

# CATHO CHRONICLE

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE CATHERINE HILL BAY PROGRESS ASSOCIATION  
ESTABLISHED 1901



## PROGRESS ON CHB MASTER PLAN

Lake Macquarie City Council conducted a community information session on the design of the community hub proposed for the Bowling Club site (refer site plan over). The design proposal includes:

- 1) A new community hall on the same footprint of the old bowling club building,
- 2) A 'village green' in the footprint of the former bowling green, with a grassed area for events & passive recreation,
- 3) A playground with climbing structures, spinning equipment & swing set, and interpretive play elements referencing the former colliery, railway & sawmill,
- 4) A multi-purpose court and path circuit for scooter / bike riding,
- 5) A gathering place with the opportunity for artwork by a locally connected Aboriginal artist,
- 6) Terraced landscaping to provide informal seating and views over the playground & village green,
- 7) A container-style café with timber facade to match the community hall.

The community building is proposed to have an extended roof overhang to act as shelter & shade for the park and as an outdoor eating area for the cafe. Viewing areas are also proposed to overlook the coastline and the former Wallarah Colliery Railway, providing connectivity to the future coastal walk and beach (subject to discussions with private landowners and NPWS).



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2026 ISSUE...**

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**NEXT PA MEETING  
at Catho SLSC on  
Sat 2<sup>nd</sup> May at 5pm**

*Cover shot: Jetty sunrise by Jim Picot.  
[www.instagram/jimpicot/](http://www.instagram/jimpicot/)*

## Progress on CHB Master Plan (continued)



Site plan of the proposed community hub in Middle Camp

Detailed planning and design of the hub is expected to continue until 2028 with construction to commence at an unspecified date beyond that.

Community feedback on the design was generally favourable, with the timber construction and the smaller footprint of the building and car park (compared to previous designs) well received. Given that Council demolished Catho's community bowling club in 2017, residents expressed frustration with the slow delivery of the community hub and urged Council Officers to proceed to construction and completion as soon as possible.



Render of the proposed community hall and cafe, showing a timber facade

## Developer Activities in Catherine Hill Bay

At a combined PA & Alliance meeting held at the Catho Surf Club in November, Lake Macquarie City Council's Section Manager for Development Engineering, David Pavitt, provided an update on current development matters affecting Catherine Hill Bay. Below is a summary of the key points.

### Rose Group Development

Because the Rose Group development was approved at the State level and is being privately certified, LMCC has only a limited role in its oversight. Council is continuing to encourage the developer to complete outstanding public facilities, and Rose has five years to establish the required planting and vegetation in the parklands. LMCC is supervising the approval and construction of the incomplete section of coastal walkway between the headland the surf club, working with the landowner (NPWS) to finalise the remaining approvals.

Mr Pavitt advised that Council has no information about the developer's intentions for the village retail precinct (although Rose Group recently told the Alliance that they will submit a DA in a few weeks), nor any information on the proposed function of Rose Group's small demountable building on the bin building site.



*Demountable building on Catho Headland. Could it be a community cafe?*

Council has no plans for a kiosk café in the village park, although private vendors are welcome to apply for approval to operate in the area. Regarding park infrastructure, Mr Pavitt noted that the village park is classified as a 'local-level' park and they have no intention of installing shade structures. The future park at the Bowling Club site is apparently designated a 'neighbourhood-level park', meaning more facilities and shade structures are planned for there.

Council has carried out emergency works to stabilise the Hooey Street landslip (April 2024), with final rectification works scheduled for May–October 2026.

On the question of improving the safety of pedestrian access to the Surf Club from Hale St and Flowers Drive, Mr Pavitt advised the community to continue to lobby Councillors and the Mayor, noting that persistent advocacy may be necessary to achieve a positive change.

### Hunter Group Development

LMCC carried out the DA assessment and will supervise construction of the Hunter Group development at Middle Camp. Road and drainage designs for Hamlet A are currently being reviewed.

The developer is progressing works on a U-turn bay at Nords Wharf Road, as well as bringing in water infrastructure from Cams Wharf.

The privately owned U-shaped parcel of land adjoining the Bowling Club site will be transferred to Council as part of the DA conditions.

Key milestones for the heritage walkway in the Hunter Group development include (refer image below):

- The red section to be completed after sale of the 100th lot (estimated mid-2026),
- The blue section to be completed after the 150th lot,
- No information is available on the timing of the green section.



### Flowers Drive and Pacific Hwy intersection upgrade is a high priority

Transport for NSW has earmarked the Flowers Drive and Pacific Hwy intersection as a high priority for upgrade in the latest Five Year Hunter Regional Transport Plan. They are currently looking at options for funding, although it is not yet committed.

Due to what Transport for NSW described as “strong community opposition”, they have ruled out the previous preferred option of preventing a right turn from Flowers Drive onto the Pacific Highway with a median strip. Traffic lights are an alternative option, and the feasibility of lights will be considered in detail when they have funding for the project. The option of an overpass (similar to Murrays Beach) is likely to be cost prohibitive.

## Landcare News

*Content courtesy of Landcare Team Leader - Carmel Brown*

The local Landcare Team was busy planting natives in Spring 2025. At our south site (in front of Pat Slaven Reserve) we planted coastal wattle (*Acacia sophorae*) and Coastal bankisa (*Banksia integrifolia*) in August and September. We removed Lantana in October, including along the surf club slope, and in November we removed Turkey Rhubarb (seen for the first time at our sites), with help from Wendy Gleen and the Lake Mac Landcare (LML) Green Team members Bruce and Dean.

Peter & Louise McGowan and Neil & Fae Pratten have proven themselves to be our south site weed warriors! In addition, a team from LML cleared the Pigface (*Carpobrotus glaucescens*) off the road to the beach, and will hopefully return to clear more of the lantana slope below the club.



*Photo right: Louise McGowan, Neil Pratten and Peter McGowan on the Pat Slaven Reserve slope*

At our north site (Graveyard Beach), we planted along the arched walkway because the tea trees there (*Leptospermum laevigatum*) are nearing their end and falling over in storms. We also planted at the top of the dunal slope below the carpark (where Zak Boudjema and the Natural Areas Team previously removed Lantana). New plantings included Acacia, Banksia, Beach bird eye (*Alectryon coriaceus*), Coffee bush (*Breynia oblongifolia*), Beach bean (*Canavalia rosea*), White correa (*Correa alba*), Hedgehog grass (*Echinopogon caespitosu*), Climbing Guinea flower (*Hibbertia scandens*), Bleeding heart (*Omolanthus populifolius*), Tea tree, Melaleuca nodosa, Pelargonium australe, Pigface, Scaevola calendulacea and native rosemary (*Westringea fruticosa*). This was a great reward after all our years of weed removal – thank you Pete again, and also Wendy Heys, Jayne Gordon, and Lindsey Goff. Still more planting to do!

Our members were again recognised at The Lake Macquarie Environmental Excellence in Landcare (EEL) Awards, including Wendy Heys and David & Lindsey Goff, who received their Ten Years Service Certificates and special name badges.

Wendy is a long term Landcarer in Newcastle and past secretary of the Hunter Region Landcare Committee. She edited their *30 Years of Landcare in the Hunter* book. She has visited the cemetery here for many years, so when Carmel joined the regional committee, she planned her visits to join in our Landcare sessions too. Wendy has often helped us to identify plants and introduce methods to cut and paint weed control.

*Photo right (L to R): Carmel Brown, Jayne Gordon, Lindsey & Dave Goff, Jann Kinsela and Wendy Heys*



## Landcare News (continued)

David and Lindsey have been invaluable Landcarers in Catho since 2015. They are our guardians for the Graveyard Beach site, walking through it almost daily with their dog. They keep the pathways clear and note anything new. One year they even guided the Landcare Week bus tour around our sites. David is also on the Progress Association executive, helping to keep our bushland protected from developer or council changes, and Lindsey is also a native plant illustrator, donating her beautiful cards to PA events for fundraising

In celebration of CoastCare Week (1-7<sup>th</sup> December), Carmel was interviewed by Paul Turton on ABC Radio Newcastle. She shared the unique challenges of caring for landcare sites that are loved by so many visitors, and how the team works together to protect its natural beauty.

**Join us on the *SECOND Monday of the month at the north site (Graveyard Beach), and FOURTH Thursday of the month at the south site (near Surf Club). All welcome at both sites for the whole session from 3.00 to 5.00 pm for March, April and May, or any part that suits you. Call Carmel on 0438 499636 if you're new for a brief induction. Bring a drink, gloves and your favourite weeding and pruning tools, otherwise we will have some. Wear long sleeves and long pants and always be sunsafe.***

## Petition to save Catho Jetty

After carrying out public consultation last year, the State Government is still considering options for the future of the Catherine Hill Bay Jetty. While they initially advised the community that the decision to demolish the jetty had already been made (prior to consultation), there are signs that the strong public opposition has persuaded them to at least consider options for full or partial retention.

In a recent quarterly update to the community, the State Government said they received 224 responses to the jetty project survey. They are reviewing the feedback from both the survey and community information sessions and are preparing a summary engagement report. In the meantime, they will monitor and maintain the jetty to ensure public safety while this process occurs.

We encourage residents to sign the petition to save the jetty. If you have not already done so, there are paper petitions at the Nords Wharf Trading Post, the Swansea Newsagency and various other retail outlets in Swansea and Belmont. The goal is to get to 10,000 signatures so it will be debated in NSW Parliament.

The paper version of the jetty petition is attached to this newsletter email. If you can't get to any of the listed retail outlets you can print and sign the attached petition and drop it in the letterbox at 21 Flowers Drive. We encourage all who sign to also join the Progress Association as a member or a friend to strengthen our voice.



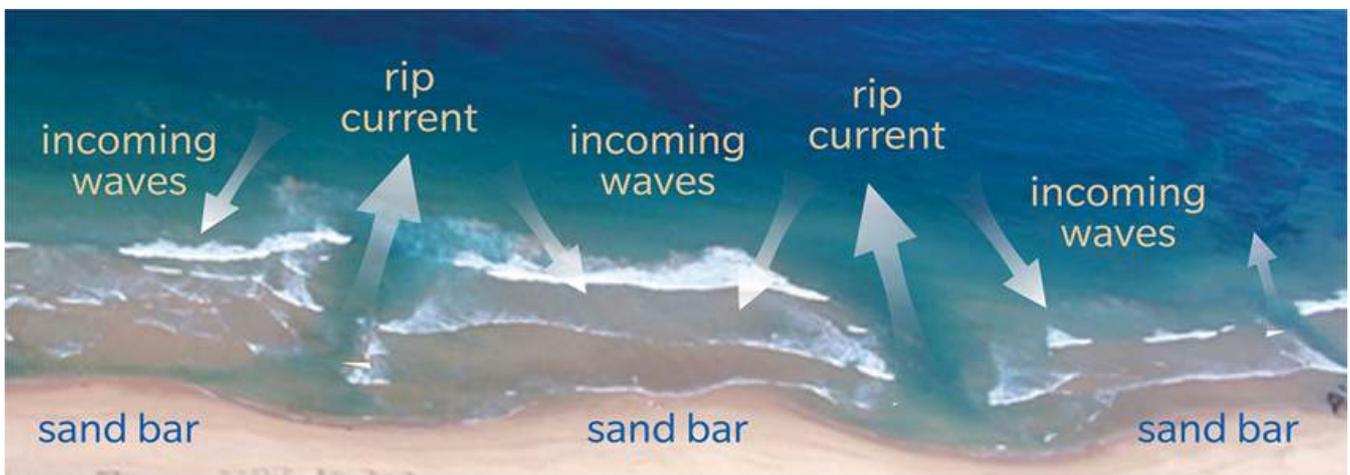
## How to spot a rip

A rip current - often simply called a rip - is a water current that can occur near beaches with breaking waves. It is a strong, localised, and narrow current of water which moves directly away from the shore like a river running out to sea. As water is pushed into the shore by the waves, rips are where all that extra water goes back out to sea.

People often get into difficulty with rips because they can appear to be the calmest part of the ocean for swimming when viewed from the beach. However, rips are dangerous and inexperienced swimmers can get in serious trouble if caught in one, particularly if panic sets in.

There are four main characteristics to look for to identify a rip from the beach. They are:

- Darker water,
- Fewer breaking waves,
- Rippled water surface,
- There may be items floating on the surface out beyond the breaking waves.



The best way to avoid getting caught in a rip is:

- Swim at a patrolled beach between the red and yellow flags,
- Stay in the shallows if you're not a strong swimmer,
- Talk to the lifeguards if you have any questions before going in the water.

If caught in a rip:

- Try to relax (as rip currents don't pull you under),
- Don't try to swim directly against the current, but parallel to the shore instead, then swim back in once out of the rip,
- If you can't get out of the rip, float or tread water and raise your arm for assistance.

## Heritage Precinct Walking Tour

On the 6<sup>th</sup> of November the Progress Association hosted a heritage house walking tour, visiting a number of houses and the local cemetery in the heritage village. Each house visit was hosted by the current owner and different aspects of the history of the buildings, the adaptive use, and commentary on life in the Bay were covered.

The tour included the old RSL Hall and the Maternity Hospital and Police Lockup, all of which are now privately owned homes. The local cemetery was a fascinating feature in the tour, not privately owned but privately occupied. A home-cooked afternoon tea overlooking the beach completed the event.

The attendees comprised Catho residents and people from other local areas. The event was well received and there are plans to repeat it in 2026.



## Did you know ...

... that the Catherine Hill Bay Cemetery was originally dedicated in 1891?

This occurred after negotiations between the Dept of Lands and the Wallarah Coal Company. An eleven-acre block, at the northern end of the beach near Middle Camp, was reserved and eventually conveyed in December 1893 (with the company reserving mineral rights under the land).



*Aerial photo courtesy of RPS Group*

## Catherine Hill Bay Cemetery (continued)

In March 1894 the Newcastle Herald reported that the local MP had applied for a grant to clear and fence the land for the cemetery, and that trustees had been appointed for the general section and the Roman Catholic section. At the time the other religions had yet to make their appointments. The earliest headstone belongs to George Dunn, who died aged 48. He was buried in the Methodist section and one month later his infant son was buried with him. In October of the same year, Enid Atterbury, the infant daughter of the town's doctor, was buried in the same section.

The cemetery records were originally held by a Trust but not always faithfully kept up to date. There are 27 burials recorded as unknown, and 36 children were recorded without a name or date.

Over the years there has been considerable erosion and movement of the sands at the site, with religious sections reallocated because of this encroachment. In July 1993, Swansea Lions Club undertook the task to rescue the graves on the Bluff. The grave of Patsy Hennessey can be found here, the 16-year-old daughter of the schoolmaster who died of consumption in April 1900. At the time, the Department of Public Instruction received letters from some of the residents stating that they didn't want to send their children to the local school because the family of the headmaster were suffering from tuberculosis. 34 children subsequently transferred to the Wallarah School at the lake, travelling about two miles over a hilly bush track to get there. But there were other factors at play to cause this exodus; the other school had an "immensely popular lady teacher", and the Catherine Hill Bay teacher, Mr Hennessey, was a Roman Catholic. Catherine Hill Bay at the time was "a purely Protestant settlement, with the residents being almost wholly composed of members of the Church of England and Methodists."



Granite is the chief material for the grave monuments, although visitors can see that cheaper materials are also common. The shell, both in ornamental and actual form, features on numerous graves, which is a symbol of fertility and hence resurrection. Gaites from Sandgate is the main stonemason on display, which would have been a very long trek back at the turn of the century.

The cemetery is exceptionally well kept, partly because the Mining Company paid royalties to the Cemetery trust from 1958-1970 for its upkeep.

The Cemetery Trust members - Mr Anstruther, Mr Northwood and Mr Ham - used a hand-pushed lawn mower to cut the grass. Council took over these funds when it took control of the cemetery. Since then, Council has erected a brick wall on the southern boundary to protect the graves from mud splashed by cars on the way to 'Graveyard' Beach. In 2006 Council also locked off the cemetery with a gate to stop the wheelies over the unmarked graves. In the early 2000s Council commissioned a complete study of the cemetery.

In 1919 the Influenza Epidemic struck Catherine Hill Bay. Special nurses volunteered for this duty, and one was detailed to Catherine Hill Bay. Cases were sent to Waratah Hospital for isolation. Health authorities planned to open an isolation hospital in the Bay as well, however by August 1919 the epidemic had abated sufficiently for this not to be needed.

There were three recorded deaths in Catherine Hill Bay during the flu epidemic; Mary Hillier (aged 34), Mrs Harris (who died leaving five children, the youngest being 5 days old), and Raymond Minch (aged 15). The arrangement of eight children in a row in the General Section suggests that there may have been another contagion that swept through the Bay.

Many men, women and children were buried in this cemetery without their names recorded, or, if they were, the exact location of the grave wasn't. There was a travelling minister who was sometimes on hand to prepare accurate records, or at other times it was left to the gravedigger.

The grave diggers were usually miners. During the Depression years, Christie Brace, a miner, was digging a grave when he came upon another coffin which had broken open. According to his wife, who passed the story onto their daughter, "there was hair everywhere and long fingernails the like he had never seen before".

Another miner, named Andy, did gravedigging on the side, and on one occasion he was asked to dig one by the following morning. After working his day shift, Andy carried out the task in the evening under the light of a hurricane lamp. Chalker Norman, another miner who was rather intoxicated after a visit to the pub, was returning home along the railway tracks when he heard a voice from the graveyard yell out, "Hey Chalker, what's the time?" Chalker, somewhat startled, replied "It's not my bloody time!" as he ran away at great speed.

Andy Scanlon, who was known as a "gentleman and an Englishman", shared a shack in Slack Alley (near the cemetery) with a Welshman named Steve Hart, Steve, a greaser at the Pit, was a cranky man who scared the locals kids and never changed his clothes. Andy hung a piece of brattice in the middle of the shack and didn't allow Steve into his half. Steve was a regular visitor to the Pub, and one evening, while following his usual route back home, he fell into a freshly dug grave. Not being able to get out he spent the night there. Early the next morning Tommy (Spider) Williams, who was making a shortcut through the cemetery to go fishing, was startled to hear a voice from the grave asking for a hand to get back out.

There are many interesting graves in the Catho cemetery. Even the bikie gang named 'Life and Death' has their own distinctive section filled with red and black tiled patterns. One special grave is the wave shaped granite headstone for John Stewart, who as a child lived with his parents in a shack at Moonee Beach. His father was an early sandal-wearing greenie. John later moved to Swansea where he became a successful board shaper for the local surfers, and his distinctive designs were prized amongst the local surf community. John later moved back to Middle Camp, but on a trip to Indonesia he had a heart attack in the surf and died. The local surfers paid for his body to be brought home

and for two gravesites to be allocated so that his distinctive wave-shaped headstone would face the early morning sun. Visitors will often see seashells placed on the John's grave by surfers as they walk through the cemetery from the beach.

The surnames that feature repeatedly in the cemetery are Tobin, Twyford, Handcock, Mascord, Henderson, Northwood, Wilson, Brace, Outram, D'Arcy, McDougall and Jones. These are families that have lived for many generations in Catherine Hill Bay.

Today, as many of the cemeteries further north reach capacity limits, people from outside of town are increasingly being buried in this well-maintained cemetery, where the sound of the sea is constant. Often families can be seen having a picnic next to their mum or dad's grave.

## Catherine Hill Bay Business Register

The CHB Community Alliance invites local businesses, trades, and service providers to be included in the Catherine Hill Bay Business Register. Its purpose is to highlight the skills and services available within our community, making it easier for residents to support local businesses and access services close to home.

If you operate a business based in CHB or live in and service the CHB community and would like to be listed, we would love to hear from you. Being included is a simple way to advertise your services to your neighbours and strengthen local connections. To join the register, please email us at [CHBCommunity@outlook.com](mailto:CHBCommunity@outlook.com) with your business name, a brief description of your services, and your preferred contact details.

You can view the current Business Register here:  
<https://www.chbcommunityalliance.org/businesses>

## 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 can be found at [www.catherinehillbay.org.au](http://www.catherinehillbay.org.au). Please email completed forms to [accounts@catherinehillbay.org.au](mailto: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](mailto:newsletter@catherinehillbay.org.au)

**For more local news check the following links:**

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[www.chbcommunityalliance.org](http://www.chbcommunityalliance.org)

**and the various other Facebook pages related to Catho:**

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