

23. Towra Point

Geographical Coordinates 34°00'S 151°10'E

Area 364ha

Location A promontory on the northern side of Kurnell Peninsula, which forms the southern boundary of Botany Bay, approximately 16km south of the city of Sydney, mid-way along the coast of New South Wales.

Date of Ramsar Designation 21 February 1984.

Other International Designations None.

National Designations Designated as a Nature Reserve under the New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974. 82ha were added to the Nature Reserve in 1991. An aquatic reserve has been established to protect the intertidal and sub-tidal areas around the land system.

Principal Features The Towra Point land system occupies approximately 700ha of the Kurnell Peninsula. The portion designated as the Nature Reserve and Ramsar site includes sandspits, bars, mudflats, dunes and beaches, with seagrass, mangrove and saltmarsh communities, as well as terrestrial habitats above the direct influence of the tides. These include dune woodlands, *Casuarina* forest, and small areas of littoral rainforest and sand dune grasslands. The site is one of the few remaining areas of estuarine wetlands in the vicinity of Sydney and is important for the regional survival of many bird species. The site also plays an important role in maintaining fisheries and supports a wide diversity of invertebrates. Land surrounding the site is developed for industrial and recreational use. The sand flats at the western end of Towra Beach are of particular importance for feeding and roosting water birds, notably migratory waders (e.g. *Pluvialis fulva*, *Numenius madagascariensis* and *Arenaria interpres*) during the summer months. The extensive areas of relatively undisturbed mangroves represent approximately half of the mangroves remaining in the Sydney area. (1b,1d,2a,2b,2c,3b,3c)

Conservation Issues Because of physical overlap and ecological interactions between the land system and the area of the aquatic reserve, planning for the nature reserve will complement planning for the aquatic reserve. A Management Plan for the Towra Point Nature Reserve was adopted in May 1989. Noxious flora/fauna, litter and recreation-based disturbance (e.g. use of trail bikes) are continuous management problems. Feral animal control was undertaken during mid-1991, with further work in mid-1992, and cat/fox populations have been reduced to low levels. Frequent ranger patrols of Towra Point spit island reduced human disturbance during the 1991/92 tern breeding season, allowing 16 *Sterna albifrons* chicks to fledge successfully; the highest success rate in New South Wales. The site would be threatened by any oil pollution arising from shipping movements associated with the highly industrialized surrounding areas. Dredging and construction of retaining walls, possibly affecting wave movements within the bay, may affect the seagrass meadows adjacent to the Nature Reserve and cause shoreline erosion, thus diminishing many of conservation values described above. There may also be threats from a commercial hovercraft route and marina construction adjacent to the Reserve.