WOLLONGONG HARBOUR DEVELOPMENTS

Although nothing further has eventuated on the question of the boat ramp and other objectionable proposals put forward by Government departments, there has been an interesting but unexpected development on another front. This was in the form of a notification which appeared in the Sydney Morning Herald on 25th August 1981 showing that Wollongong Harbour has been included in a “Notice of Intention to enter places in the Register of the National Estate.”

A letter was then sent by the Society to the Commission enlisting support and advising of the proposed desecration of the harbour. A reply has just come to hand.

This is to the effect that the Australian Heritage Commission monitors Commonwealth actions, but the enabling Act is not directed at the actions of State authorities. This is understandable enough, but the Society’s Council believes that the more notice is taken by all authorities of this part of our heritage the better.

The area proposed to be proclaimed includes the whole of the area of the harbour proper, including the old lighthouse, breakwater, and adjacent rocky areas. It does not otherwise include Wollongong Head.

The Society has written suggesting that the whole of the precinct should be proclaimed, inclusive of all of Wollongong Head as well as Brighton Beach and the natural rocks near the Continental Baths. Much of this is under the control of our City Council, who are completely on side, but the possibility remains that there could at some future time be a change of thinking if there were to be a substantial change of aldermen. Therefore, this protection would apply for all time.

It is interesting to note that Wollongong Head was nominated for inclusion in the Register by the National Trust. The Society has suggested that the Drill Hall should be included, if this has not already been done, and notes with interest that “Little Milton” has already been proclaimed. We have enquired for any other sites which have been proclaimed in the Illawarra region, and in the light of the reply it may well be that the Society’s Council will be nominating other parts of our heritage.

Getting back to Wollongong Head, it is of great interest to see from a diagram provided by the Commission the nature of ownerships of the area. The harbour is designated as “Public Works,” but the greater part of Wollongong Head is designated “public recreation.” Then there are other small areas which have been leased to Wollongong City Council. But most interesting of all is the fact that the land on the south eastern part of the Head, containing the old fortifications, has apparently been transferred by the Commonwealth to the City Council, and the Society is beginning to wonder if these should not be opened up and made available for public exhibition as a tourist attraction of real merit.

Finally, the area owned by the Council excludes a tiny bit of land consisting of sixty square feet on which the Wollongong Head
lighthouse is situated. This is under direct Commonwealth control and is likely to remain so.

In short, the ownership of Wollongong Head and the old harbour is quite complicated, so that the sooner authorities such as the Australian Heritage Commission and the Heritage Council of New South Wales exercise proper overall supervision the better for everyone concerned in conserving what is left of our heritage.

—E.B.