

Harbour Trust



Australian Government
Sydney Harbour Federation Trust

Snapper Island

Discussion Paper



November 2020



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Snapper Island intersects the homelands of the Wallumedgal, Wangal, Cammeraygal and Gadigal Peoples. We respectfully acknowledge the Traditional Custodians and Owners including their Elders past, present and emerging.

Introduction

The Harbour Trust is seeking the community's feedback to inform planning for Snapper Island.

Snapper Island, near Drummoyne and Balmain, is the smallest island on Sydney Harbour, part of a grouping with Cockatoo and Spectacle islands known as the 'Hen and Chickens'. The island is listed as a Commonwealth Heritage (CHL) place, deriving its historical, social and associative value values from its connection to Len Forsythe and the Navy League Cadets, the unique development of the island for use by the Navy League Cadets, and its contribution to the landscape of Sydney Harbour. The island has been unoccupied since 2006.

Snapper Island is currently owned by the Commonwealth Department of Finance. The Harbour Trust's *Comprehensive Plan*, made in 2003, sets out a vision for the renewal of Snapper Island, based on the intended transfer of the island to the Harbour Trust. The *Comprehensive Plan* proposes the repair, maintenance and enhancement of this extraordinary facility, and its reuse for maritime training activities, potentially in partnership with naval history organisations.

The Harbour Trust has engaged consulting firm ERM to prepare a draft Conservation Management Plan (CMP) to provide updated advice about the condition of the buildings and recommended policies for protecting the island's heritage values. The draft CMP accompanies this discussion paper.

The Harbour Trust was recently the subject of an Independent Review. The Review notes that while Snapper Island is included in the Harbour Trust's *Comprehensive Plan*, any handover of this site or transfer of any other new sites to the Harbour Trust will need to be accompanied with sufficient funding to allow for remediation and ongoing maintenance and management of the site.

The draft CMP and community feedback will inform consideration of the potential transfer of Snapper Island to the Harbour Trust; and – subject to the transfer proceeding – the preparation of a future statutory Management Plan made in accordance with the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* and *Sydney Harbour Federation Trust Act 2001*.

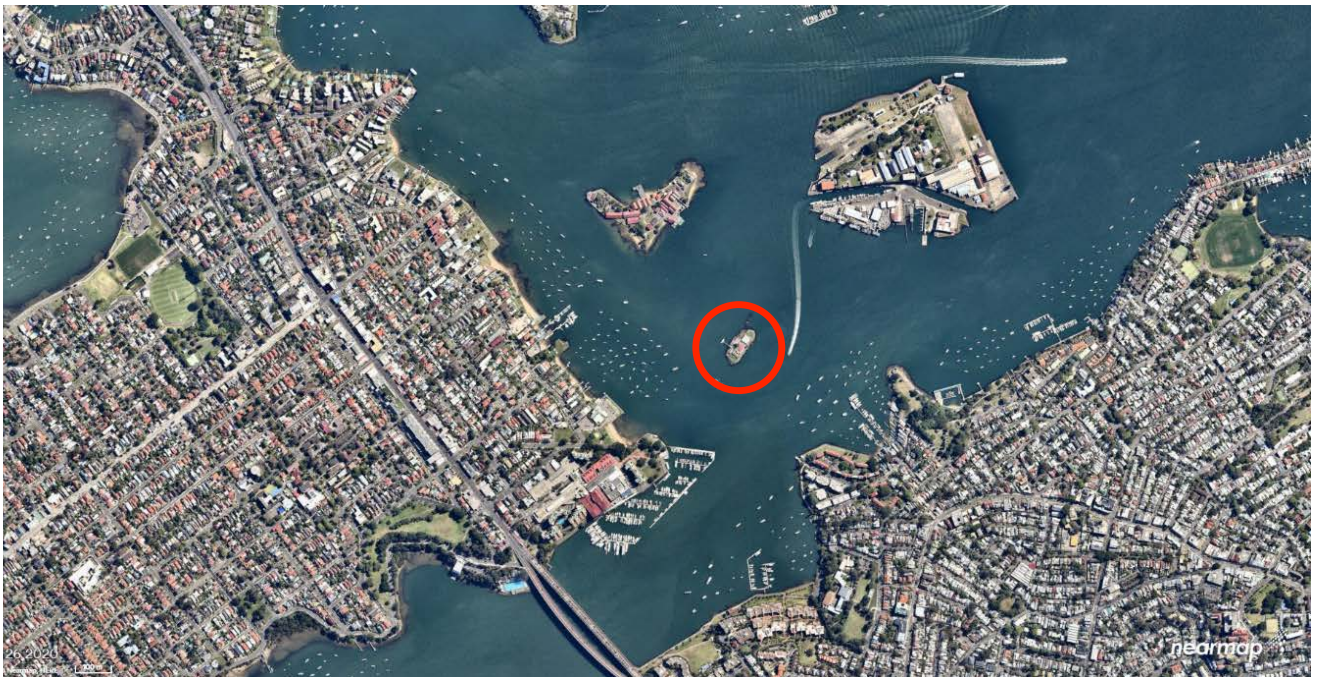
- What are Snapper Island's values that you would like to see protected?
- Are the outcomes proposed in the Harbour Trust's *2003 Comprehensive Plan* still relevant, given the current condition of the site and the changing needs and expectations of the community?
- Are there better, more appropriate, or more sympathetic uses for Snapper Island that could be explored and evaluated?

Background

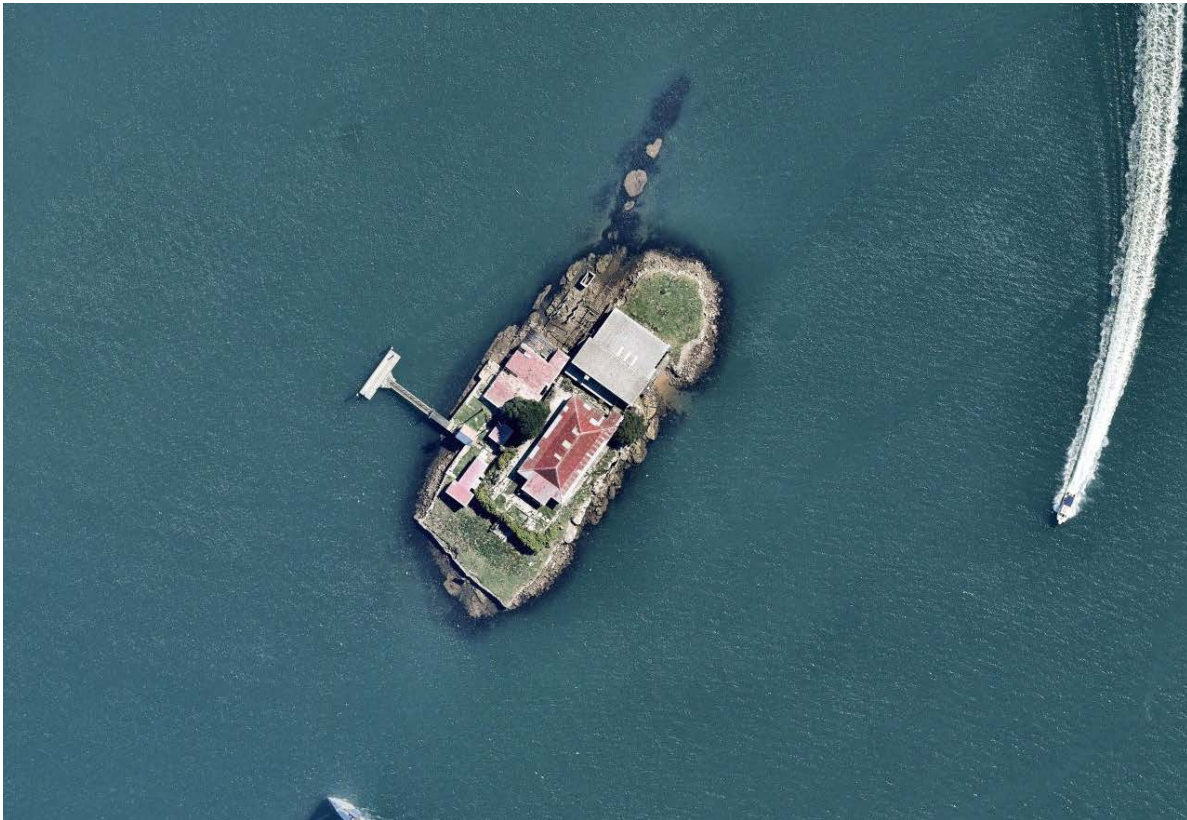
Snapper Island (Ar-ra-re-agon) is a picturesque grouping of buildings, slipways, boat storage, gardens, flagpoles, and jetties – all arranged in the pattern of a ship. Snapper Island is the smallest Island in Sydney Harbour. It is situated at the mouth of the Parramatta River, close to Birkenhead Point, near Drummoyne. It is a lozenge-shaped island that measures approximately 100 metres long x 40 metres wide, and covers an area of approximately 1.65 hectares.

Snapper Island is a unique landmark in Sydney Harbour. It was significantly modified to mimic the shape and layout of a ship as a place for training for Naval Cadets. It has been home to a rich and wide-ranging collection of naval artefacts and memorabilia, but now the buildings and structures have fallen into disrepair. The museum collection was relocated to Spectacle Island and the Navy Museum at Garden Island in c2006.

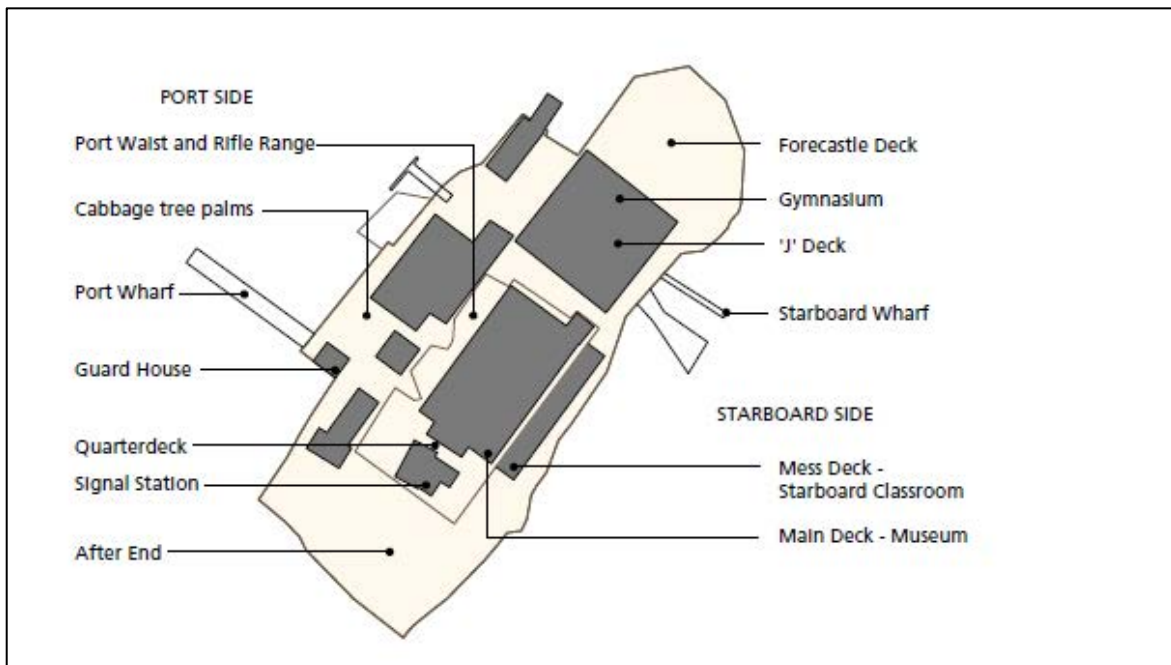
Until the early 2000's, Snapper Island was run by a private company, Sydney Training Depot Snapper Island Limited. Today, Snapper Island is owned by the Commonwealth Department of Finance. The island is currently vacant and closed to the public.



***Aerial photograph of Snapper Island, showing proximity to Cockatoo Island and Spectacle Island.
Source: Nearmap, 2020***



Aerial photograph of Snapper Island. Source: Nearmap, 2020



Snapper Island - Site Features. Source: Comprehensive Plan 2003

History

Local Aboriginal people are likely to have used Snapper Island for spear fishing and collecting shellfish and molluscs. Nineteenth century images show Snapper Island to be a small island with rocky shores, sparse vegetation and low shrubs. Due to the levelling and infilling works that occurred from the 1930s, evidence of Aboriginal occupation of Snapper Island is unlikely to remain on Snapper Island. In 2007, Clive Lucas Stapleton analysed the archaeological potential of the site. In their assessment, LSJ advised due to highly disturbed condition of Snapper Island, there was very low likelihood of encountering Aboriginal cultural remains or intangible values at the Site.

In 1879 Snapper Island was declared a public recreation reserve but it remained a rarely visited rocky outcrop. The island was leased to the Cockatoo Island Dockyard for additional storage during World War I.

From 1931–2, Snapper Island was flattened and expanded by blasting and reclamation to establish the training depot 'Sydney' for naval cadets and so fulfilling the vision of Leonard Forsythe, a founder of the Navy League in NSW. The stone seawalls created the shape of a ship with a bow and a stern. Building work commenced on a signal station and other buildings. The names and layout of buildings and structures on the island model that of a naval ship.

The Training Depot, known as TS Sydney, was opened in November 1932 and became the headquarters of all Sydney's Navy League units for 45 years.

Snapper Island accommodated memorabilia for the HMAS Sydney including from when it was broken up in Cockatoo Island's Sutherland Dock, in 1932. The collection opened as a museum in 1952 and consists of a vast array of ships' badges, flags, models, brass plates, photographs, etc. The collection on Snapper Island was one of the most important collections in Australia.

A comprehensive history of Snapper Island is in the draft CMP.



00024966
Navy League Cadets at Snapper Island 1935 (Source: Australian National Maritime Museum, Samuel J Hood Studio Collection Object ID 00024966)

Current Conditions

Snapper Island is currently closed to the public. Many of the relics housed in the former museum have been removed from the site and relocated to other facilities at Spectacle Island and Garden Island.

Buildings and Services

There are currently no services connected to Snapper Island. The Island originally operated in a self-sufficient manner with its own septic system, water collection tanks and diesel-powered generator for power. At present, these facilities are considered to be substandard. There are no fire services, stormwater systems or sanitary services on the island.

There are approximately 10 distinct buildings remaining on the island, most are derelict and contaminated materials such as asbestos remain. The island contains seawalls, retaining walls, two main wharves constructed of timber piles and framing, numerous timber walkways and decking, a boat ramp and various paths. These are all considered to be in poor and unsafe condition.

A comprehensive assessment of the buildings and elements that remain on Snapper Island, their condition, and recommended measures for their maintenance and conservation, is in the draft CMP prepared by ERM.

Flora and Fauna

There is little remaining evidence of the natural form of the island and none of the original vegetation remains. Two Cabbage Tree palms were planted in the 1930s and these are local landmarks. There are no known threatened flora or fauna species on the island.

There is an abundance of seagulls roosting on Snapper Island. The Harbour Trust and the Department of Finance engaged ecologists to develop a Seagull Management Plan for Snapper Island.

The draft CMP prepared by ERM includes a register of fauna that may potentially use, and flora that has been recorded on Snapper Island.

Contamination and Hazardous Materials

In its original form this island was a smaller rocky outcrop, and filling was carried out to reclaim land and expand the island. It is likely that contaminated materials were used in this fill and further assessment is required to confirm this. It is known that asbestos was used to construct buildings, many of which have degraded.



Site conditions (Source: ERM)



Harbour Trust's Vision for Snapper Island

In 2003, the Harbour Trust prepared a Comprehensive Plan for a number of former Defence sites on Sydney Harbour, including Snapper Island. The Comprehensive Plan includes an assessment of the condition of the Island, identifies constraints and opportunities, as well as its significant values and considerations.

In relation to Snapper Island's heritage values, the Harbour Trust's Comprehensive Plan (2003) states the following:

Snapper Island has been assessed for its Cultural Significance in a Draft Preliminary Heritage Study (Clive Lucas, Stapleton and Partners, February 2001). This concluded it was of National Significance for its collection of naval memorabilia and of State Significance, as the headquarters of The Navy League in NSW for 45 years and as an island in Sydney Harbour. The buildings have not been individually assessed but are very much a part of a cohesive group which replicates the layout of a ship.

The Comprehensive Plan proposes the following outcomes for Snapper Island:

The Trust's plan for Snapper Island proposes the repair, maintenance and enhancement of this extraordinary facility. The continuation of maritime training activities will be encouraged.

The Trust is keen for professional curatorial assistance. Partnerships could be encouraged, such as with naval history organisations, the Australian National Maritime Museum and Spectacle Island.

Programs and activities could be developed for the interpretation and appreciation of the island, its buildings, workshops and collection.

Improvements to the island require the preparation of a remediation strategy and environmental management plan.

- *Repairs and maintenance will be required to:*
- *Manage tidal erosion of fill to seawalls*
- *Make good the surface cover that currently exists over the island*
- *Upgrade services on the site*
- *Ensure structural soundness of buildings*
- *Ensure occupational health and safety requirements are met*

Next Steps for Snapper Island

Your feedback will inform the Harbour Trust's and Department of Finance's consideration of the potential transfer of Snapper Island to the Harbour Trust. The draft CMP's condition reports and recommendations will inform level of funding that may be required to support essential repairs, conservation works, and the re-opening of Snapper Island.

If Snapper Island is transferred, the Harbour Trust will prepare a statutory management plan for Snapper Island, in accordance with the requirements of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* and *Sydney Harbour Federation Trust Act 2001*. The community would be consulted regarding the draft Management Plan which would identify outcomes for Snapper Island, including suitable land uses.



Naval League Cadets at boat ramps Snapper Island circa 1938
(Source: State Library of NSW Sam Hood Collection FL1375016)