



25 March 2021

Mayor, Cllr Darcy Byrne  
Marrickville Ward Councillors:  
Cllr Sam Iskander  
Cllr Colin Hesse  
Cllr Victor Macri  
Acting General Manager - Brian Barrett

Inner West Council  
PO Box 14, Petersham NSW 2049

By email: [Councillors@innerwest.nsw.gov.au](mailto:Councillors@innerwest.nsw.gov.au)

Dear Councillors,

**Re: Request for assistance with Cooks River Wall and Access Arrangements**

We seek your assistance in finding a practical solution and positive path forward for the riverwall along the Cooks River adjacent to Mackey Park. This includes steps that provide access for paddling activities on the Cooks River, not only used by the River Canoe Club but also the broader local community.

**In summary:**

- **River wall failure** - The existing riverwall for a section of approximately 60m is structurally failing. This is not only unsightly, it also presents a significant level of safety risk to the public.
- **Need for urgent action** - the river wall adjacent to the existing steps is in need of urgent repair works. It is becoming noticeably worse each week and is expected to fail totally shortly.
- **Opportunity to improve access** – there is the opportunity to improve access and safety at the existing steps. The current arrangements do not meet modern recommendations/standards in terms of safety and accessibility.
- **The club has sought to facilitate a positive solution for all parties** – the issue that held matters back has been the lack of agreement between Council and Crown Lands in terms of ownership and management responsibilities.
- **Unable to secure funds** – the club has sought to attract funding from a range of external sources to complete maintenance/upgrade works. There are a wide range of significant funding opportunities available. Without clarity of landownership and associated in-principle support, formal funding applications are simply unable to be made
- **Update on discussions** – We have been in discussion with both Council and Crown Lands over the last 12 months with a view to facilitating progress. To date, each party has been of the view that the other is responsible for any repairs and on-going management. As you would appreciate, this situation remains unacceptable. In the

We respectfully seek your assistance and hopefully we can find a positive/timely path forward for the community.



More detailed background information is attached for reference. Should you wish to discuss matters further or have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the undersigned.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in purple ink, which appears to read "swilkes".

Simon Wilkes  
President, River Canoe Club  
0423 779 631  
[pres.rivercanoecub@gmail.com](mailto:pres.rivercanoecub@gmail.com)





## Attachment A - Background Information

There are existing steps into the Cooks River, as shown in the images below. From a review of available aerial photographs, the existing steps would appear to have been constructed around 1960. This aligns with the club's establishment on the banks of the Cooks River in the mid-1950's.



It is our view that there is a significant need and opportunity to achieve significant outcomes, as set out below.

- ***Establishing a clear path forward for maintenance and future upgrades***

The existing steps are in poor condition, particularly at the western end, located within Crown Land/Mackey Park, where the wall is currently failing (refer image 3 above). Beyond regular cleaning by club members, it does not appear as though there has been any maintenance since original installation. **It is our view that 'doing nothing' is not in the best interests of the community – rather a clear path forward would be good to establish.**

- ***Improving the existing steps from a safety/accessibility perspective***

The current steps are challenging to navigate for even the most agile of persons, being steep, slippery and of insufficient length to accommodate many small boat craft. While likely compliant with relevant standards at the time of construction, the club is of the view that efforts should be taken by all parties (Club, Council, Crown Lands, and RMS) to ensure that this access point remains in good condition and, where possible facilitate an upgrade.

- ***Improving recreation opportunities for the public and club members alike***

From our observations, the club's utilisation of the existing steps represents around half of overall utilisation— there is significant community usage of this current access arrangement. In terms of alternative access points, the following may be noted:

- **Kendrick Park** offers steps and a concrete ramp, however, is difficult to access by car and there is a reasonable distance between the car park and the ramp.
- **Kyeemagh Boat Ramp** - this is located approximately 3kms downstream, offering major boat launching facilities particularly for larger motorised craft accessing Botany Bay
- **Upstream** – at present, there are no dedicated access points to the river for craft, with areas such as 'Boat Harbour' for example not providing effective access due to condition and mud build-up. A new canoe launch facility is proposed at Ewen Park (within CB Council)— approximately 3km upstream from Mackey Park. This will be an excellent complement to the access at Mackey Park, being a comfortable distance for recreational paddling between.

- ***Facilitating continued community clean-up efforts on the Cooks River, and***

The club has been, and remains, active in organising clean-up efforts on the Cooks River. Clean-up efforts in February 2020, for example, involved a major community event involving 429 people and achieving an overall total waste removal of 13.8 tonnes. Regular clean-up efforts continue on a monthly basis, with further major events also planned.



- ***Attracting external funding opportunities.***

We do acknowledge the efforts of Inner West Council along other sections of the river to improve the foreshore environment, most recently in the proximity of Steel Park. We also acknowledge that as part of the planning for the Cooks River, improved facilities and waterfront access have been identified as recommendations/actions in the Cooks River Parkland Management (2016), along with the general naturalisation of the river foreshore.

We are, however, unaware of any funding commitment to such improvements nor any action planned in the short to medium term specifically in respect of this section of Mackey Park/Cooks River foreshore. For the reasons set out in this communication, there is a need to establish a clear path forward.

In order to advance matters, the River Canoe Club has actively sought to identify potential external funding opportunities that may be of mutual benefit, to date and during the last 12 months that we've been seeking resolution, these have included:

- ***The RMS 'Boating Now Program'***. Round 3 closed March 2020. The next round is estimated to be in 2022. A formal registration of interest was lodged. In principle support was provided for an application, however could not proceed without clarity of landownership.
- ***'Community Building Partnership'*** – the 2020 round closed on 12 June.

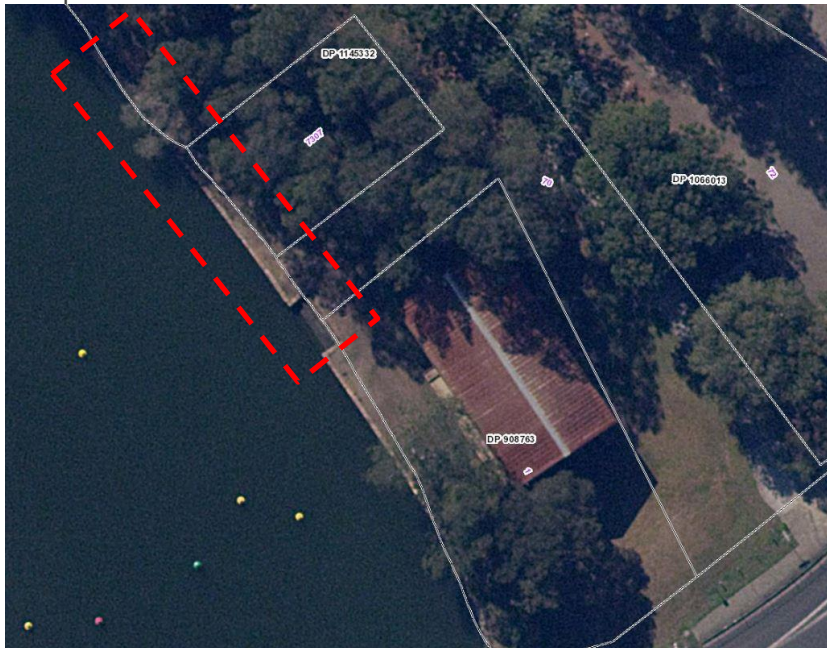


- **Responsible Gambling Program – Infrastructure Grant – Round 3**  
Applications closed March 2020.

There will be further funding opportunities into the future.

**A fundamental requirement for such funding programs is confirmation of support from all responsible agencies/landowners – with respect to both the completion of works and on-going management. In the absence of formal support from Council and/or Crown Lands it has not been possible to apply for such external funding to date. The Club is keen to work with Council (and other authorities as needed) to ensure appropriate funding is secured moving forward.**

As may be seen from the image below, any works on the steps potentially involve three different land parcels.



Source: Sixmaps

### **Other relevant considerations**

- **Riverwall condition assessment**

We understand the Cooks River Alliance is planning to advance a ‘condition assessment’ of the river wall over the next 12-18 months. This is intended to provide a broader understanding of challenges and opportunities moving forward, determining whether the river wall is ‘fit for purpose’.

**Notwithstanding any upgrade to the waterfront access, it is clear that the existing river wall along Mackey Park is currently failing.** This extends for a length of approximately 60 metres in a westerly direction from the current steps. The potential upgrade of the steps does present an opportunity to potentially remedy a broader situation, should this be desired by Council.

### **Other similar situations in Inner West Council**

The nearest best example is that of Kendrick Park – located some 500 metres downstream. The facilities were established by the former Marrickville Council, with funding assistance from the State Government. To the best of our knowledge, on-going management/responsibility remains with Inner West Council.

- **Avoidance of legal risks/management**

The Club acknowledges that all parties (Club, Council, Crown etc) will be eager to minimise their potential legal risks/potential liability moving forward. To this end, we make the following observations:

- the access arrangements already exist, presenting a level of risk; and
- collective inaction by parties is not an appropriate way to minimise practical risks for the community moving forward. It is our view that the parties should all work together to achieve a better outcome.

- **Other examples across Sydney**

There are plenty of other examples across Sydney of other similar small boating upgrades/waterfront access arrangements that have been advanced as part of collaborative efforts between sports club, Councils and the State Government. A particularly relevant example completed recently is that of Kurraba Point in the North Sydney Area – per images below. This was completed in 2019, through the Boating Now Program.



From the above, the following may be noted:

- A desirable grade is 1:7, with a maximum grade of 1:5
- The perforated material is designed to ensure maximum grip moving forward, minimising the potential for mud/silt build-up
- On-going maintenance is predominantly a high-pressure wash every few months.
- A hand-rail installation is an important component for improved accessibility.

For comparative purposes, the current steps at the Cooks River have a total height in the order of 1.53m and a total width in the order of 2.6m. Applying a 1:5 ratio, a total width in the order of 7.5 metres would be recommended moving forward – therefore extended a further 5m or so from the current steps.

The club has recently engaged consultancy firm Advisian to assist with technical advice and establishing a preliminary project scope, based on their experience with projects such as Kurraba Point. We trust this demonstrates the club's commitment to seeing a suitable outcome advanced. The Club has also continued to be proactive in working with Council staff and other agencies to facilitate information sharing and identifying options moving forward.

## **More generally About the River Canoe Club**



As you may be aware, the River Canoe Club is the premier and oldest recreational paddling club in NSW, providing opportunities for both members and non-members alike since 1935. The club has been located on this particular site since the mid-1950's.

The club continues to work closely with a range of different stakeholders including but not limited the Cooks River Alliance, Inner West Council, Canterbury-Bankstown Council, Wolli Creek Preservation Society, Cooks River Valley Association, Mudcrabs etc. The club continues to invest significant efforts into the continued environmental clean-up and general community enjoyment of the Cooks River.

Continued paddling activities, upgrades to the clubhouse and surrounds are all commitments of the Club toward delivering broader community benefits and increased recreation opportunities and activation of the Cooks River. Recent examples of collaborative efforts include:

1. The completion of the new mural artwork, made possible through Council's Perfect Match
2. The annual Cooks River Clean Ups and regularly monthly mullets clean-ups.
3. The Cooks River Litter Strategy (in preparation for entire catchment)





**1**  
day

**429**  
community  
members

**1.2**  
tonnes  
of litter



## Towards a litter-free Cooks River

How do we reduce litter  
**50% by 2025?**

Online, Wednesday March 17, 5pm

**Who?** People who live, work or play in the catchment, councils, community groups. Everyone has a role to play.

**Learn** What's this project doing? What's already being done about litter?

**Share** What do you know? Where is the litter? Where is it from? What can we do to change it?

Register: [info@cooksriver.org.au](mailto:info@cooksriver.org.au)  
ph: 9707 5724 or via [Eventbrite](#)

This project is a NSW EPA, Waste Less Recycle More Initiative funded from the waste levy.

