

CATHO CHRONICLE

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE CATHERINE HILL BAY PROGRESS ASSOCIATION
ESTABLISHED 1901



ICONIC CATHO JETTY TO BE DEMOLISHED

The NSW State Government has announced plans to demolish Catherine Hill Bay's famous jetty.

In a letter to residents and community groups from the NSW Dept of Resources, Primary Industries & Regional Development, it states that a recent structural report has concluded the jetty is beyond saving. In its place, an installation is proposed to commemorate the jetty's significance to the town.

"The local community strongly opposes the plans for demolition," said Sue Whyte, Vice President of the CHB Progress Association. "The Catho Jetty is utterly unique, a regional icon, and it would seem the State Government doesn't care about the Hunter's cultural and industrial heritage. They had every opportunity to take the initiative and keep it properly maintained. It's a pretty clear case of demolition by neglect."

The jetty, located at the southern end of the bay, is the most prominent reminder of Catherine Hill Bay's mining history and the last remaining coal loading sea jetty in Australia. A coal loader was first constructed at the site 150 years ago and twice rebuilt over the intervening years. The third and current jetty was built in 1974.

SPRING 2025 ISSUE...

**AURORA AUSTRALIS
COMES TO TOWN**

LANDCARE NEWS

**CALL FOR
VOLUNTEERS**

WHALE SEASON

**CATHO'S SISTER
JETTY**

**NEXT PA MEETING
at Catho SLSC at
5pm Sun 2nd Nov
(combined meeting
with CHB Alliance)**

Cover shot: Jetty sunrise by Jim Picot.
Will it soon disappear from our
coastline?

Iconic Catho Jetty to be demolished (continued)

No information has yet been provided on the timing and duration of the demolition.

The State Government is planning to conduct public consultation sessions at Catho Surf Club at the following times and dates:

1. Thursday 25 September 2025 - 5pm to 7.30pm
2. Saturday 18 October 2025 - 9:30am to 12pm (this has been booked to be held outside of the School Holiday period)

Register your interest in an information session at chbjetty@dpird.com.au.

Planning for our Past: LMCC's Heritage Plan

Lake Macquarie City Council is working with the community to develop a Heritage Interpretation Plan (HIP) as part of the Catherine Hill Bay Master Plan. The HIP will cover the Surf Club Precinct, the Middle Camp Precinct and the connecting Coastal Walkway. Catherine Hill Bay is a town rich in coal mining, maritime, and Aboriginal history, and the plan will help share our unique story with visitors and future generations with the aim of retaining the charm and authenticity that makes Catho so special.

A community workshop held back in May gave locals a chance to share their knowledge and ideas. Many members of the PA were there to contribute their decades of local history and insight. Some key ideas from the workshop included:

- Building the long-planned Coastal Walk with heritage signage to tell our story along the way,
- Reinstating the Skelty Bridge across the stream with picnic shelters and safer pedestrian access,
- Making sure new works blend with the natural landscape.

Concerns were raised by residents about:

- Overdevelopment of carparks,
- Use of non-local materials (like sandstone),
- The need to maintain our town's natural contours and open spaces,
- Keeping signage and infrastructure simple, with a "less is more" approach,
- The need to plant more shade trees in community areas for sun protection.

Community members also suggested that changeable heritage displays could be created, and using a number of lockable boxes along one wall of the Community Hall to support school visits and community events.

Next steps in the process are ongoing consultation with the NSW Heritage Office, refinement of the design, and ensuring that Aboriginal & industrial heritage are respectfully and accurately interpreted.

The HIP has the potential to create a wonderful open-air museum within the Master Plan area. However the PA believes that, given Catherine Hill Bay is a State Heritage-listed Township, a more wholistic Heritage Plan is required that also acknowledges the significance of items like the Catho Pub, the Police buildings, and other heritage structures and relics.



A 'less is more' approach to signage & infrastructure is preferred by residents

Trivia Afternoon!

The CHB Community Alliance cordially invites you to a **Trivia Afternoon** with details as follows:

Date: Saturday, 13 September

Time: 2:00 PM – 5:00 PM

Location: Surf Life Saving Club – Upstairs Room

Tickets Cost: \$10.00 per seat – 8 seats per table.

Book a full table & get 5 free tickets in the Lucky Door Prize! Limited tables – secure your spot early!

Food & Drinks: No BYO – Support the Surf Club by purchasing beer, wine & soft drinks. Free coffee & tea provided. Bring a plate to share with your neighbours.

What's On: An afternoon full of fun & trivia celebrating all things Catho! Silent auction – bid on items donated by sponsors & fellow Catho citizens. Lucky door prize for each attendee!

Why We're Doing It: Money raised through the event will go towards enhancements to the new Catherine Hill Bay community park.

Book Your Tickets: Contact Carmen on 412 465 639.

No refunds and No BYO. We hope to see you there!



Call for Volunteers for Community Events

Would you like to get involved in helping to organise community events in Catherine Hill Bay?

We're putting out a call for volunteers who'd like to help bring people together through local events—whether you have time to lend a hand or ideas to share, we'd love to hear from you.

One of the main goals of the CHB Alliance and the CHB Progress Association working together has been to build community, and part of that is to create events that help residents connect, get to know one another, and feel part of the community. A number of joint events have been held over the past year or two including:

- Easter picnics with egg hunts and kids' activities,
- A community Christmas party (with a visit from Santa),
- A fundraising BBQ for the Rural Fire Service,



Call for Volunteers for Community Events (continued)

- Meet and greet wine and cheese night for new residents,
- Annual meetings with guest speakers (e.g. reps from Surf Life Saving, our local MP, Parks & Wildlife),
- Community meetings and surveys to discuss proposed developments,
- Community Park Opening Celebration (cancelled unfortunately due to bad weather),
- Catho Trivia to raise funds for community projects.

We're always open to fresh ideas and extra hands. If you're interested in helping with upcoming events, just reply to this email—we'll keep you in the loop for our next planning catch-up.

To register your interest, simply send an email to chbcommunity@outlook.com with your name and contact details.

Aurora Australis comes to Catherine Hill Bay

Recently the Aurora Australis, usually only visible from latitudes further south, reached north to NSW to provide a rare glimpse for a few hardy sky-watchers, Newcastle photographer David Diehm managed to get a stunning image from Catho Lookout (see below).

"Catherine Hill Bay proved to be the perfect location thanks to its low light pollution," he said. "I'd been hoping to capture the southern lights for nearly a decade, always assuming I'd have to travel much further south. It was only the second time I'd captured the Aurora Australis, but the first time I'd seen the beams and glow visible to the naked eye, even if only for five magical minutes,"

For anyone interested in future southern light events, there are now apps available that track the predicted solar activity and aurora forecasts.



Photo courtesy of David Diehm Photography

Landcare News

Content courtesy of Landcare Team Leader - Carmel Brown

It's been a wet winter with some sessions cancelled, although the plants are thriving – both friend and foe. At Graveyard Beach on 3 June, Jayne, Lindsey and Jann were along the dune edge, filling Jayne's goat feed bags with the flowers and berries to take off-site. I worked down the south side of the main dunal area, and it was good to see so few Bitou bush seedlings - deadheading flowers and berries works! There was so much erosion. Our photo shows it filled with sand, but it is sadly now gone again.

We then changed our sessions to second Mondays of the month for the north site. On 13 July, Mina attacked the Lantana clump half way down the slope, Louise weeded through the high dune along the beach and extended our square a little further south, and I worked through the south half of the square. Peter meanwhile weeded down the north half until distracted by the sound of laughter and calls for help coming from the bushes on the north side of track. A lady had decided to grab some of the weeds there and tumbled in. Sadly, she didn't sign up. But Pete continued on over there, so we can now say we're at the site size of pre-COVID sessions. Bravo all!

On 24 July, we started our fourth Thursdays of the month for the south site. Pete and I attacked the Bitou bush beside the lone Banksia tree on the Pat Slaven Reserve slope with pruners and glysophate, I thought this will be fast but the steep sandy slope made it precarious, slow work. We certainly cleared a few metres, however, and hopefully leaving all the roots in and piling the branches back on top will stop erosion.

Good news! When I was over at the Landcare centre for the Lake Mac Landcare Volunteer Network committee meeting (all Landcarers are welcome), I mentioned to Simon that both sites need plants for the high edge. We toured the nursery, and now there are 80 plants itching to feel the Catho sand, thanks to Coco! Let's hope that with this rain, they grip the slopes and grow!



All are welcome at both the Graveyard and Pat Slaven Reserve sites between 3-5 pm for the Spring season. Come for the whole session, or any part that suits you. Bring a drink, gloves and your favourite weeding and pruning tools. We have some ourselves, if required. Wear long sleeves and long pants, and be sunsafe. Call me first on 0438 499636 if you're new for a brief induction before you come.

It's whale season!

The Chronicle recently spoke with Tracey, the Catho local who spends her days skippering the CoastXP boat tours. With a front-row seat to whale-watching and other wonders of the ocean, Tracey shares what it's like to turn a love of the sea into a daily workplace adventure.

Hi Tracey, it's seems like you've got the funnest job in all of Lake Macquarie. What were the qualifications that landed you the job of skippering the whale-watching tours?

I was qualified as a commercial boat driver from my time in the NSW Police Force. CoastXP were looking for a driver, so I went through their training program and landed the job. I must say, chasing whales is much more fun than chasing crooks.

When exactly is the whale migration season along our coast?

They migrate north from late May through to June and July, going to warmer waters in Queensland to mate and calf. The return southern migration occurs in around September and October. We see slightly different whale behaviour depending on the direction of the migration. In particular, going north we often see groups of males in a 'heat run', trying to impress the females. It can get quite wild out there!

Do you have a most memorable whale (or other marine life) encounter that's stayed with you?

Wow, there's so many. I find the whales to be so inquisitive, as if they're drawn to the sounds of people on the boat. Sometimes it's like they want to engage and put on a show by breaching around us. The drama and energy and sound of a huge humpback whale launching in the air is something you never forget. It's amazing every time.

Are there particular whale species that you see more often around here?

Mostly we see humpback whales. On rare occasions the ocean surprises us with less common whale species. For example, we had a huge southern right whale and her calf hanging around Redhead recently.



Tracey at the helm of the CoastXP boat (above), and a humpback whale surfaces off the local coast (right).



It's whale season! (continued)

As well as whale-watching, you also do a boat tour that explores the coast around Catho. What are some of the local landmarks that you visit?

We have the Adventure Tour, which is about observing the history of our shores and geological landmarks from Newcastle to Catho. As well as Moon Island and Reid's Mistake at the mouth of Lake Macquarie, we go to Caves Beach, the massive Pinny Beach Cave, and of course the Catho Jetty and the wreck of the SS Shamrock. Due to popular demand the lake vessel was added to the fleet to depart from Swansea wharf for whale watching and to be a versatile vessel for various operations and tours within Lake Mac. The lake tours include lunch stops at places like Tinta and Trinity Point.

Any tips for whale-watching from shore around Catho?

Flat Rock at Moonee is a great spot where the whale migration comes very close to shore, one of the best spots in the region. I've even had some close whale encounters while surfing at Moonee. In the future I'd love to do sunset whale tours down around that area - it would be spectacular!



Thanks so much for your time, Tracey. How can people join one of your tours?

Just go to our website at www.coastxp.com or phone us on 1300 852 682.



Exploring one of the extraordinary sea caves just north of Catherine Hill Bay

Vale Nell Hudson

Long-term Catho resident Nell Hudson sadly passed away in June.

Nell came to live in Lindsley Street, Catherine Hill Bay in the early 2000s. She was retiring from a remarkably busy life in Sydney where she often worked seven days a week. Nell had co-founded two highly successful businesses which had many franchises in the state. Sleep City and Everyday Living. Nell wanted a quieter life walking her two dogs on the beach but her zest for life soon saw her join the Association. She embraced the community, giving generously of her talents, time, and financial support.

She is greatly missed.

Did you know ...

.... that the jetty at Catherine Hill Bay has a sister jetty in Sydney Harbour?

Both these wharves were specialist coal loaders. The coal that came from the mine at Catherine Hill Bay was loaded onto collier ships, then travelled down the coast and into Sydney Harbour, where it was unloaded at Balls Head on the Waverton Peninsula. This coal was used to power industry and transport in New South Wales.



The coal loader jetty at Balls Head (left), and interpretive signage by North Sydney Council (above).

These colliers were the only ships that were not required to take on a pilot upon entering Sydney Harbour. They would unload and quickly return north to pick up the next load of coal. These journeys were so frequent that one of these "sixty milers" was rarely absent from the horizon. Many of the colliers sank in rough weather and some were even torpedoed during the Second World War.

Coal was a lifeblood for industry and shipping. The Balls Head Coal Loader, which operated from 1921, reflected Sydney's place as a major working port. Balls Head serviced the needs of steamships for the Wallarah Coal Company until the 1960s. After that it was used to despatch coal to overseas markets through Coal and Allied until 1992.

The Wallarah Colliery railway, which ran along the beachfront in Catherine Hill Bay, closed in 1963. After that, instead of bringing the coal onto the jetty in cars drawn by a steam locomotive, a 1,000 ft long retractable conveyor system was installed and became operational in 1964. Coupled with this, a new coal preparation plant was built on the hill above the jetty. Thousands of tons of sand and conglomerate were removed so that a huge storage bin system could be built on the headland.

In the opinion of Jack Thornton (Jetty Master 1964-1984), the installation of the new conveyor belt system “was the saviour of the Catherine Hill Bay coal mining industry”. The tonnage that could be moved exceeded that achieved in Newcastle at the time, so the process of loading coal was greatly speeded up.

“Coal was weighed then dumped into a road bin, [then] went down through the processing plant where it was graded into a 13,500-ton bin before being fed onto a conveyor belt and directly onto the jetty. So it sped the time up for loading, and the coal was under cover [and] not affected by the weather, and the operation was so much more profitable. Smaller ships would be in and out in under two hours ...we got it up to about 1250-1300 ton an hour. Newcastle was only loading 1000-1200 an hour at this time”.



Loading the collier “Camira” (left), and jetty view to the washery (above).

Jack – who was the second-last Jetty Master of the Catherine Hill Bay coal loader - maintained that he would fill a ship at the beginning of his shift and the same ship would have returned before his shift finished.

Disaster struck in May 1974 when a cyclone blew half of the jetty down. Machinery and wooden piles lay on the ocean bed and debris littered Middle Camp Beach. This same storm also forced the ship *Syigna* ashore at Stockton Bight north of Newcastle, the stern of which was unable to be salvaged. The rusted remnants of it can still be seen today. When the cyclone hit, Thiess Bros had just finished building a jetty on the south coast to load gravel for Pioneer. The coal company appointed Thiess without even calling for tenders and a new jetty of steel and concrete was built within twelve months.

Despite calls to extend the new jetty, it was only another six feet longer. “We had to cut the corner off that six feet so the ships wouldn’t get tangled around the sharp corner,” Jack said.

The depot at Balls Head was closed with the building of a new ship called the Wallarah in 1986. It had a carrying capacity of 6000 tons and could be loaded quickly at 2000 tons per hour by the new loader. The feature of this purpose-built ship was its extremely fast self-discharging system of 2500 tons per hour.

The coal from Catherine Hill Bay no longer needed to be taken to Sydney. Instead, it went directly to Newcastle where it was blended and loaded onto the 100,000 ton bulk carriers bound for overseas. The export trade had taken over.

It was such a spectacle to stand on the beach or cliff at Catho and watch the Wallarah come close to the shore, drop anchor and slowly rotate, seemingly to just miss colliding with the jetty; side thrusters going the ship settled next to the jetty bow pointing seawards. It was a sad day for the people of Catherine Hill Bay when mining finished in 2002, and the jetty closed.

Unlike the Catho Jetty, the jetty at Balls Head has not been subject to the rough weather of the open sea. So it remains, still standing but unusable. Indeed, now it is netted to stop floating debris from presenting a danger to the adjacent station HMAS Waterhen, which was commissioned in 1962 to support the Royal Australian Navy's mine warfare and patrol boat fleet. Currently, Transport NSW is exploring options to express the heritage values of the Coal Loader Wharf at Balls Point through heritage interpretation. This will involve the re-imagining of the wharf in a way which integrates heritage, public art, and urban design to share the significance of the site and place with the local community and visitors, in interesting, educational, and engaging ways. There is the intention to explore a number of options including 'interpretive signage, public art, reuse of salvaged materials, expressions of Country and creative lighting'.

Could this also be the future for the jetty site at Catherine Hill Bay?

RFS Bushfire 'Get Ready' Weekend

Is your property bushfire ready? The RFS Wallarah Brigade will be at Wrightson Park, Cams Wharf on Sunday 21st September between 10am-2pm. Come along and engage with your local brigade and ensure you are ready for summer.

PREPARE. ACT. SURVIVE.

For more information visit www.rfs.nsw.gov.au

How to become a PA member

Would you like to become a member or friend of the CHB Progress Association? The annual membership fee is \$20, or \$10 for pensioners. The membership form is attached to this newsletter email. Please email membership forms to accounts@catherinehillbay.org.au. Thank you to all our members and friends who have already renewed their membership.

To join the Catho Chronicle mailing list, please email us at **newsletter@catherinehillbay.org.au**

For more local news check the following links:

www.catherinehillbay.org.au

www.facebook.com/CathHillBay

www.facebook.com/CathHillBayLandcare

www.chbcommunityalliance.org

and the various other Facebook pages related to Catho:

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