

Lower Estuary Reach – Como Bridge to the Navigable River at Sandy Point

The Lower Estuary Reach is characterised by steeply sloping cliffs and ridgelines of sandstone with associated vegetation. The river is broad in this section with many tributaries.

Built environment and scenic quality

The nature, extent and impacts of change in this reach are some of the most substantial on the river.

The steep sandstone topography bordering the river, the combination of ridgeline, midblock and foreshore buildings with a bushland setting and the elevated profile of river crossings all generate a landscape that is highly sensitive to change.

The built form is particularly important in determining the character of the river foreshores. The general character of residential style and size varies considerably. In locations such as Soily Bottom Point, long-established detached residential properties have been continually developed and now extend from ridgeline to foreshore, and in other locations, such as at Gertrude Point or above Moon Point, more intense recent multi-unit development is located on the ridge or midslope.

Many houses on the slopes of the foreshore also have boat sheds, that appear to double as accommodation on the water line, creating a more dominant visual focus on the river foreshore. Other residences, on the waters edge are of such imposing size that, when viewed from the water or opposite shore, they dominate the landscape.

The relatively unmodified bushland of the substantial former army landholdings and the presence of parts of the Georges River National Park on the southern shore of the river, provide a contrast to the more developed nature of the residential areas on the northern side.

At various points along this reach, all levels of the river edge, from waterline to ridgeline, are affected by the built form. In some cases, such as Griffins Point, there may be small groups of individual buildings scattered in bushland. In other cases, such as at Lugarno West or Como, built form may be focused on a foreshore feature such as a wharf, old punt crossing or boatyard.

Major visual intrusions occur when complete ridgelines are broken by buildings, or when an artificial wall or structure breaks the continuity of colour and form of the native rocks and vegetation.



The dramatic sandstone outcrops and natural vegetation provide this reach with a unique visual character.



Steep terrain with the dense bushland and rock escarpment typical of the Lower Estuary Reach.



Some built form is well-balanced with natural vegetation on the shore line, midslope and ridgeline.



Ridgeline and midslope are dominated by built form.

This is the most visually sensitive reach of the river with the potential for future development to quite significantly degrade the existing qualities of the area. Existing built form controls do not appear to have been effective to date. With such steep topography and open bushland the absorption capacity of this landscape is also very limited.

The principal experience of the river in this stretch is from foreshore parks and residences with fewer people viewing from the river and relatively limited high level and high speed views from bridges such as Alford's Point Bridge.



The bulk and scale of developments such as these are out of character with the river and are not harmonious with their natural setting.

Foreshore access, recreation and leisure

The southern foreshore has restricted access along this reach, limited by terrain and the presence of Holsworthy Military Reserve. There is only one boat launching facility, an informal one at Sandy Point. Georges River National Park protects a significant stretch of waterfront on the Alford's Point peninsula.

Access is much more common and more highly developed on the northern foreshore. Like the Bay Reach, this is due to a combination of slightly less severe terrain, more mature development and the demand from a wider population catchment.



Many of the Georges River National Park reserves have a parkland rather than bushland design character.

Natural environment

Remnants of relatively good quality native bushland exist in this reach. However, these areas of native vegetation are interspersed with highly urbanised areas with little or no remnant vegetation. Many of the public reserves are largely devoid of significant native vegetation and comprise large expanses of mown grass. Riparian vegetation has been removed from most of the reach.

There are some significant areas of mangroves and saltmarsh occurring mainly in the tributaries, rather than on the shores of the main arm of the river. The existence of mangroves may have historically reduced the attraction of these areas to potential developers.

Water quality is generally poor and affected by urban influences including discharge from sewage treatment plants, sewage overflows, discharge from industrial activities and contaminated run-off.

Several areas have been highlighted as sensitive in the Mid-Georges River Stormwater Management Plan (Kinhill, 1999). These include:

- Mickeys Point – problem eroded sandy areas
- Little Salt Pan Creek – mangroves/saltmarsh
- Little Salt Pan Creek – natural creek
- Morgans Creek – natural creek
- Georges River National Park – remnant bushland
- Yeramba – natural creek
- Yeramba Lagoon – natural lagoon
- Trial Bikes – problem sandy areas
- Deadman Creek – bushland protection.



Litter build-up along the edge of the river is both an environmental issue and detracts from visual quality.

Lower Estuary Reach: site analysis

Built environment and scenic quality

- Very dominant natural form of entrance to Woronora River. (1)
- Scale and bulk of foreshore buildings (some derelict) typical of scenic impacts of development that is out of context. (2)
- High density 'mid-block' residential development contrasts with the low density nature of this reach. Clearing of vegetation exacerbates problem. (3)
- Long established foreshore development becoming dominated by bulky ridgeline development. (4)
- Alford's Point Bridge marks scenic junction of estuary to more river-like character. Design of bridge limits drivers views of the river. (5)

Foreshore access

- This reach has the greatest opportunities for development and increased access to the foreshore.
- There is limited access to public facilities in the upper areas of the Glen/Koolangarra Reserve, Bonnet Bay; Georges River National Park; and Holsworthy Military Reserve.
- Focus needs to be placed on improving the quality of existing walks and facilities.

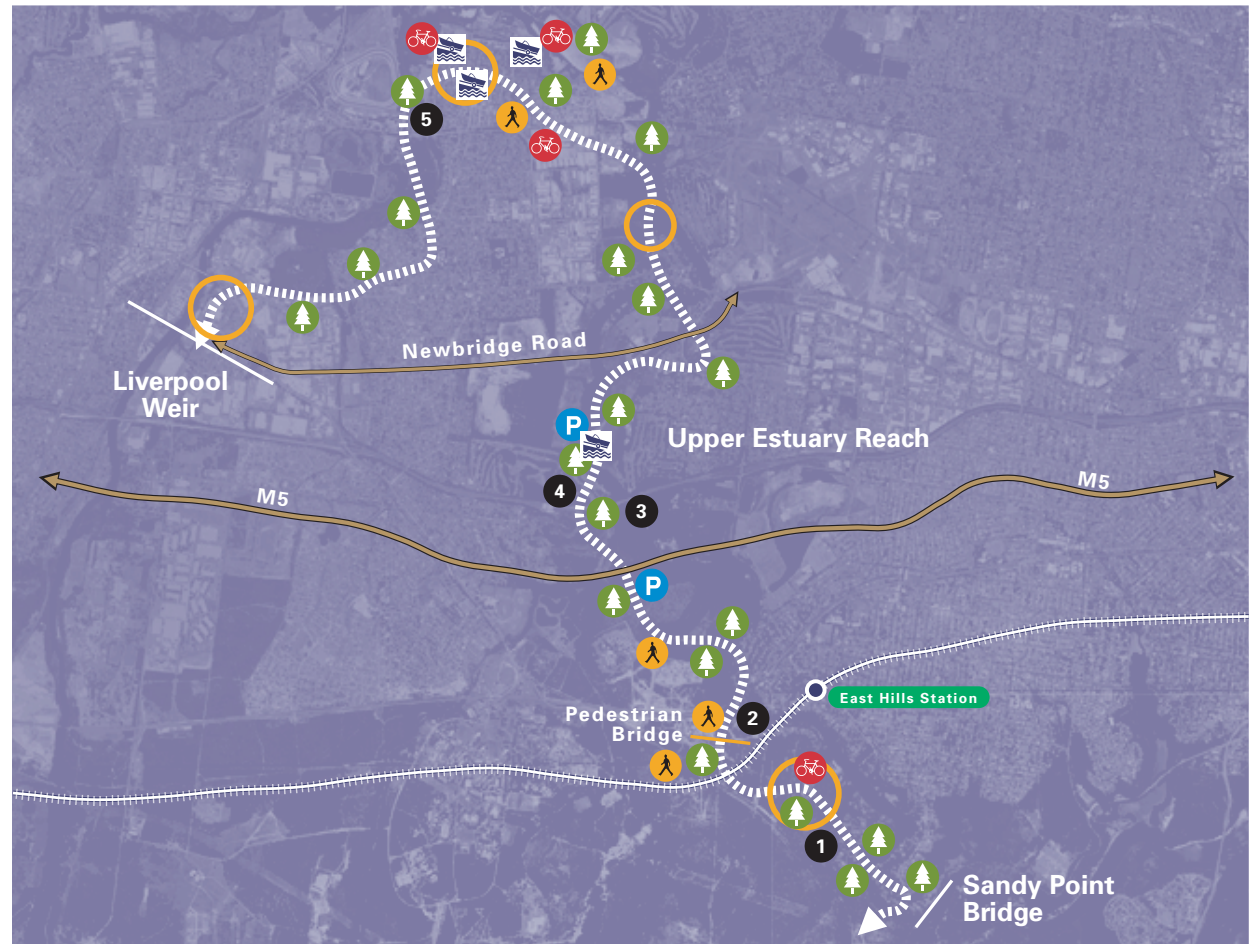
Recreation and leisure

- There are 24 reserves or parks that provide an extensive range of diverse recreational and leisure facilities, including walking tracks, cycle paths, playgrounds, picnic and BBQ areas, boat launches, fishing areas, a restaurant, a jetty, boat launches, Scouts facilities, a sand boat ramp, water access and use of beach area.

Natural environment

- The natural environmental condition of this reach has been progressively degraded with the intensification of development.

Figure 5 Lower Estuary Reach – site analysis



Conclusions

In many respects this reach is the most critically balanced with regard to its future scenic and environmental status. While there are numerous examples of recent developments along the foreshore that have demonstrated significant negative impacts, the extent of generally unmodified landscapes (especially in the Georges River National Park and on former military land on the western bank) provides opportunities for conserving these values when adequate planning controls are implemented.

The scenic sensitivity of this reach is perhaps highest of all given the combination of extensive unmodified natural landscapes and the steep topography adjoining the river. In this context even small single developments can have profound impacts on the immediate foreshore environment.

Many recent developments in residential zoned areas such as at Sandy Bottom have progressively changed the scale and character of built form impacts over several years, but such changes pale by comparison with the profound impacts of single major developments such as the unit developments at Gertrudes Point.

This reach of the river is scenically significant and should be protected by appropriate controls. Zoning limits are required in order to maintain existing landscape. The same controls should be applied to government agencies such as the RTA, Sydney Water and Energy Australia who are as responsible as any developer for negative scenic and environmental impacts.

Foreshore access in this reach is already well-developed and recent planning initiatives by DEC and various local councils suggest that pedestrian access to and along the foreshore and linking creeks is likely to improve further. This reach has perhaps the greatest opportunity of all the reaches to provide extensive additional foreshore links in the immediate future. In the longer-term the possibility may arise for the introduction of public rights of way through the military land by the river.

Henry Lawson Drive running parallel to the northern foreshore over much of the length of this reach provides both an opportunity and a constraint to river access; opportunity in the sense of ease of vehicle access and constraint as a barrier to pedestrian access to the river from the north, particularly for the local community. Identification of carefully located grade separated crossing opportunities will be as important an initiative in extending river access as will linked path systems on the foreshore.

Boat access to the river is relatively limited by virtue of topography in this reach and the emphasis here may be best placed on improving the quality of ramps and public wharfs and associated amenities rather than providing new facilities.