WOLLONGONG BOATHARBOUR: A PROGRESS REPORT

The battle rages on, even if at present it is only preliminary skirmishing.

Certain Government authorities are trying to hoist the public with their own petard. They argue that public opinion was overwhelmingly in favour of the continuance of the fishing fleet in the harbour, and this is perfectly correct. But, they argue, in order to survive, the fishing fleet must have better facilities; and therefore there has to be a factory and associated services built on what is the main central spur, which means the most conspicuous place in the whole area, right in the heart of things.

They go on again: before this can be done, the boat-launching ramp has to be moved. Where? The suggestion was Port Kembla Harbour. However, the Maritime Services Board says it may not go into Port Kembla; therefore it has to be relocated on a great concrete pad constructed over natural rocks hard up against the Continental Baths, providing parking space for fifty-five cars and as many trailers, not to mention some buildings. There will then be consequent hazards of cars and trailers turning off Cliff Road in week-end traffic and across access tracks used by the great numbers of people going to and from the baths, including many children.

Now in all logic there should be no such therefore in these two specious arguments. Because the public wants the fishing fleet to continue does not mean the public wants to see the whole harbour taken over by a fishing industry; and that is what will happen, because in addition to the buildings there must be roads and parking areas for them, plus a good deal of filling of the little beach near the pylon of the old T-jetty. And in relation to the boat-launching ramp, if it cannot go to Port Kembla then it certainly does not have to cover natural rocks, create a traffic hazard and induce the omission of noxious fumes from vehicles, since the maximum uses of baths and parking area will occur at the same time. If the authorities have their way, a health area will be poisoned atmospherically.

So it has become abundantly clear that the boat-launching atrocity is only the thin edge of the wedge; it is the first step in the destruction of a place of beauty, calm, and historic interest. As such it has to be opposed vigorously. Sectional interests must not be allowed to push the public in general out of a place it holds very dear, as being the very centre of our historical origins—the only substantial part of it we have remaining to us—and a place of lasting enjoyment for young and old.

In all this bad news, there are elements of good news. Firstly, it is most gratifying to note that our City Council has turned the proposal down flat. On the other hand, the Council does not control the area, and has no power to stop the proposed works which we are informed are definitely to proceed—or so the Departments concerned think. The second good news is that the stone structure of the old harbour is to remain untouched, and not altered out of all
recognition as previously proposed. Therefore it can be seen that we and other opponents of this desecration have had a great deal of success to date. Now we have to convince the authorities that our old harbour has grown into something that already has a maximum use; that it has character and charm as it is; that, as such, if it is to be "developed" it simply cannot survive as we know it and enjoy it; and that the only changes should be the removal of errors of the past, not the perpetration of new ones. After all, where will the arguments of the authorities finish? They could just as logically—or illogically—argue that the place has to be "developed" because without it the Queen Mary couldn't be launched there. The fact is our toy colonial harbour was never meant for such things. It has reached optimum development and popular enjoyment with a balanced usage, and must remain that way.

Members may be assured the Society's Council is doing its utmost in the cause. Meanwhile, they are urged to get as many signatures to the circulated petition as possible. Further copies can be obtained from my office (176 Keira Street, Wollongong), or by phoning Mrs. King there (291188). And could all petitions be handed in by, say, the July meeting of the Society?

Keep up the good work.

—EDGAR BEALE.