

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY



EMBARGOED AGAINST DELIVERY

PRIME MINISTER

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER
QUARANTINE STATION - NORTH HEAD - 16 MARCH 1984

Mr Premier, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

This is a small but significant ceremony to commemorate the transfer of the former North Head Quarantine Station to New South Wales. That it occurs at all reflects the close co-operative arrangements existing between the Australian and New South Wales Governments. Such co-operation now extends into many fields of community interest. That it should continue is in the interests of all of us - of all Australians.

This former quarantine station site of about 27 hectares is being transferred to the State under the provisions of the Land Exchange Agreement between the Commonwealth and the State for inclusion in the proposed Sydney Harbour National Park.

The Agreement is unique in Commonwealth/State negotiations on the purchase/disposal of Government owned property. Among other things, it requires the purchasing government to use the land for a prior nominated purpose at an agreed value based on that use.

I have been advised that the current size of the Sydney Harbour National Park is about 465 hectares. Of this area the Commonwealth is contributing 80 per cent - 372 hectares, with only 82 hectares remaining to be transferred. The State has so far contributed 93 hectares.

The North Head component is the largest and one of the most prominent areas of the proposed National Park. This area, contributed by the Commonwealth, comprises over 55 per cent of the total park area.

In the 1800's, North Head on the northern side of the entrance to Sydney Harbour, was isolated and unpopulated. Store beach was protected from the southerlies and provided safe anchorage, drinking water and sandy beaches.

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Before the area was proclaimed for quarantine purposes ships arriving from overseas used to put ashore on the beach at North Head, with some provisions or rations, passengers and crew who appeared to be suffering from a communicable disease.

A scare resulting from an outbreak of cholera in England and Ireland prompted Governor Bourke on 14 August 1832, to proclaim the site for quarantine purposes.

In 1837 temporary buildings were erected between Collin's Flat and Store Beach. By the end of that year the occupants moved up the hill to the present station site where nine permanent buildings were being erected. These buildings were finished in May 1838.

When the Commonwealth was established in 1901, the Federal Constitution included quarantine as a specific Commonwealth responsibility. The Commonwealth Quarantine Act was passed in March 1908 and came into force on 1 July 1909. As a result the station, which originally operated under State legislation, was transferred to the Commonwealth.

The station has many links with early white settlement in Australia and is part of our historic heritage. It is especially interesting that rock carvings, made by crew and passengers, may be found in a number of locations such as Store Beach, Spring Cove and Old Man's Hat.

Over the last 10 years the need for human quarantine stations has diminished with the advent of better public health services, the eradication of smallpox and changing world disease patterns. Quarantinable diseases such as typhoid and cholera contracted by travellers from overseas are very few and each State has agreed that any cases or suspect cases can be adequately handled within the existing State health authority system.

The transfer of this property is tangible evidence of the Commonwealth's desire to see that any lands it holds are put to the most appropriate uses and, wherever practicable, are made available to all Australians.

Mr Premier, I am delighted that, through a spirit of mutual co-operation, such a worthwhile asset will be opened to the public. I know that its inclusion in the Sydney Harbour National Park will enhance what is generally - and rightly - regarded as the most picturesque harbour in the world.
