Bruce Hamon’s book, *They Came to Murrarang*, provides a vivid account of the isolation that communities at Murrarang experienced over much of their post-settlement history, as well as the impact made by various forms of industry, communication and transportation in linking the area to the rest of the state, the nation and the world. The time that has elapsed since Bruce published the book in 1994 presents an opportunity to reflect on the pace of contemporary change in the area and the likely nature of future development.

Bruce’s history of the area was published following a decade of significant population expansion during the 1980s. Between 1986 and 1991, the population of Bawley Point had grown from 261 to 433 people. Kioloa was not listed as a bounded locality for census purposes until 1996, when it recorded a population of 148 residents. In the intervening period since Bruce wrote his book, a returnee entering Bawley Point over the bridge at Willinga Lake, or entering Kioloa over the Butler’s Creek bridge, would notice that the residential subdivisions had filled in and that the new homes are larger than their predecessors. Otherwise, they would have little difficulty recognising the area.

The 2011 census records that Bawley Point’s population had risen to 591 people, while 208 residents lived at Kioloa and Merry Beach. Over the previous decade to 2011, Bawley Point had grown by 15 per cent, while Kioloa had grown by 5.1 per cent. These communities marking the northern and southern extremities
of the area still retain a high proportion of holiday home owners, with both Bawley Point and Kioloa possessing more private dwellings than residents (687 and 304 dwellings respectively). At Bawley Point, 62.6 per cent of homes are listed as ‘unoccupied private dwellings’, while 66.2 per cent of dwellings at Kioloa share this status. However, during the summer period, between 10,000 and 15,000 people visit the area.

The demographic characteristics of the local population also reveal that the area remains popular for retirees. While the Australia-wide proportion of persons aged 65 or over in 2011 was 19.6 per cent, 39.1 per cent of residents at Bawley Point and 46.3 per cent of residents at Kioloa were 65 years or older. Furthermore, the area contains twice the number of outright home owners as the nation as a whole. Only 39.6 per cent of residents at Bawley Point and 29.6 per cent of people at Kioloa reported being in the labour force. In 2011, of those in the labour force, 18.6 per cent of residents at Kioloa and 9.3 per cent at Bawley Point listed ‘accommodation’ as their industry of employment, compared to an Australia-wide proportion of 1.2 per cent.

Demand for holiday accommodation (mainly from the Sydney–Illawarra region, but also from the Canberra region) remains strong, and has been serviced partly through the growth of small to medium-sized family-owned guest houses as well as bed and breakfast accommodation, near the beaches and in the bush west of Murramarang Road. Bruce’s mother’s guest house, the Bawley Point Guest House, closed down in 2001. While the original Californian bungalow–style house still stands — having finally served as the restaurant for the guest house — the spacious block has been subdivided gradually over the past 20 years to accommodate six other residential units.

The area also abounds with holiday rental properties but has not attracted large-scale resort complexes or hotels. Indeed, the 2012–17 Shoalhaven Tourism Master Plan acknowledges the value of Murramarang’s present ambience, and lists as a desired outcome that the area be ‘recognised as one of the special, treasured areas on the South Coast, providing the quintessential coastal village experience’. The Bawley Point Kioloa Community Association also performs an active role in keeping the community informed of developments that have the potential to change the character of the area.

The four on-site caravan parks that Bruce described (at Racecourse Beach, Kioloa, Merry Beach, and Pretty Beach) have been reduced to three, after NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service ordered the removal of the on-site Pretty Beach caravans at the turn of the millennium. The NPWS Plan of Management for Murramarang National Park, formulated in 1997, identified that most of the caravan sites were permanently occupied by private holiday vans. This placed restrictions on other park users, such as day visitors, campers and short term/
casual van stays. In these circumstances, the National Parks and Wildlife Act requires facilities to be offered across the recreational use spectrum. The subsequent redevelopment plan required permanent holiday vans to be phased out over a five-year period.¹ The other caravan parks remain popular holiday resorts in high season, while the Racecourse Beach caravan park also possesses a dedicated, gated residential park.

As a critical mass of permanent residents has grown in the Murramarang area, the scale and location of retailing has evolved. For much of the post–World War II period, holidaymakers and locals relied on the fibro-clad convenience store adjacent to the Kioloa caravan park on Murramarang Road. The store grew incrementally over the years, catering for the seasonal influx of tourists, and assumed the role of the local petrol station and fish and chip shop. The centrality of this location for the area was enhanced by the nearby establishment of the local fire depot and tennis courts. However, by 2014, shopping in the Murramarang area had become more bifurcated. A couple of years before Bruce’s book was published, a shopping centre was built off Voyager Drive on the outskirts of Bawley Point to meet the needs of the locals, who had previously relied on Kioloa or Termeil service station for convenience goods. In the heart of Bawley Point, the Bawley Point Café has also developed a casual dining clientele. At the other end of the Murramarang settlement at Merry Beach, Kioloa, the new subdivisions encouraged the establishment of a restaurant attached to the convenience store on Merry Street. These retailing and dining enterprises servicing permanent residential and holiday demand took custom away from the original Kioloa store, which closed down in the mid-2000s. However, the store reopened in 2015.

Bawley Point and Kioloa are becoming unique communities with respect to the provision of other services. For example, the area is one of the few along the coast yet to be connected with mains water and mains sewerage. Shoalhaven Council has extended mains sewerage as far south as Lake Tabourie (just under 10 kilometres north of Bawley Point as the crow flies), but Murramarang remains reliant on water tanks for potable water and septic tanks for waste. Older ‘absorption’ septic systems are being replaced with ‘pump-out’ systems, reducing some of the pressure on ground soil. Mobile phone services remain unreliable and it is estimated that it will be a number of years before the area is connected by the National Broadband Network. Furthermore, most school-aged residents within the area still attend schools in Ulladulla, some 30 kilometres

north. Consistent with the demographic profile noted earlier, only 17.2 per cent of Bawley Point’s population and 13.9 per cent of Kioloa’s population were under 20 years of age in 2011, compared with 25.8 per cent Australia-wide.

As Bruce’s book documented, William Walker’s homestead on 248 hectares, cleared and developed just north of the Kioloa sawmill before World War I, was eventually purchased by Edith and Joy London in 1929. While Joy remained at this property until her death in 1995, she had earlier bequeathed it to The Australian National University, under a 1975 deed of gift whereby ANU would maintain the property (including its forest, cleared farmland, buildings and beach area) in its present condition for educational and research purposes. In the subsequent 20 years, ANU fulfilled this commitment, and added a number of buildings to ensure its functionality as a university coastal campus.

However, in the late 1990s, ANU management undertook a series of budgetary measures designed to reduce costs, and questioned whether maintaining the Kioloa campus was part of its ‘core business’. A proposal to divest itself of responsibility for the property was challenged by a concerted campaign by many members of the ANU community, spearheaded by its Kioloa Management Committee. The issue was resolved when the new Vice-Chancellor, Professor Ian Chubb, visited Kioloa in 2001 and was impressed enough with the site to commit the university to enhancing the status of the campus as one of the world’s foremost coastal academic field stations. Since then, the Kioloa coastal campus has upgraded its existing buildings — including its heritage-listed homestead, timber-workers’ cottages, and old schoolhouse — and placed the station on a self-financing footing. In 2012, it erected a new $3 million multi-purpose building that was officially opened with a smoking ceremony and welcoming address conducted by local Indigenous elders. It boasts a theatre hall with a capacity for 150 people, breakout rooms, a service area and a display room holding the African artefacts collected by Joy London’s father.

Apart from aiming to provide ANU students from all natural and social sciences disciplines with a research experience at Kioloa, the campus hosts highly popular annual open days for the general public during the first week in January, showcasing the campus and the research of ANU academics. ANU has also dedicated part of a paddock to a highly successful community garden supported by over 80 local residents, and maintains a dedicated program to protect the critically endangered Hooded Plovers that inhabit its shoreline. The open fields of the campus also act as an important firebreak for the community of Kioloa.

Over the past two decades, the Murramarang region has inspired research by people from many different disciplines and walks of life, and this research complements Bruce’s history. Archaeologist Michael Tracey spent years corresponding with Bruce about the history of the local timber industry, as he
was interested in trying to match the archaeological record with information derived from archives and oral history. In 1994 he submitted an honours thesis on the archaeological expression of timber-getting, timber transport, and shipbuilding in the Murramarang district, which involved research on land and in the ocean. His research led to the discovery of some fascinating maritime archaeology in the ocean depths below Bawley Point. Tracey later published research on the ship the SS *Douglas Mawson*, built and launched from Bawley Point in 1914 and mentioned in Bruce’s book.

Tracey’s question of whether the timber tramways associated with the Kioloa and Bawley Point sawmills were ever linked remains pertinent today. Since 2011, after retiring from his Batemans Bay-based position with Forestry Corporation of NSW (formerly the NSW Forestry Commission), Ian Barnes has explored the state forests looking for the remains of the timber tramways from a forester’s perspective. While little remains of Guy’s sawmill at Bawley Point, he discovered further evidence of the timber tramway that served it. Barnes and another forester, Ian Bevage, have plotted kilometres of the tramways accurately onto topographic maps.

Ulladulla-based historian Cathy Dunn has researched the convict history of Murramarang and in 2006 published *Masters and Convicts: Murramarang and Ulladulla*. This manuscript contains an index of Milton and Ulladulla and other South Coast church records, cross referenced with civil registrations. It presents lists of convicts and the farms and estates in the district to which they were assigned, and the names of their masters, including Sydney Stephen, William Morris, and later William Carr at Murramarang.

The Murramarang area that Bruce describes is situated in the natural environment of the South Coast, whose beauty and ‘naturalness’ have been a draw card for visitors and residents for decades. Keeping it that way has not been easy. Despite its isolation — perhaps because of its isolation — Bawley Point and Kioloa remain attractive villages. Since the early 1990s, there has been no major subdivisional development for residential purposes, and few vacant blocks now remain on the two subdivisions on either side of Forest Road on the edge of Murramarang National Park that were cleared around the time Bruce wrote his book. Larger blocks of land closer to the bush behind Bawley Point have also been developed and a range of entrepreneurial ventures have been established in accommodation, equestrian activities, horticulture and viticulture between Bawley Point and Termeil. Unless more residential land is ‘unlocked’, people looking to settle or erect holiday homes in the area will compete for the existing limited resources. Shoalhaven Council’s Tourism Master Plan also suggests that any future development in the area would have to remain consistent with the existing social and natural environment.
The area has also been afforded natural protection from development, being bounded by Murramarang National Park to the south, state forests to the west, Meroo National Park and lakes to the north, and the Tasman Sea to the east. The Murramarang Aboriginal Area also affords protection from development between Bawley Point and Racecourse Beach. The commitment by ANU to preserve its site in its current and natural state also removes Joy London’s fear that her property would be subdivided for residential purposes.

Along with the socioeconomic changes in the Murramarang region since Bruce wrote this book, there have been major government initiatives to improve protection of Australia’s marine and forest biodiversity. The Southern Regional Forest Agreement was one of several agreements between State and Federal governments to find a balance between conserving native forests and extraction of timber for saw logs and woodchips. Controversial, prolonged and often acrimonious, by 2001 the Southern Regional Forest Agreement had delivered an extension to Murramarang National Park on the eastern side of the Princes Highway and created new protected areas — Meroo National Park and Barnunj State Conservation Area. These were subsequently combined to create the 4,000-hectare Meroo National Park between Burrill Lake in the north and Bawley Point in the south. This national park protects the catchments of a suite of significant wetlands and coastal lakes, provides camping and other recreational opportunities and conserves landscapes rich in cultural heritage, including Indigenous sites and evidence of early timber production.

Equally controversial was the creation of Batemans Marine Park in 2006. Formulation of the Marine Parks Act in 1997 was the NSW government’s response to global concerns over dwindling fish stocks and inadequate protection of marine ecosystems. The Marine Parks Act allows for sustainable fishing but does include ‘no-take’ sanctuary zones.

Batemans Marine Park covers 85,000 hectares of the Tasman Sea, between Bawley Point in the north and Wallaga Lake in the south, and extends from mean high water mark to three nautical miles offshore, where it adjoins Commonwealth waters. The marine park contains numerous lakes and estuaries and several offshore islands. Many people robustly opposed the creation of the marine park but much of this was fuelled by a misunderstanding of the perceived constraints on fishing. Some commercial fisher livelihoods were affected, but they received compensation for their hardship. Recreational fishing is deeply embedded in the Australian psyche and the community is divided in its views on the marine park. The NSW Liberal government currently has an amnesty on recreational fishing in some sanctuary zones and a moratorium on any new marine parks. We are yet to see whether this has been a wise decision but it shows that finding a balance between conservation and sustainable use is essential if humans want to share their South Coast environment with all of life’s biodiversity.
Due to these social, economic, regulatory and geophysical circumstances, there is ample reason to hope that the Murramarang area that Bruce so eloquently described will be preserved for future generations. Yet, this epilogue can only echo Bruce’s final warning that ‘only vigilance’ will keep in check the threat to the area’s attractions. At the jetty on the north of O’Hara Head, two concrete blocks — remnants of the old Kioloa sawmill — are slowly being reclaimed by sand and vegetation. As these remaining visual landmarks disappear, the region can be even more grateful for Bruce’s vivid description of the history of Murramarang.
This text is taken from They Came to Murraramang: A History of Murraramang, Kioloa and Bawley Point, by Bruce Hamon, edited by Alastair Greig and Sue Feary, published 2015 by ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.