comm/waterways>)



Michael Scobie OAM The eyes have it

Michael Scobie's career as an ophthalmologist got off to a flying start. With wife, Susan, he had been touring Europe in a campervan arriving in London with his Australian medical degree but rather short of money, a fortunate sighting of an ad in a medical journal for a trainee eye doctor proved fortuitous. Dialling the number, he managed to get through to the senior consultant, who asked no questions about his eye expertise but merely said, 'Where are you from?' To which Michael replied, 'Australia.' The response changed everything. 'We love Australians. You start on Monday.' So began three years of UK work and training on the tiny organ, the eye. His supervisor was an Indian doctor, Manek Patel, who had wonderfully sensitive hands and technique, Michael recalls. It was he who locked in Michael's love of eye surgery. Returning to Australia fully qualified, Michael came to Gosford in 1978 where he practised until retirement in 2001.

Most intraocular eye surgery is done through a microscope, and cataract removal is the most common procedure, involving removal of the eye's cloudy lens and replacing it with a clear plastic one. When an artificial lens is installed, it has a fixed focus. Amazingly, you can put lenses of different focal length, one in each eye and the brain will adjust to the differences in refraction, using one eye for long sight, and the other for close-up vision.

The first installation of replacement lenses came about in a strange way. During the Second World War, a British ophthalmologist, Harold Ridley, observed that pilots who crashed sometimes had shards of Perspex windscreens embedded in their eyes, foreign bodies which the eye did not reject. Ridley realised that he could implant shaped Perspex lenses in eyes, and they too would not be rejected.

In addition to his practice Michael began going to remote Aboriginal communities in far north Queensland, following in the footsteps of Fred Hollows. This led to annual trips to

Papua New Guinea, over 16 years in all. There were almost no established facilities and Michael and his team had to take absolutely everything with them, 'a list of items as long as your arm', he says, including a specially modified travelling microscope. The lenses were sourced from factories established by Fred Hollows in Kathmandu and Eritrea. Michael was able to reduce costs for the lenses needed for his work in New Guinea to \$20, compared with the \$200 plus one would pay in Australia.

It was tremendously satisfying work, giving sight back to local people with no expectation of ever seeing again. He remembers two old blind men who had been brought into his clinic on a truck, opting to walk a long way back to their village, so enthralled were they to now see their countryside which had dimmed gradually over the years. Then, there was a little old lady squatting in a corner of the clinic, so wizened and frail that he wondered whether it was worth operating on her. But then how delightful it was to see her, sight regained, rise from her bed and jubilantly dance around the room.

As we talk, a sea eagle drifts lazily past the magnificent view from their house on the cliffs above Avoca. It reminds me to ask Michael about his passion for bird spotting. It's an interest that developed on a fishing trip to Cape York. One of the party was fascinated by Australia's rich birdlife, and Michael caught the bug, ticking off birds wherever he went. He plays me an app on his phone which gives you the pictures and plays the calls of any bird you want to identify. He's coordinator of the Central Coast Bird Club involving regular meetings and "birding" trips near and far. Michael and Susan have had a wonderfully rich life together here on the coast, raised three daughters, and are now enjoying themselves immensely as they explore Australia and the world. Then, there's his OAM to show that the country appreciates what he's done as well.

Mike Rubbo



Editorial credits: Steve Fortey: Editor | Julie Pickett: Advertising

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Also if you'd like to contribute to the newsletter, get in touch.

President's Report

Our front-page article on the continued poor water quality of Avoca Lagoon is a story that could easily be another exercise in Council bashing. It's become quite a popular past time. But to the credit of the actual workers on the Council, they have shown genuine concern and a strong will to help. Unfortunately, we must all deal with a Council that is seemingly dysfunctional due to no fault of the workers at the coal face. On Page 10 there's an interesting article by Ian Carruthers on this topic.

A worthy initiative by locals is the formation of a Landcare group that intends to meet regularly to work on ridding our foreshores of noxious weeds and helping to reinvigorate our beautiful Lagoon. Graeme Murray is the instigator, see his article on Page 5 and give this great idea some thought.

In this issue we give prominence to two extraordinarily successful clubs that call Heazlett Park home. The Avoca Beach Rugby club has been a force since winning the foundation premiership back in 1975 and is one of the most successful clubs on the Coast. The Avoca Kayak Club, by contrast, has only been in operation a short while, but has achieved astounding results at the highest levels. Both clubs thrive on enthusiastic volunteer coaches, officials and supporters. Clubs like this, the Surf Club and the Board Riders Club are what good communities are all about.

At the time of writing the old house next to the theatre, 'la Paloma', is about to be demolished. It

is no longer habitable. Beth Hunter has told the ABCA this should not be read as a sign that construction on the proposed theatre complex is about to begin. Meanwhile, the single screen is in operation and seemingly doing well, as many of us hope it will continue to do.

The lengthy battles to stop two major developments – the old Bowtell's Caravan Park site and the Bangaloe Stud site – are continuing. At the time of writing both DAs are in the hands of the NSW Government's Local Planning Panel. Both DAs have had significant community opposition and we have our fingers crossed that common sense will prevail and the Panel will rule these proposals as unsuitable for Avoca and its neighbours.

The Rock Pool continues to astound and amaze us. It is a constant source of beachside conversation and multiple theories. It has old timers scratching their heads. Only weeks ago it was remarkable how much sand had disappeared, and how hundreds of rocks appeared 'out of nowhere'. Making your way to the water was an exercise in nimble footedness. Complaints were made. We wrote to Council. We phoned them. Then, miraculously, the ocean delivered a big dump of sand which covered most of the recalcitrant boulders. For a week or so no one stubbed a toe. Then the next big seas arrived, in an awesome display of mother nature's powers, the sand absconded, and the rocks reappeared. As I write, the sand is back. Its bucket and spade heaven. Is this the future?

A popular theory is that the design of the new foreshore has changed the dynamics and in big seas the wave action becomes more damaging when it hits the impervious surfaces of the sandstone stairs. That would be a pity because most of us love the new foreshore.

Good luck to all involved in the 5 Lands Walk on 26th June. A great day, get out and enjoy it.

Steve Fortey

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Avoca Beach Rugby Club

THE SHARKS – More than just a Rugby Club

From humble beginnings in 1975 when it won the inaugural Central Coast competition the Avoca Beach Rugby Club has grown to its current status as one of the premier clubs on the coast with over 320 players in teams fielded from age 6 and upwards.

As a club we are extremely proud of our juniors placing an emphasis on “having fun”. You will see lots of our grade players and coaches taking time out to coach junior teams and investing in the rugby basics which is clearly part of a winning formula with the club being junior club champions for the past 2 seasons as well as picking up numerous premierships. The success of the juniors is further manifested in the number of players in our senior teams who have come through our junior programme.

Female rugby participation continues to grow with a number of junior girl’s teams playing in the 7’s format each Saturday as well a very strong senior women’s team in the CCRU competition which has been upgraded from 7’s to 10’s this season.

As a club we are performing well across all senior grades this year with our women’s, 3rd, and 2nd grade men all currently at the top of their competitions. 1st Grade are currently in the top 5 but struggling with consistency week in week out and this is now a key focus for the coaching staff to ensure that we come home strongly.

At the time of writing, we lead the senior CCRU Club Championship which is a great indicator of how well the club’s on field efforts as a whole are going.

The club has seen some important player milestones recently. First Grade and Club coach Justin Staben likes to keep his hand in on the field and recently at the home game Vs Terrigal Justin played his 300th grade game for the club – making the moment more memorable was that he got to play the same game with his son and join a growing list of father-son combinations showing we truly are a family club.

There may well be more to achieve for Justin because to date with 52 games in our juniors he could well surpass 400 games for the club! (subject to of course to his hamstring , calves and speed not diminishing and/or exploding).

On the same weekend the club celebrated 200 grade games from veteran centre Matt Anderson.

Both players are a great showcase for our junior system and their loyalty to the blue, green and gold!

Away from Rugby, we as a club are proud participants in a Gosford North Rotary and Lifeline initiative called Save Our Kids from Suicide (SOKS) which is targeted at assisting Central Coast communities to reduce young people’s life-threatening behaviours. Lifeline have run courses for our members providing additional skills to identify and assist those who need our support.

Each winter Saturday at our home ground either our junior or senior teams are playing. It’s a great afternoon for the rugby enthusiasts and everyone is welcome to come down and support the teams.

Our sponsors who include many local businesses and our supporters help make the club what it is. Their support is very much appreciated.



Justin Staben



Priya Lama in the thick of the action



Elle Mitchell - distributor



Taylor Bateman on the burst

AVOCA BEACH



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Avoca Beach Rugby Club playing the game they play in Heaven since 1975

Come along and join in the fun. Every Saturday we field teams from Under 6’s to Senior grade throughout the season at the Sharkpool (Heazlett Park). Both male & female players are welcome

New players can contact Club Coach Justin Staben on mob 0439 139 430 or Junior VP Julia Niness Mob 0400 548 646

The Club appreciates the continued support of all our local businesses, sponsors & supporters

See our web page <https://www.avocabeachrugby.club> or check out our Facebook page Avoca Beach Rugby Club -The Sharks

More info by email at avocasharks@gmail.com



Avoca – A Call to Arms

For tens of thousands of years people have lived around the Avoca area. First Nation tribes, the Guringai, Wanaginee and their neighbours, the Darkinjung and the Awabakal to the north, inhabited what we all know as this magnificent strip of coastline. Our southern headland (Winnie Bay and Captain Cook Lookout) was called 'Bulbararing', our beach (Avoca) 'Bulbararing Bay'. Oceans and the lake were teaming with fish, the rocks, beach and lagoon bottom full of shellfish and meat in the form of the wallaby (which still can be seen today in our hinterlands) enough to sustain the people for generation after generation after generation. Like us, they loved living here, why wouldn't they? Kids playing on the beach, swimming in the lake and sea, strolls along the beach, fishing off the rocks, beach and lake, we all do it or at least have done it. Quite the utopian image really – only one big difference – these people lovingly managed the animated landscape intimately conjoined and responsible to their family, tribe, future generations and their lore. We, on the other hand, have taken it for granted, neglected and tried to tame this place we profess to love.

Our bush and sand dunes are now full of exotic weeds and rabbits (next time you're near the Shark Tower take a look). Our lake, once again given an "F" in government audits, is full

of silt and other latent pollutants from careless developments – what will it look like for our future generations? Is this to be our legacy?

For years Avoca Beach has been home to great athletes, surfers, lifesavers (Australian champions), great artists and musicians. Perhaps it's time for us all to have that uncomfortable look at ourselves and step up as a community. Let's stop pointing the finger at others to blame and fix what is essentially our problem and of our making.

A small group is in the process of starting up a Bush and Lake care group with the primary focus in restoring our dunes, foreshores and lake systems back to some form of decent state. Sure! A small step in a huge task which will take years, but hey, we've got to start somewhere! Come on Avoca, we are a great community, one of champions, let's get on the ground, accept this as our responsibility and challenge, get tangible and do something for ourselves, our community, our kid's kids and finally out of respect for those ancient peoples, past generations, who cared, worked, looked after and loved this country, Bulbararing.

If interested in being a part of this effort please contact me: Graham Murray (0418 488 038) or email: muzzaslifestyle@gmail.com





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Avoca Kayak Club – 2021 National Championships

West Lakes, South Australia 19-23 May



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Just a few weeks before the 2021 National Championships were due to be held at SIRC in Penrith, it was announced that toxic algae had taken hold of the waterway and the event would be moved. An anxious few days followed as we waited to hear where the race would be held. Finally, West Lakes in Adelaide was declared, and a flurry of flights and accommodation was booked.

Scott Lawsen and Paul Hutchinson, having only hours earlier returned the trailer loaded with boats from the All-Schools Championships in Grafton made a quick change over for the long drive to Adelaide. After 17 hrs of getting better acquainted, 1456kms, a box or two of chocolates and lots of "guess where we are now" tourist photos, a weary but enthusiastic Scott and Pommie arrived at West Lakes with the trailer for what was to be an incredible week of racing. So how did we do? Read on to find out.

DAY 1 – Wednesday 19th May

Day 1 of the Championships was for the pro's.

With only 65 days until the Tokyo Olympics, it was an opportunity to see some of Australia's best athletes on the water.

The First medal winner for Avoca was Freya Alston, claiming Gold in the Women's 1000m K1, closely followed with silvers for Ella Beere, Georgia Sinclair and Natalia Drobot and a bronze for Jemma Smith in the Open women K4 500m. Gold for Ella in the U23 500m K2 and silver for Georgia and Jemma. Over in the men's event Fletcher Armstrong won a silver medal with partner Jackson Collins.

DAY 2 – Thursday 20th May

With 83 races on schedule, the sun came out, the wind died down and just like the waterway, the medals for AKC just kept flowing.

Our junior boys Harrison Blake, Campbell Connolly and Julian Glew were lucky enough to have Olympic Athlete Aylce Wood give them some pro tips before their first race, with the boys clearly taking her advice and bagging a Silver Medal in the U14 K4 500m alongside guest paddler Austin from the Illawarra club. Well done boys!

Our third Gold of the regatta went to Dylan Littlehales in the 200m para and more great results with Bronze for Jemma Smith and Georgia Sinclair in the open women's K2 200m.

Day 3 – Friday 21 May

The weather just kept getting better and so did our athletes.

Fantastic results for Natalia Drobot racing up an age group and winning gold in the 1000m, 500m and 200m U18K1 – sensational races to watch. Well done to Bailey Connolly crossing the line in 1st with the NSW K4 500m state team.

The afternoons races brought more hardware for the U14 Boys, with the lads taking Silver this time in the K4 200m as well as Harrison and Julian making the 500m final joined by Campbell in the 1000m final.

And in the 500m Open men A final Fletch Armstrong finished a great 7th with Fletcher Cunningham also 7th in the B final.

We are enormously proud of our U16 girls Emerson Connolly, Ella Lawson, Sirisha Wasal and Mikayley Fisher racing hard and having fun, with Emerson making the final of the 1000m K1.



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Day 4 – Saturday 22nd May Pass the Deep Heat....

Day four was an exciting one to wake up to, with all of our open Women Ella Beere, Jemma Smith, Georgia Sinclair and Freya Alston making it to the semis for the 200 K1 with Ella straight to final, and our open Men 200m paddlers Fletcher Armstrong in the A final & Fletcher Cunningham and Sam Hutchinson in B final.

With plenty of muscle on show, team supporter and Mum, Renu Wasal kept an eye out for any athletes that might need a massage, and the wonderful Carolyn Connolly and Louise Blake both taking some awesome photos of our teams' races.

The afternoon brought with it not only more sunshine, but a great result for Fletch Armstrong and Jackson Collins taking bronze in the 1000m K2 Open men.

Day 5 – Sunday 23rd May Final day, but it's not the last of the medals.... and it was starting to look like the team would be charged for excess luggage on the flight home.

Lots of great results on this the last day of the 2021 National Championships. First race of the day was the B final women's K1 200m where we had Jemma Smith coming home 7th.

In the A final Ella Beere was 4th Georgia Sinclair 6th and Freya Alston 9th.

Over to the men's U18 500m with Bailey Connolly winning the B final, and the open Men's K4 Riley Fitzsimmons, Lachlan Tame and partners won gold with Fletcher Cunningham, Fletch Armstrong and partners in silver medal position.

We saw more great work from the U16 girls K4 crew of Emerson Connolly, Ella Lawson, Mikayley Fisher and Sirisha Wasal racing to 6th in the 500m Final.

Last races of the meet were the State v State K4 500's always exciting to watch. Natalia Drobot in the victorious U18 NSW crew Georgia Sinclair and Jemma Smith 3rd in the open women and Lachlan Tame, Riley Fitzsimmons and Fletcher Armstrong 2nd in the open men.

Even though a lot of medals were won, they were by no means the best part of this 2021 Sprint Championships – the comradery, the friendships, the laughs, the hugs, the tears, the volunteers, the coaches and the cheers all made for a phenomenal week.

Huge congratulations to all our competitors and thanks to Nikki Beere for all her work in the tower, Scott Lawsen Jeff Beere and Pommie for towing the trailer, Scott Cunningham with his coaching and the parents with their enthusiastic cheering; and not forgetting Angelica back home on Avoca Lake keeping training going while we were away.

That's a wrap of what was the 2021 National Championships.

Anyone interested in having a go at Kayaking can get in touch with Pommie on 0414630012.

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Natalia Drobot

If you are looking for an example of how hard work pays off, go no further than Natalia Drobot.

At only 16 years of age, Natalia is a dual Australian Champion in two very demanding sports.

The Year 11 Kincumber High School student is one of many fine, dedicated athletes connected with the Avoca Kayak Club and the Avoca Beach Surf Lifesaving Club.

In April this year at Surf Life Saving's 'Aussies' in Queensland Natalia beat the best junior surf ski paddlers in the country to take out gold in the Under 17 Single Ski race. With her talented Avoca teammates, Mia Cracknell and Bronte Ayres, she also picked up a couple of Bronze medals.

Fast forward a few short weeks and Natalia was down in South Australia competing for the Avoca Kayak Club in the National Kayak Championships, where she showcased her outstanding competitive spirit once again. Competing in an older age group she dominated, winning a trifecta of Gold in the under 18 1000m, 500m and 200m K1 (singles) races. For variety she teamed up with competitors from other clubs in mixed races to pick up another 4 gold. On the final day Natalia represented NSW in the K4 500m and it was gold again.

A total of 9 gold medals, a silver, and two bronzes at two National championships in the space of a month. Her favourite race? It was difficult to say, but her first response was the Taplin relay at the Australian Surf Life Saving titles, where she shared a bronze medal with friends.



Natalia's secret? She really enjoys training and pushing herself to the limit. Avoca Kayak Club president, Paul Hutchison, says Natalia is a great young athlete who trains extremely hard to make her amazing wins look easy. As an accidental gym buddy, I've been a witness to her sheer commitment and willingness to test her body. All the while she's clearly enjoying herself. It's clear too, that the friendships she enjoys while training and competing mean a lot to her.

What about the future for Natalia? It's early days yet, and she doesn't want to get ahead of herself. Certainly, based on her performances to date she has every right to set herself the highest of goals, but I've a feeling she would be happy to take it one step at a time and enjoy the present company of her friends.

Footnote: I shared this article with Natalia before printing and she had one request, a thank you to all those in both clubs who have supported and encouraged her. And a special thanks to her parents, especially taxi driver mum. SF (Editor)

“No Ship” – 10 Year Anniversary

13th April 2021, marked ten years since the retired naval warship, ex-HMAS Adelaide, was sunk at Avoca Beach.

In late January 2010, another lazy Avoca summer was ending when word trickled through town that a four thousand tonne warship was going to be sunk in our bay. Say what? Most locals had no idea about this proposal and felt blindsided by the decision. Details were scarce, which fueled apprehension. Apparently, the state government had already spent millions preparing the ship to form an artificial reef for divers and it was going down at the end of March.

Surfers were the first to rise up. How would it affect our beach and waves? They consulted coastal morphologist, Professor Ian Goodwin, who determined the ship's central placement would impact wave angles and natural sand replenishment, particularly erosion around the lagoon.

Several local marine scientists enquired about the environmental impact studies undertaken for placing such a large vessel in a high swell area. To their dismay, comprehensive investigations using local in situ wave data had not been done.

Some local health professionals questioned whether toxic materials remained onboard: if so, how would they affect community health? Research revealed that lead paint, polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) and asbestos were impossible to be stripped completely from within the ship's superstructure. Since this was the closest warship to be sunk next to a populated community, the long-term health effects were unknown.

A meeting was hastily scheduled at North Avoca SLSC with government officials hoping to put local resident fears to rest. But after clarifying very little, the government spokesperson simply declared, “This ship is going down on the 27th of March whether you like it or not.” Cue giant red flag, an irate audience, and the birth of the No Ship Action Group (NSAG), whose sole purpose was to ensure the safety of Avoca Beach and its community.

NSAG arranged a public information rally on the 6th March which attracted around six hundred people. Michelle Meares, a young mum from North Avoca, came to the rally and offered to help. She rapidly collated information the group had gathered and presented it to the Environmental Defenders Office (EDO), requesting they represent NSAG pro bono. A photo taken on a recent tour of the ship of severed electrical cables weeping PCBs clinched their support. Since the ship was built, PCBs have been classified as the largest carcinogenic risk of any environmental contaminant ever made and banned worldwide.

The ship was due to be towed to Avoca in a matter of days. To allow more time for community concerns to be addressed, the EDO agreed to contest it. We felt incredibly fortunate and relieved to have such high-calibre support.

Wednesday 24th March was our day in court and the tow was scheduled for 6am the following morning. The judge acknowledged around five million dollars had been spent preparing the ship for scuttling and close to a million on the imminent sinking spectacle. He recognized cancelling the event would cause large scale inconvenience and expense but letting it go ahead left no time to ascertain if the ship

was cleared of toxic materials. The debate continued until the end of the day when finally, the judge granted a stay of execution. The scuttling was scuttled!

There was a brief surreal moment of stunned silence as the news spread. Unfortunately, some businesses and organisations sustained financial loss from the sudden cancellation. NSAG members were threatened with violence and even death threats through social media and phone messages. Local media fanned the rage. Wider media outlets like the Sydney Morning Herald and ABC News reported more favourably, recognising the important implications the decision had on sea dumping, due process, and the environment.

There was an enormous groundswell of support and appreciation from the local community and beyond. Many environmental protection leaders and groups actively got behind our cause, including Greens MP Ian Cohen, Surfrider Foundation, the National Toxics Network, and Dr Tony Adams, former Chief Medical Officer of Australia.

The court hearing was set for July. NSAG members got to work finding expert witnesses, legal representation, researching and commissioning scientific reports to support our case. With the generous support of local businesses and community, we fundraised a staggering \$140,000 to pay our expenses. The state and federal government disclosed spending over \$1 million on expert witnesses and a polished team of at least eight barristers and lawyers to fight us.

On the first day of the hearing it was acknowledged that lead paint is toxic and should never be deliberately placed in the marine environment: it bioaccumulates in marine life and humans, which can lead to neurological damage, especially in children. Four government expert witness statements were read out declaring no lead paint remained on the ship.

On the second day, our expert witness Mr Werner Hoyt stepped onto the American built warship, accompanied by the judge. Within 15 minutes the California based marine engineer and naval architect identified over 23,000 square metres of lead paint, and vast quantities of fiberglass insulation that he advised would mobilise into the environment during the first big swell. For the rest of the day the government's legal team flipped the debate and argued that because the estimated 2.3 tonnes of lead in the paint will leach into the marine environment gradually, it is no longer harmful in a diluted state. Our expert witness Dr Peter deFur, who specialises in ecological risk and toxicology, strongly refuted this reasoning.

The hearing lasted four days, and although the sinking was eventually granted permission, the judge imposed substantial additional cleaning conditions before the ship could be sunk. It took almost a year to remove all of the flaking lead-based paint, PCB contaminated electrical cabling and fiberglass insulation. The 138 metre long warship that will break down in front of our beautiful beach for generations to come was made significantly cleaner due to the actions of our small but mighty group.

The ship was finally towed to Avoca several days prior to

the scuttling to prepare it with explosives. The only thing that could prevent the detonation now was the presence of marine mammals within a kilometre of the vessel. As a final protest, NSAG engaged an indigenous whale caller, Lila Kirby, to perform a ceremonial summoning of the magical creatures a few days prior to the scheduled sinking.



NSAG President Quentin Riley after the police asked him to call off the dolphins 13/11/2011

On Tuesday, 13th April 2011 thousands flocked to Avoca Beach, eager to witness the contentious warship get blown up at 10:30am. At 9:00am Lila asked the No Shippers to hold hands and enter the ocean. The icy water numbed our ankles as we stared at the hulking grey nemesis that had turned our lives upside down.

“There are no whales, but her soldiers are coming” Lila said quietly.

We nodded respectfully, unsure what the Wiradjuri elder actually meant. At 10:29am a flare signalled the button was about to be pushed. Onlookers strained to get the best vantage while the No Shippers turned their backs. After a long pause, nothing happened. Suddenly a collective cry of “Dolphins!” ripped through the crowd as the silver saviours shattered the surface and the scuttling plans.

A marine biologist watching from the cliff above counted at least two hundred dolphins, a sight she had never witnessed in her forty two years of living at Avoca Beach. The sinking was delayed by nearly two hours, the news helicopters ran out of fuel and the No Shippers rejoiced that Mother Nature had the final word.

Since then NSAG has remained vigilant, regularly checking ex-HMAS Adelaide monitoring compliance. In 2018 we assisted a Tasmanian community group to stop ex-HMAS

Darwin from being sunk in the pristine Bay of Fires. The whole experience inspired Michelle Meares to complete a law degree, and recently she was appointed a Councillor of the NSW Law Society.

Ex-HMAS Adelaide was the sixth warship to be sunk as an artificial reef in Australia, but the first to be contested. This case raised global consciousness of sea dumping, the health risks, exorbitant costs and environmental irresponsibility of not recycling thousands of tonnes of aluminium and steel. The Commonwealth government later announced the navy can no longer dispose of military waste in Australian waters and three ships have since been sent to America for their green ship recycling programme. We may have lost the battle but it seems we won the war.

For more information, visit www.noship.com.au

Virginia Riley



No Shippers at the scuttling of ex-HMAS Adelaide on 13th April 2011



NSAG Public Information Rally 6th March 2010 - attended by approximately 600 people.



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Central Coast Council – Future Structure

The past year has been disastrous for Central Coast residents as a result of financial mismanagement by the newly amalgamated Council incurring an eye-watering level of debt in a short period.

There have been many immediate repercussions - beginning with removal of the Chief Executive and Chief Financial Officer, terminating elected Councillors, and appointment of an Administrator. Many Council staff lost their jobs, Council assets are up for sale and Council functions cut.

The Administrator's report strongly pointed to failings of the then CEO and CFO, and at Councillors themselves. He indicated Councillors should have been more strongly focused on pressing hard questions on the financial situation. He attributed Councillors' failings to a lack of collaboration and cohesion brought about by party political tribal behaviours.

Residents are coping a large increase in rates, a substantial part of which is a special debt levy.



At Avoca lake bridge learning of 42% rates rise!
(Apologies to Edvard Munch.)

Avoca residents and others on the Central Coast are stuck with these consequences. It is easy to be overwhelmed by this bad news.

An important question is the future structure of Council.

A Referendum will be held in our Local Government Area on 4 September – the same day as elections of Councillors for all other Local Governments. (The Central Coast Council election of Councillors has been deferred until late next year; meanwhile Council will remain under an Administrator (now Rik Hart) and an independent public inquiry is underway into the financial mismanagement issue.)

In the Referendum, residents will be asked a question on reducing the number of Central Coast Councillors from 15 to 9; and consequentially reducing the number of Wards from 5 to 3.

Why do that? The Administrator's rationale is that fewer Councillors would engender more cohesion, more in the character of a company Board.

The number of Councillors deserves some thought and testing. Most candidates when they stand for election are wearing the badge of a political party, with some proclaiming as independents. Behaviours and voting patterns at Council meetings and in other Councillor activities often reflect this political tribalism – much in the same way as on the Federal and State political stages. It is hard to be confident that simply reducing Councillor numbers will change that intrinsic problem – Councillors will still have their political badges. Justification on grounds of cost savings doesn't really cut it when Councillors receive a paltry \$32k annually.

Perhaps we electors bear some responsibility for securing better performance of Councillors by trying to find out what experience candidates actually have in governance of a large organization, and not simply aligning our votes with a political banner. And perhaps the State Government and the CEO need to invest more at the outset in training Councillors

on what governance expectations are required of them – bearing in mind that few of the Councillors elected for the first term of Central Coast Council had previous experience in the role.

The intended benefits of reducing the number of Wards seem not to have been argued. Wards will obviously be bigger, meaning increased responsibility for Councillors.

A critical feature for the future of Central Coast Council is the interface between the community and the elected Councillors during their terms of office. The Councillors need to understand the different needs and circumstances of diverse locations, and to be accessible – this is especially the case for Avocans wanting to maintain the village and low key style and amenity.

Central Coast Council has almost the largest population among NSW local government areas and it is growing rapidly. Our Community Association, overall, had an effective and regular engagement with our current elected Ward Councillors via meetings and correspondence. We doubt that fewer Councillors in fewer Wards will continue to provide us with the degree of community access we need.

We all need to think carefully about the Referendum in September and whether we are going to support or oppose the proposal on reduction of Councillors and Wards. And now that the referendum has been delinked from an election of Councillors, will enough people get out to vote on the referendum to make it a valid expression of community view?

It is easy to view cynically that Australia could do with fewer politicians generally and therefore fewer local Councillors – but the recent Central Coast Council fiasco demonstrates getting governance right matters to us all. There is much to reflect upon.

Ian Carruthers



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