



Save Ralphs Bay Inc. entry in the Dr. Edward Hall Environment Awards 2008

Category: Community Group

Summary

Save Ralphs Bay Inc. was formed in 2004, to oppose the construction of a marina and canal housing estate on the site of the Ralphs Bay Conservation Area at Lauderdale.

Since that time, we have worked in numerous spheres to raise awareness of the many environmental and social issues raised by the proposed development.

We have also worked hard to raise awareness and provide accurate information on Ralphs Bay biota including the Spotted Handfish, *Brachionichthys hirsutus*, the resident and migratory shorebirds and the myriad invertebrate and microscopic organisms of the sandflat ecosystem.

We have also worked to raise awareness of pollution issues in the Derwent and the likely impacts of the proposed development.

Save Ralphs Bay Inc. has sought to deepen the community's appreciation of the beauty and complexity of Ralphs Bay ecosystems, and to promote understanding of the ecosystem services provided by estuarine ecosystems.

Supporters of Save Ralphs Bay Inc. have developed a heightened awareness of the beauty and importance of this place, and a passionate resolve to prevent the destruction of its natural values.

As a result of our campaign, we hope members of the Tasmanian community will be encouraged, informed and empowered to participate fully in the coming assessment of the proposed development. We have already encouraged members of the community to make their own submissions on the RPDC's Draft Guidelines for the Walker Corporation's Integrated Impact Statement and on a range of other topics.

We have proposed a State Reserve and Interpretation Centre for Ralphs Bay, and we have advocated for the creation of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) in the

Bruny Bioregion in general, and around the South Arm Peninsula in particular. The Opossum Bay and South Arm MPAs announced this week will go some way towards protecting these areas.

Innovative aspects of our campaign have included our roadside protests, featuring distinctive high-quality corflute signs and banners, and our deep commitment to education of the public, media, politicians and students, through a wide range of information-sharing activities.

Save Ralphs Bay Inc. has demonstrated its long-term viability by persisting for over four and a half years in its campaign, expanding and evolving its activities.

Our task is far from completed, and we remain deeply committed to saving Ralphs Bay and achieving stronger protection for Tasmania's coastal environment.

1. **What is the environmental issue?**

In 2004, the Walker Corporation announced its proposal to destroy the sandflats of the Ralphs Bay Conservation Area at Lauderdale, and convert this critical shorebird feeding habitat into a marina and canal housing development.

The Tasmanian community, especially the community of Lauderdale and the South Arm Peninsula, reacted swiftly and strongly. Save Ralphs Bay Inc was formed at a public meeting in the Lauderdale Hall on March 17 2004.

The details of the proposal have varied over the four and a half years since Save Ralphs Bay Inc. (SRB) was formed, but our opposition has not wavered, and the more we research the environmental threats posed by the proposed development, the more committed we become to educating the community and opposing the destruction of this section of the Ralphs Bay sandflats.

The environmental issues raised by the Walker Corporation's proposal are numerous, and include the following:

- The sale of a significant Conservation Area to a developer, to build a housing subdivision in the sea at a time of global warming and sea-level rise
- The disturbance of the polluted sediments of Ralphs Bay by bulldozing and excavation, followed by ongoing siltation and dredging of the artificial waterways
- Risk of habitat loss for the critically endangered Spotted Handfish, *Brachionichthys hirsutus*, which requires areas of clean shellgrit and coarse sand, free of soft silty sediments
- The potential release of heavy metals from Ralphs Bay sediments as a result of disturbance, oxygenation and pH changes altering the sediment geochemistry

- The risk of higher levels of heavy metal pollutants entering marine foodchains and, by bioaccumulation, causing hazards to human health and to marine organisms, possibly including the critically endangered Spotted Handfish, *Brachionichthys hirsutus*
- The risk of heavy metal pollution travelling round the South Arm Peninsula and compromising the very high water quality essential for aquaculture operations in Pipeclay Lagoon, Cremorne
- Risks to the Australian oyster industry, since 60% of the oyster spat grown on into plate oysters in Australian aquaculture originates from the oyster nursery at Pipeclay Lagoon
- Risk of environmental pollution problems associated with the disturbance of coastal acid sulphate soils
- Loss of critical feeding habitat for resident and migratory shorebirds, including listed threatened species, as a result of the proposed destruction of over 100 ha of sandflats
- Loss of shorebird roosting and nesting habitat, including the beach along the edge of the South Arm highway and the vegetated sandspit near the Lauderdale canal, which is to be obliterated in the latest version of the Walker Corporation's plan
- Loss of beautiful vistas across the windswept sandflats to Mount Wellington, with light and sunsets reflected on wet sand and shallow water
- Loss of the one of the state's best and most exciting windsurfing locations, especially for beginners, who can have the excitement of an exhilarating ride combined with the safety of falling off into shallow water
- Noise, dust and traffic impacts for the community, especially the nearby Lauderdale Primary School
- Risk of increased prevalence of Ross River Fever as a result of mosquitoes breeding in brackish water if there is poor mixing in the canals
- Increased pollution of Ralphs Bay and the Derwent by urban and marina runoff, as a result of placing a housing subdivision in the marine environment
- Loss of ecosystem services provided by the sandflats, including maintenance of water quality as a result of interchanges between bacteria in the sediments, pore waters and the water column above
- And the list goes on!

2. What are the objectives of the project?

Save Ralphs Bay Inc. has the following constitutional objectives:

1. To oppose the Walker Corporation's 2004 development proposal for Ralphs Bay, Frederick Henry Bay and the canal at Lauderdale, and any subsequent development proposals for Ralphs Bay deemed by SRB Inc. to be inappropriate;
2. To work towards the protection of the natural and aesthetic values of Ralphs Bay such that further proposals of this nature cannot be put forward;
3. To promote an approach to coastal planning in Tasmania that will prevent inappropriate development proposals in coastal areas;
4. To bring into closer understanding and co-operation the supporters of SRB Inc. for the purposes set out above, and to convene, organise and co-ordinate such meetings, activities and events (including fundraising) as may be deemed necessary.

3. What does the project involve (implementation)?

3.1 Membership, Meetings, planning and liaison

Save Ralphs Bay Inc. has over 250 currently paid-up members, and 350 members in its database in total. We are just about to send out membership renewal reminders to boost the number of paid-up members. We have over 400 members and supporters signed up through our website, and we provide them with emailed notices from the website about significant events and developments in our campaign.

The Save Ralphs Bay Inc. working group meets fortnightly, and meetings are typically attended by around a dozen members. There are approximately 20 active members of the working group, backed up by a network of other advisers and many supporters.

We hold occasional weekend strategy meetings to identify important new directions for SRB action. Initial major direction-setting was carried out with the kind assistance of a professional facilitator.

In anticipation of the Walker Corporation's Integrated Impact Statement (IIS) for its proposed Lauderdale Quay development, we liaise and network widely with experts in a range of areas, and we have engaged the services of key experts to assist us in the presentation of our response to the IIS and in Hearings in the Commission. We have fundraised vigorously, in anticipation of a prolonged and highly expensive assessment process, which will involve the payment of fees for expert witnesses as well as paying travel expenses for interstate experts.

We liaise closely with Birds Tasmania/Australia. We have also liaised with the South Arm Peninsula Residents' Association (SAPRA), to increase awareness of

the plight of Pied Oystercatchers on the South Arm Neck as a result of rising sea levels and habitat loss. We worked with SAPRA on the development of an information flyer for residents (enclosed with this application) and helped in the development of yellow Pied Oystercatcher road signs, placed along the South Arm Neck by the Department of Infrastructure, Energy and Resources. This was a first in Australia.

We are part of the Ocean Planet coalition of marine environmental groups campaigning for marine reserves. Ocean Planet includes the Tasmanian Conservation Trust, Tasmanian Marine Naturalists Association, Tasmanian National Parks Association, Environment Tasmania and the Wilderness Society. With our Ocean Planet partners, we have lobbied ministers including David Llewellyn and Paula Wriedt on this issue, and met recently with one of Premier David Bartlett's advisers. We played a leading role in the organisation of the Rally for Marine Conservation in the Town Hall on World Environment Day this year.

3.2 Research, community awareness and lobbying

In support of our constitutional objectives, we strive to provide accurate, relevant information to the community and to decision-makers in government and related bodies.

We have done this by:

- Liaising closely with Birds Tasmania/Birds Australia
- Liaising with a wide range of experts in Tasmania, interstate and overseas, to increase our understanding of the issues
- Developing the website, www.saveralphsbay.org which contains our Newsletters, media releases, emails to supporters, submissions, additional resources, letters, photos, poetry, cartoons, links and more
- Maintaining a media collection of relevant press clippings, currently standing at 19 display folders. This is currently being copied, catalogued and collated for use as an information resource, and there are plans to digitise the collection
- Producing and distributing a series of newsletters
- Liaising with politicians of every party and at all levels of government, to obtain assistance in the printing, copying and distribution of newsletters in the community
- Volunteer letterboxing of each newsletter edition to thousands of households

- Public Information Evenings and a community Expo, held at the Lauderdale Hall. See “Ralphp Bay Community Expo” section of the Photo Gallery at www.saveralphpsbay.org
- Rallies at City Hall and the Town Hall
- Ralphp Bay information displays at the Coast to Coast Conference in 2004, outside the Walker Corporation’s display office at Lauderdale in 2004, at the Shoreline shopping centre, at Rallies and other events
- Media Releases and comment in the Media, including print, television and radio coverage, talkback radio calls and Letters to the Editor
- Bulk emails to our large group of many hundreds of supporters, advising of current issues and activities
- Lobbying politicians of every party and at all levels of government, in writing and in face to face meetings, including a visit to Canberra with a representative of Birds Australia, to meet the then Environment Minister, Ian Campbell (see September 2006 in the Complete Archive at www.saveralphpsbay.org)
- Providing Members of the Legislative Council with a folder of briefing documents in the lead-up to their vote on Project of State Significance status for the proposal in 2006; providing them with a Legal Opinion and briefing material in relation to the Ralphp Bay Conservation Area (Clarification) Bill 2006, and providing a Legislative Council briefing on these issues, with Birds Tasmania/Australia (for Legal Opinion, see September 2006 in the Complete Archive at www.saveralphpsbay.org)
- More recently, the Walker Corporation held a Public Information Display at the Lauderdale Football Club at the end of August. We advertised this widely in a newsletter and encouraged residents to go along, see the plans and have their say. We had a Save Ralphp Bay stand outside the Football Club carpark while the Walker Corporation display was open, providing alternative information, and a comments book where members of the community could express their feelings about the proposal.

3.3 Formal submissions

We have written formal submissions and/or made presentations at Hearings on the following:

- The original 2004 Walker Corporation proposal, the three month community consultation, and our response to this
- Resource Planning and Development Commission (RPDC) Draft Guidelines for the Integrated Impact Assessment for the proposed Lauderdale Quay development
- Federal Government’s Draft Recovery Plan for Four Species of Handfish

- Draft Water Quality Improvement Plan for Derwent heavy metals
- RPDC Inquiry into the establishment of marine protected areas within the Bruny Bioregion. Our submissions on the Background Report, Interim Report and Final Recommendations Reports can be seen at www.saveralphsbay.org
- State Government's Draft Climate Change Strategy
- State Coastal Policy Review
- Review of the Tasmanian Planning System
- Joint Parliamentary Select Committee on Ethical Conduct

Examples of our submissions, media releases and newsletters are included with this entry. Most can also be viewed on our website.

Our submission on the Interim Report of the RPDC's Bruny Bioregion included a detailed description of our positive alternative vision for a Ralphs Bay State Reserve and Interpretation Centre. This can be seen at www.saveralphsbay.org

3.4 Educational resources

We provided comprehensive educational resource folders to Tasmanian science teachers, and gave presentations on "The science behind the campaign to save Ralphs Bay" at the 2008 CONSTAT (Conference of the Science Teachers' Association of Tasmania) and BIOTA (Biology & Environmental Science teachers' association) conference.

In addition, we have conducted field trips to Ralphs Bay for classes of Environmental Science, Biology and Geography students from Rosny, Elizabeth, Hobart and Claremont Colleges, and the Friends' School.

We are currently developing an Educational Resources section on the website.

3.5 Protest and further public awareness raising on key issues – corflute signs, banners, roadside vigils, posters, bus ads

Save Ralphs Bay Inc. is fortunate to have a wide range of technical skills within the working group, including vinyl sign-cutting. As a result, we have been able to produce professional-quality corflute signs and banners at little cost, in working bees in members' homes.

Slogans have included, "Save Ralphs Bay", "Our Coast is Not For Sale" and many more. The "Road Rage!" section of the Photo Gallery on our website at www.saveralphsbay.org shows how these signs and banners were used in 2004 for roadside protests, display on highway overpasses, and in setting up halls for public meetings and rallies.

We produced a high quality full colour Metro bus ad in the lead-up to the Cabinet's original consideration of Project of State Significance (POSS) status for the Walker Corporation's proposal in 2005. The ad featured a beautiful sunset photograph of Ralphs Bay, and the slogan, "Our Coast is Not For Sale", and was part of the successful lobbying effort which prevented Cabinet members reaching agreement on POSS status at that time.

In June 2008, consultants for the Walker Corporation began test drilling of core samples in the bay. Although we understand this to be part of the necessary information-gathering if the Walker Corporation is to submit an Integrated Impact Statement to the Commission, we marked this assault on the bay by morning roadside vigils with placards, from 7.30am – 9.00 am on Friday mornings for the duration of the drilling.

Whilst the early mornings were dark and the air temperature was chilly, we were greatly heartened by the large number of cheerful waves, smiles, victory signs and "thumbs-ups" from the occupants of passing vehicles. We counted the responses, and found that over 60% of the passers-by were expressing their overt support for our efforts, while less than 1% showed their disapproval of us. This tallies well with surveys carried out by politicians in 2004, each of which showed opposition to the proposed development at well over 60%. Senator Paul Calvert's survey was the largest one conducted, and this found 73% opposition to the development.

3.6 Draft Planning Directive

We lodged a Draft Planning Directive with the RPDC in August 2006, for a statewide ban on canal estate developments, consistent with the ban in the Kingborough Planning Scheme. The RPDC recommended to the then Planning Minister Steve Kons that the merits or otherwise of such a Planning Directive be assessed, but unfortunately Minister Kons refused to allow the RPDC to look into the matter.

3.7 Merchandise and other fundraising

We are fortunate to number among our working group members and supporters dedicated individuals able to make top-quality embroidered merchandise, take professional photographs and provide professional layout and graphic design work, at no charge to the group. This is just one of many indications of how strongly community members feel motivated to support the campaign to save Ralphs Bay.

We create awareness of the Ralphs Bay issue and provide positive images of Ralphs Bay, its landscapes and wildlife, through the production and sale of Ralphs Bay merchandise, including:

- Ralphs Bay 2007, 2008, 2009 calendars
- Ralphs Bay cards and postcards
- Save Ralphs Bay linen teatowels

- Printed Save Ralphs Bay t-shirts
- Hats, scarves, vests, sweatshirts, teatowels etc. embroidered with Spotted Handfish and Pied Oystercatcher designs
- Save Ralphs Bay mugs (in production)
- Save Ralphs Bay stickers
- Save Ralphs Bay fundraising wine sales
- Save Ralphs Bay Christmas cake and pudding kits (new in 2009)

These items are sold at Salamanca market, Rallies and other events, as well as through mailouts of order forms and in shops in the South Arm Peninsula, Hobart and in members' and supporters' workplaces. Some examples are included with this entry. T-shirts can be viewed in the "Ralphs Bay Community Expo" section of the Photo Gallery at www.saveralphsbay.org. The 2009 calendar can also be viewed on the website.

We sent examples of our merchandise to an exhibition of campaign logos, held at the State Library in Launceston earlier this year.

With the help of a generous donation from a supporter in the local business community, we also produced a large number of high quality colour A3 size posters, featuring beautiful sunset photographs of Ralphs Bay and local bird species. These can be seen in cafes around Hobart, and have also been used in our displays.

Some months ago, we held a highly popular and entertaining Quiz Night in the Sandford Hall, as a fundraiser and a community get-together. Our second Quiz Night is coming up on October 4.

4. What will be or have been the outcomes of this project?

We have often been complimented, by politicians and members of the media and wider community, on the quality of the information we provide. We believe we have raised the profile of the issues central to our campaign. In addition, we believe we have heightened the awareness and appreciation of Ralphs Bay and the Derwent estuary, their ecosystems, wildlife and environmental threats, among residents of the South Arm Peninsula and visitors to the area. Members of the Save Ralphs Bay Inc. working group certainly feel that we have vastly deepened our knowledge, understanding and appreciation of the many issues relevant to the campaign, over the past four and a half years.

If the Walker Corporation presses ahead and lodges its Integrated Impact Statement with the RPDC, we will participate fully in the assessment process at each and every stage. We aim to ensure the development is rejected.

We would also like to campaign for a ban on canal estates in Tasmania, as in the state of New South Wales.

We continue to work towards the celebration, protection and interpretation of the marine and coastal environment.

Why should this project win an award?

We have worked hard for over four and a half years to raise community awareness of the importance of estuarine ecosystems and the particular issues relevant to the health of the Derwent estuary and Ralphs Bay, and to defeat the environmentally destructive development proposed by the Walker Corporation.

We are confident the majority of residents in the Lauderdale area very much appreciate our efforts on their behalf, and we will persist in the face of what sometimes seem to be insurmountable obstacles.

We need the prize money, to help us fund a wide range of experts who will help us in the writing of our submission in response to the Walker Corporation's Integrated Impact Statement (IIS). The IIS is expected to be hundreds of pages long and highly technical.

We also need to fund our legal representation during what we expect to be protracted Hearings in the Commission, and we need to pay expert witnesses, including travel for interstate experts. Save Ralphs Bay Inc, a local Tasmanian community group, will be pitted against a multi-million dollar Corporation and its resources.

Recognition, by winning this award, of our aims and desire to protect our coastal environment would provide an enormous morale boost to the Save Ralphs Bay community.