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Mud, ‘Mangrovites’ and Oatley Bay

The protest at Oatley Bay was against both reclamation and dredging. There were two major tributaries into Oatley Bay and, by the 1960s, the western one, Renown Creek, had been largely destroyed by dumping, while the eastern one, Poulton Creek, and the surrounding Poulton Park, were both threatened with ‘reclamation’ by council dumping. While some of the material to be dumped was from rubbish, much of it was to be dredged up from Oatley Bay itself, through which the council aimed to deepen the bay and make it more accessible for watercraft. The active campaign in the 1960s and 1970s was focused on saving the eastern tributary, Poulton Creek, and its park, but the dredging of the whole bay was always just as crucial to this campaign as was the dumping on both the creeks.

This overall protest campaign was distinctive because of the rising strategic importance of education – both formal and informal – as the argument for conservation. There were activist teachers in the simultaneous campaign at Lime Kiln Bay, but they were focusing on mobilising political support at community and government level. Around Oatley Bay, while formal protests were written to politicians, the argument for an end to dumping, dredging and ‘reclamation’ was based fundamentally on the need to learn from the natural environment. This campaign argued that the mangrove and swampland and the natural bush and its wildlife provided a crucial educational resource for the community and within formal schooling, with teachers and students more prominently represented among the campaigners than in the upstream disputes.

These protests were distinctive too in that they demonstrated the complexity of the local community, showing alliances among residents but also revealing the tensions between them. Those trying to protect Poulton Creek and its bushland included oyster farming families as well as those employed on land. But, at the same time, churchgoing conservationists were accosted by religious ministers who sided with the council. Finally, the conflicts were distinctive because, even more obviously than in the Lime Kiln Bay conflicts with Hurstville Council, these disputes with Kogarah Council showed an intense focus on mangroves by all sides.

Some members of the longer-established Oatley Flora and Fauna Society (OFF) were attracted by the persistent advocacy undertaken in the Lime Kiln Bay conflicts. Others within OFF, however, were troubled by what they saw as 'activism', by which they meant putting public pressure on local and state government through petitions, media and running candidates in local elections. The more conservative members wished only to stick to their self-education approaches, as was clear in the *OFF News* Editorial in January 1969, which reported that, in the committee:

The opinion has been expressed that the greater activity in conservation matters during the year may be against the wishes and inclinations of some members who would prefer just to hold our monthly evening meetings with their entertaining and instructive lectures and our enjoyable field days. This view has been strongly opposed, but the Committee feel that this is a matter for discussion at the AGM so that the incoming Committee will have a clear understanding of the wishes of members.¹

By the late 1960s, such polite activity was losing favour, and indeed visiting experts like Allen Strom often argued for strong 'citizen-based conservation' advocacy. Nevertheless, this self-education activity had built up general and widespread community knowledge about the presence and values of native bushland. In the AGM the following month, members supported the view that OFF should take a more activist position. Subsequently the order of aims in its constitution was reworded so that 'the furtherance of conservation' was placed ahead of 'encouraging the growth of native plants'.² Yet the threats to bushland were coming ever closer to home as the momentum built up to further dredge the bay to fill in Poulton Creek.

1 *OFF News*, January 1969, 1–2.

2 'Annual General Meeting', *OFF News*, February 1969, 3.

Kogarah was further downstream than Hurstville, along the northern shore of the Georges River, stretching around to the shores of Botany Bay, making it even further away than Hurstville from the factories and the Housing Commission hostels and settlements of Milperra and Herne Bay. The river waters, however, were not isolated from the waste flowing from the old industrial areas like Mortdale, which was in the Hurstville local government area but encompassed Renown Creek, which flowed into the western arm of Oatley Bay, in the Kogarah area. The massive Judd brick pits and other smaller industries all lay around Mortdale until the 1930s or later, draining waste into Renown Creek. The contents of such dumped and leached toxic materials had not ever been recorded but had persisted in the soils of the creek bed as well as the floor of Oatley Bay itself.³

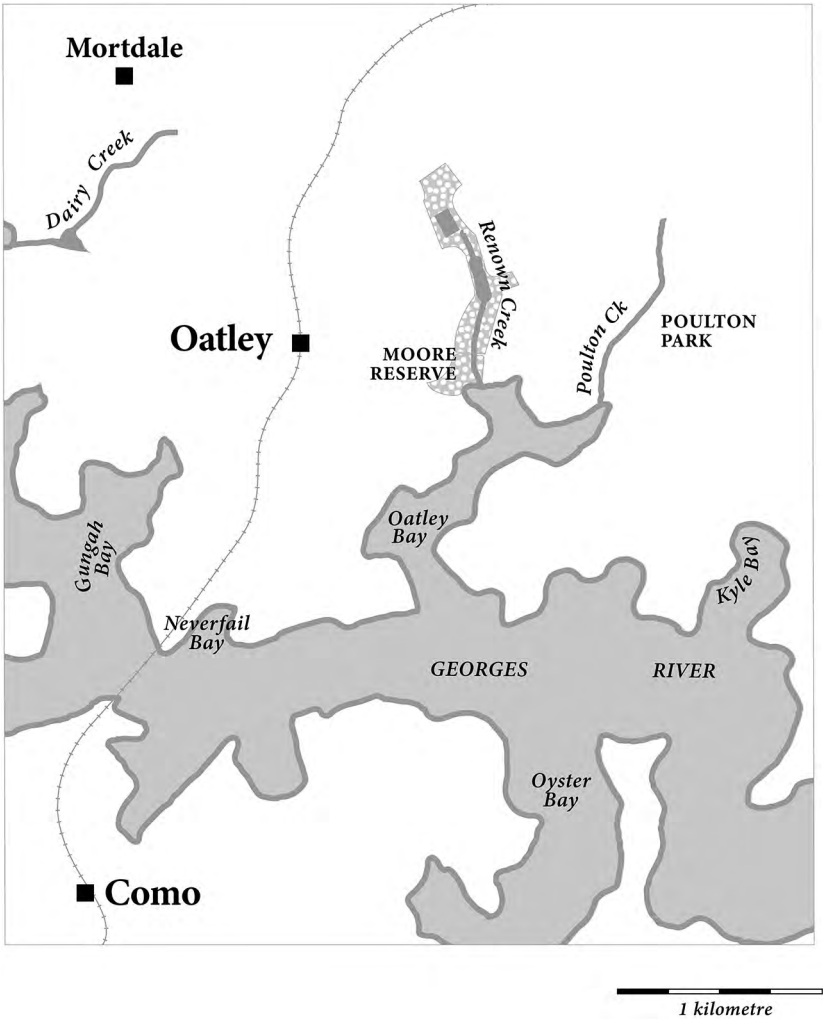
On the land close to the Georges River there were far more boat owners living in the Kogarah area than there were in the upstream areas controlled by Hurstville. There were also fewer industrial unionists although there were many with only moderate levels of education and income. Kogarah Council had a significant proportion of professional residents, with some who were economically comfortable, but others, like teachers, who were not only less affluent but had a history of unionised activism in the New South Wales Teachers Federation. Nature study had been given attention in the New South Wales education curriculum since 1905; however, with the first manned space flights in the 1960s – Yuri Gagarin in 1961 and the moon landing in 1969 – the profile of science education was rising. So too was concern about the impacts of new technologies. Consequently, teachers were being asked to teach more about the environment in their secondary schools.⁴

Like Bankstown and Hurstville, the upstream councils on the northern side of the Georges River, Kogarah had been dredging and reclaiming small patches of low-lying land over many years. The northern end of Kogarah Bay, for example, had long before been turned into Beverley Park and a golf course. The Kogarah area boat owners had not been satisfied with the access gained to Kogarah Bay and continued to apply pressure for more dredging. Renown Creek, with its load of toxic waste from Mortdale, had already largely disappeared under silt dredged up

3 Kogarah Council, 'Moore Reserve Plan of Management', 3.

4 Mitchell, *Teachers, Education, and Politics*; Kass, *Educational Reform*; Goodall, Randerson and Ghosh, *Teacher for Justice*.

from Oatley Bay in the days after World War II (WWII) to become 'Moore Reserve'. 'Reclamation' continued until eventually Renown Creek was destroyed altogether and replaced with concrete pipes.



Map 12.1: Oatley Bay, Renown and Poulton creeks.

Cartography: Sharon Harrup.

As early as 1936 Kogarah had applied for permission to dredge still more of the bay in order to reclaim not only the more easterly Poulton Creek but also the deeper, eastern arm where this creek joined Oatley Bay, which would lead to the formation of Poulton Park. Although the Depression and

WWII had slowed this work, the rising tide of household and industrial waste after the war ensured that this 'reclamation' plan re-emerged. Today men who were young boys at Mortdale Public School in the 1940s have fond memories of sneaking out of school to hide in the caves and play in the swamps.⁵ A small section of land along Poulton Creek had been filled by the late 1960s, but there was still a large area of saltmarsh and mangroves on the lower edges of the creek near its entrance to the bay.

The continued presence of these swamplands did not weigh on the conscience of Kogarah councillors, who talked of 'filthy mangroves'.⁶ The council proposed building a causeway across the eastern arm that would cut off the creek and upper waters of the eastern arm from the river, starving the mangroves and saltmarsh of the saline, tidal water they needed to survive.

But the reclamation of the western arm for Moore Reserve had not been going to plan. In 1971, the Kogarah Council engineer, John Lindsay, reported to the 5 July council meeting that the dredged mud from the riverbed that had been dumped onto the Moore Reserve surface had not solidified.⁷ Instead, it had remained slimy and mobile and was, in fact, slowly sliding back down into the bay. He reported that the dredged mud was causing substantial problems:

After four years it is still moving. It has never dried out. All the mud in the tip is moving under the garbage and I don't know how we can control this.⁸

The problem was so pronounced that what had been suggested as a children's soccer field could not be opened. Instead, it lay idle, behind a cyclone wire fence with a sign forbidding entry because of the danger of quicksand. Even the hopes for its use had faltered. In 1977 Kogarah Council called a meeting to canvass local residents about their preferred use for the reclaimed area: did they want passive or active recreation? Residents attending the meeting voted overwhelmingly for passive

5 Robert Haworth, pers. comm. 29 April 2020.

6 Fairley, *Being Green*.

7 At the council meeting on 5 July 1971. John Lindsay (1920–2010) was Kogarah Council engineer and town planner (1956–72). He was outspoken and 'trod on toes' at Kogarah, which he accused in the mid-1960s, in an article in the *St George and Sutherland Shire Leader* (hereafter *Leader*), of treating him with 'dog in the manger antics'. Andrew Tink, Obituary, 1 September 2010, *Sydney Morning Herald*.

8 Cited in Fairley, *Being Green*, 52.

recreation – like the picnics and family gatherings that Ruth Staples had wanted to be able to retain at Lime Kiln Bay. It was not, however, what the council wanted.

Even more problematically for all concerned was the realisation that the waste and silt that had been dumped included high levels of zinc, lead, chromium and mercury, discovered because the unstable dredged layers were leaching liquids from the waste into the bay.⁹ There had been no accurate accounting of the composition of the dumped waste, making it impossible to assess the degree of toxicity.¹⁰ The Wran Labor government came to power at state level in 1976 and when local member Frank Walker became acting environment minister in the following year he was able to impose a halt to further work on the site. All dumping ceased at Moore Reserve from July 1977.¹¹

Meanwhile, the faltering reclamation of Poulton Park had been under debate since the late 1960s. At the same 1971 meeting at which engineer John Lindsay had reported on the unstable silt at Moore Reserve, he used the evidence from that western arm to warn against further dredging and dumping onto the eastern Poulton Park. He argued that the dredged silt would exhibit the same unstable behaviour there. Regardless, Kogarah councillors voted at that meeting to go ahead with the dredging and to dump the silt onto Poulton Park. OFF members wrote in protest against the decision to kill the mangroves, demanding first that the council at least consider installing large pipes underneath the causeway to allow tidal water to flow to the mangroves and marshes and, second, that the whole area be made a flora and fauna conservation area. At the same time, attempting to counter the simplistic binaries that council was asserting of ‘conservationists vs the community’, OFF insisted that it did not oppose the dredging, believing that additional tidal flow would, in fact, benefit the mangroves.¹²

9 Ibid., 53.

10 At the Senate Select Committee Hunt explained that no records had been kept prior to 1969 of the composition of garbage dumped or of toxic waste released into river. The Bill before the New South Wales Parliament when he gave evidence (5 August 1969) set the maximum allowable discharge of any chemical, but he argued that this was not workable, as ascertaining the composition of a mixed discharge of chemicals would be impossible and/or unworkably time-consuming. In the later Poulton Park case, the New South Wales State Pollution Control Commission, the body arising from the 1969 Bill, had simply refused to act, telling the campaigners that all future correspondence must be directed to the municipal council.

11 Cited in Fairley, *Being Green*, 53.

12 Ibid., 43.

There continued to be those in OFF who wanted to take a stronger position, so the Save Poulton Park Campaign Committee was set up. Initiated by Ray and Evol Knight, together with some other OFF members, it drew in many concerned residents who had wider networks. Although neither Ray nor Evol had had the benefit of much formal education, they were both lifelong learners, and had become tireless advocates for the environment at Oatley. Ray, an immigrant from the south of England in 1957, had left school at the age of 11 to go to work and, by 1971, was general manager of a printing business in Ultimo. He had been active in promoting native plants and a bushland environment ever since his arrival, becoming vice-president of OFF.

Evol was just as active, although, as was common along the river, she was not ever the public face of conservation advocacy. Her involvement became particularly important in this campaign: she was a member of the Derwent family, so she belonged to the large network of oyster growing families. Consequently, Evol was able to form a sustained link between the oyster farmers and the conservationists. Her father, Charles John Derwent, her brothers and her cousins all farmed oysters and Evol had grown up among them in Wyong Street, which led down to Neverfail Bay where the industry was based and where Evol kept her own small rowboat. After Evol and Ray married, they stayed close by, settling directly behind Wyong Street, on a bush block on Letitia Street where they could retain all the native trees and shrubs. From there, they took a strong interest in both water quality and land-based environments in the area.

Evol had been frustrated in her own education, having fulfilled family wishes to leave school at 15 to train as a secretary. She grew up to be tireless in her environmental advocacy, writing endless letters to politicians and creating educational opportunities, particularly in schools. With Ray, she established a native plant garden at Oatley Public School, which survived as long as there was a sympathetic principal. They continued their work by setting up a creative leisure centre, which fostered environmental interest as well as other leisure activities. In what spare time she had, Evol would gather native plants like banksia from the bush around Oatley and take the cuttings into a school at Redfern to teach students there about the native plants they could no longer see in their heavily built-up inner-city area.



Figure 12.1: Save Poulton Park Campaign Committee stickers.

These stickers were printed by Ray Knight, chairman of the Save Poulton Park Campaign Committee. Alexandra Knight handed them out at school and gave them away as she gathered signatures for the petition opposing Kogarah Council's 'reclamation'. Note especially the 'Keep bushland in our suburbs' and 'Protect our wetlands' stickers. This is the only use of the term 'wetlands' in any of these campaigns along the river. Courtesy of Dr Alexandra Knight, Save Poulton Park Campaign Archive, private collection.

Kogarah Council continued to insist on 'reclaiming' the eastern arm by dumping garbage and silt, so the Save Poulton Park Campaign Committee geared up the attempt to save it. A petition was mounted and Alexandra Knight remembers going from door to door as a child across the suburb to gather signatures. As a printer, Ray understood the impact of graphic statements to remind people of what they stood to lose if the creek and banks were smothered in silt. He printed a set of stickers that Alex took with her to hand out to petitioners and around her school. Each sticker carried the name of an important species of bird, animal or plant that could be found, and the whole message of the campaign was summed

up by one sticker, which could have been the slogan for all the anti-reclamation campaigns along the river: 'Keep bushland in our suburbs' (see Figure 12.1). It may be significant in this sense that this was the only one of the estuary campaigns that used the term 'wetlands': all others used terms like 'bush', 'mangrove swamp' or just 'mangroves' as the metonym for all the vegetation in low-lying swampy areas.

These were not campaigns to defend a historic built environment or even to defend working-class housing. Nor were they to defend distant and supposedly 'pristine' environments. Instead, this campaign and all the others on the river were attempting to defend a damaged and polluted river and the scarred remnants of its endemic bushland. They were driven by a commitment to saving what they could in order to create a future for the river lands.

The committee was now in touch with the wider emerging environmental activist movement. Unlike the Lime Kiln Bay activists, they do not seem to have attempted to contact unions as potential allies, perhaps having learnt from the refusal of the Municipal and Shire Council Employees' Union to support the Lime Kiln Bay campaign! Nor did this campaign focus its attention on mobilising political allies. Instead, its primary strategy was to focus on education.

Poulton Creek activists were able to build links to teachers interested in education as a means to defend the environment. Through teachers, the committee was able to draw in Alan Reid, who became a part of the Oatley Bay story. Reid had already been a conservationist and teacher in Melbourne when he began studying science part-time at Monash University in 1969 to better understand the environment he was teaching about. He became involved with both the Gould League and the Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) where he took up a position as education liaison officer, making nationwide and international connections for the ACF among teacher environmentalists and developing strategy for the Curriculum Development Centre, sponsored by the federal Ministry for Conservation and Environment. During 1970, the ACF asked Reid to work on setting up state-based associations for environmental studies with the goal of building a national organisation on the model of the Field Studies Council in the UK.¹³ In December 1970, Reid recalled that

13 Alan Reid, pers. comm., 2 May 2020, citing diary records from the period. The centre was eventually set up in 1975. The Environmental Studies Associations in each state became a national body in 1980. The UK Field Studies Council continues to exist. Field Studies Council, 'Outdoor Learning and School Trips', accessed 21 January 2021, www.field-studies-council.org/.

the broad environmental movement was shaken up by William Stapp from the University of Michigan who spoke at a Canberra conference and challenged teachers and environmentalists to work together to build curriculum for all age groups that would inform them about ecological science, empower them to investigate their local urban environments and build their skills to communicate their findings and concerns.¹⁴ Strom had also been impressed by Bill Stapp's talk, drawing on it to support his own advocacy of 'citizen-based environmental activism'.¹⁵

Another source of organising energy for local activists was the Society for Social Responsibility in Science (SSRS), which included university students studying in the field of science and medicine. SSRS had generated an adult education program and Peter Ellyard, then a policy researcher, organised high school science students in Canberra on similar principles in 1970 – what would today be called today 'inquiry-based' or 'problem-based' education – to learn about biology by investigating their local environments. This drew on the approaches that had been developed by the earlier progressive education movement and can be seen as the seeds of today's 'citizen science'.¹⁶ This program was called INSPECT – an acronym for INquiry into the State of Pollution and Environmental Conservation by Thoughtful People'. Ellyard and Roger Gifford reported in 1971 on the school students' program in their *Bad Luck, Dead Duck*, which circulated rapidly among environmental educators (see Figure 12.2).¹⁷ As Ellyard explained it, the INSPECT approach began with talks to the students by visiting speakers, staff and fellow students, then students would select problems and, guided by scientists, teachers and planners who had some idea of the problem chosen, would develop a research plan. They could administer surveys, do literature searches and/or undertake laboratory studies. They would then gather the data together in a form that would be useful for agencies responsible for the correction of the problem. INSPECT groups developed in many schools, drawing on similar approaches to develop their own strategies depending on local conditions and problems.

14 Reid, interview. Stapp was keynote speaker at an Australian Academy of Science conference. Stapp, 'A Strategy for Curriculum Development'.

15 Allen Strom's comments on Bill Stapp can be found in Fox, *Chief Guardian*, Ch. 11.

16 Progressive education in Australia had been associated with the New Education Fellowship (active in the UK, Europe, India and South Africa) and with John Dewey's work in the US. For its political impacts, see Goodall, Randerson and Ghosh, *Teacher for Justice*. For an introduction to 'citizen science' see Simpson, 'What is Citizen Science?'

17 Gifford and Ellyard, *Bad Luck, Dead Duck*. The following year they published *What a Mess! Let's Confess: The Report of INSPECT 1971*.

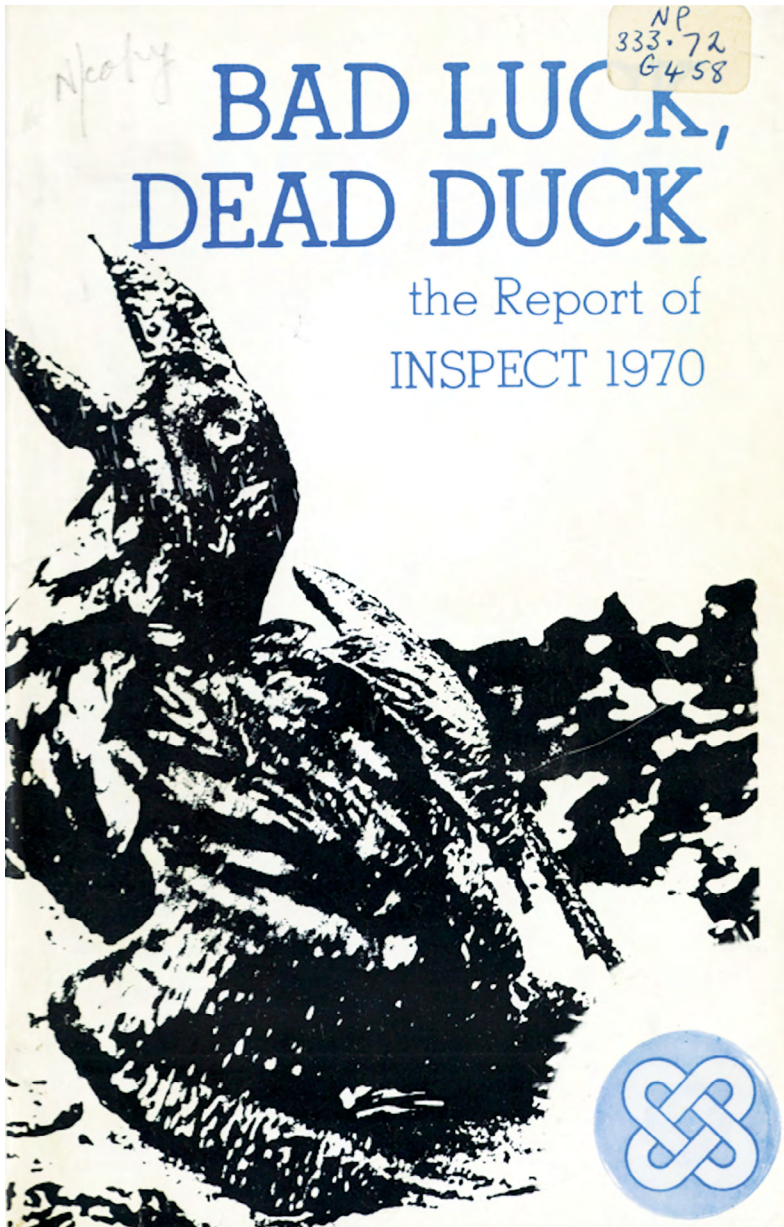


Figure 12.2: Cover, *Bad Luck, Dead Duck: The Report of INSPECT 1970*, by Roger Gifford and Peter Ellyard.

The title was taken from a moving poem published on the inside cover, written by 13-year-old high school student, Nicholas Davey, which began: 'Lying there amongst the muck / Bad luck, dead duck; / Oil pollutes your river bed, / How sad, too bad ... / As you lie between the weeds, / No-one cares; no-one sees; / You'll lie there for years and years; / Bad luck, dead duck'. Image courtesy of National Library of Australia.

Ray and Evol Knight were regularly holding the meetings of the Save Poulton Park Campaign Committee in their home. They invited SSRS to send a member and so met Philip Sutton, a veterinary science student at the University of Sydney, who had become the Sydney convenor of INSPECT.¹⁸ Evol, with her relationship with Oatley Public School, worked with Sutton to develop an INSPECT program to investigate the conflict over the dredging and reclamation of Poulton Park. Together, they drew a number of local secondary schools into the INSPECT study program on the intended council-backed dredging and dumping plan as a focus for inquiry-based learning. Philip Sutton lived close to Oatley Bay for a month to work with the committee to develop its strategy, inviting Alan Reid, in his ACF role, as well as Dexter Dunphy, a sociologist who was then a professor in the Business Faculty at the University of New South Wales. Dunphy was the younger son of Myles Dunphy and so brought with him a substantial background in environmental politics.¹⁹ As well, the campaign drew on high-profile scientists like the well-known head of the Fisheries Branch, Don Francois, and the ever-supportive local member, Frank Walker. The Save Poulton Park Committee was able to move quickly, organising for Philip Sutton and Dexter Dunphy to speak before Kogarah Council to argue the value of the swamps, pointing out the educational as well as environmental roles of the mangroves and saltmarsh. Letters were written to the press and publicity achieved in radio and television. By 11 July the petition for which Alexandra Knight had been working had been presented to council, carrying 3,000 signatures calling for an end to the plan to dredge, build the causeway and dump the sludge on the blocked wetlands. Eric Willis, still chief secretary, intervened again as he had done in the Great Moon Bay conflict, writing to Kogarah Council and the committee that the earlier 1936 permission to dredge and dump was to be withdrawn on the basis that 'the conservation principles were not then understood'.²⁰

18 This approach appears to have been coordinated through the Sydney branch of the Social Responsibility in Science group. Correspondence with Vince Serventy, held in Papers of Vincent Serventy, MSS 4605, Class 8, consignment received 11 July 1994, File 18, Box 307, National Library of Australia.

19 Meredith, *Myles and Milo*; Orlovich, 'Dunphy, Milo Kanangra (1929–1996)'.

20 Cited in Fairley, *Being Green*, 43.

Tensions ran very high within the community during this period. One family of active campaigners were shocked to find that they were confronted by their local minister of religion at the end of a Sunday service. He accused family members of sabotage by destruction of the machinery of the dredges operating in the bay, an act that none of them had – or would have – contemplated, despite their strong commitment to the cause. The minister's unfounded accusations so dismayed them that they stopped going to church altogether.²¹

Despite the significant forces that the Save Poulton Park Campaign Committee had mobilised against the reclamation, the council refused to give up the idea, persisting in pushing forwards over the next three years. In 1973, the council reapplied to the state government, still in conservative hands. Its approach was to ask the recently created State Pollution Control Commission (SPCC) to review its earlier objection. As a result, the SPCC approved a modified Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) on the potential impact of the reclamation project and the dredging. Jack Beale, the minister for the environment, then approved this revised proposal to dredge on the grounds that it had been modified to conserve the mangrove area by the insertion, as OFF had suggested, of three large pipes underneath the causeway to allow tidal water to flow easily to the mangroves and saltmarsh areas.²² The Save Poulton Park Campaign Committee was shocked and angered that the SPCC had backed down on its earlier objection. In January 1974 the campaigners wrote to Tom Lewis, the minister for lands, protesting that the SPCC had accepted a biased EIS:

Consideration given to benefits accruing to water-based activities and organised sports is more extensive than that given to educational, social and aesthetic losses likely to be generated. This bias makes the EIS quite unsatisfactory as a basis for making an objective decision.²³

21 Pers. comm.

22 'Dredging in Oatley Bay', letter to the editor, *Leader*, 5 November 1973, 2. Beale was minister for the environment (1971–73) in the Askin Liberal government. He championed water resources and set up the State Pollution Control Board. Eric Willis was no longer in a position to object, having moved from being chief secretary in 1972 to being minister for education.

23 Save Poulton Park Campaign Committee to Minister for Lands and Tourism Tom Lewis, 19 January 1974, Dr Alexandra Knight, Save Poulton Park Campaign Archive, private collection.

As will have been clear in earlier chapters – and evident in the press and the records held by the resident action campaigners – there had never been regular or sympathetic communication between these local anti-reclamation groups and the oyster farmers of the Georges River estuary. Even though oyster beds remained in the open waters off Lime Kiln Bay and the industry was well known downstream, the many oyster farming families had felt they had been on their own in their campaign for cleaner water even when they had protested against the leaching of dumped garbage into the water around their oyster racks as they had done in 1969. Nor had the oyster farmers been drawn on to support the campaigns against ‘reclamation’ by dredging or garbage dumping, even though their concerns were so similar. In this Poulton Creek campaign, however, Evol Knight played a crucial role in bring the two groups together. She organised for her brother, John Derwent, to take the members of the Save Poulton Park Campaign Committee along the river to see for themselves the damage being done in other areas as well as to learn more about the oyster farmers’ concerns (see Figure 12.3).



Figure 12.3: Boat trip, organised by Evol Knight, allowing oyster farmers and Poulton Creek campaigners to view river problems together.

Looking back from the front of the boat, this photo shows in first row: John Derwent, front right and Evol Knight, left (without hat). Second row: Ida Carder in hat. Back row: a scientific member of OFF on left, John Derwent Jnr on right steering boat. Courtesy of Dr Alexandra Knight, Save Poulton Park Campaign Archive, private collection.

Strengthened by this alliance, the campaign continued to oppose both the dredging and reclamation. The importance of the Poulton Creek wetlands as a teaching resource was a prominent element in the group's opposition to the council, with INSPECT taking a key role in organising student and teacher visits to the area to affirm the value of observing ecological networks in process. Mangroves were particularly well suited to this educational role: while the immature fish and other species were hard to see and the saltmarsh was often unremarkable, the large mangrove trees and the protruding pneumatophores were easy to identify and to recognise as essential parts in the wider ecological network.

Kogarah Council was at pains to marginalise the role of education, as it demonstrated in February 1974. The Save Poulton Park Campaign had worked with Philip Sutton through INSPECT to organise a teaching field day at Poulton Park where Alan Reid led invited secondary students and teachers from various schools in the area, including nuns from a local Catholic school, in discussion about questions around reclamations of mangrove and saltmarsh areas. Reid, who was visiting Sydney for the ACF, had been interested in mangroves and saltmarsh since teaching nature craft at children's school camps at Westernport Bay (1959–66) where he had studied bird populations with fellow researcher Bill Davis.²⁴ A group of Kogarah Council aldermen and boat-owning residents interrupted the event. The *St George and Sutherland Shire Leader* reported the intervention sympathetically, transforming the teachers into 'protesters'. Headlined 'Angry Residents Rout Protesters', the article continued: '200 angry residents drove about 40 conservationists from Poulton Park last week and took control of a meeting the conservationists had organised'.²⁵ Arguing that council was simply following majority resident requests, one of the attending aldermen said:

The people of Oatley are sick and tired of having a stinking, mosquito-infested swamp in their backyards. They are also weary of the conservationists hindering council clearing up the area and turning it into something useful for the kids ... That's why the people who elected us to council mainly on this issue and gave us a clear mandate to reclaim the park, came out to stop the meeting.²⁶

²⁴ Alan Reid, pers. comm., 2 May 2020, citing diary records from the period. See also 'Teachers' Park Probe', *St George Pictorial*, 28 February 1974, 8.

²⁵ 'Angry Residents Rout Protesters', *Leader*, 27 February 1974, 3; 'Editorial: The Silent Have a Say', *Leader* 27 February 1974, 2.

²⁶ 'Angry Residents Rout Protesters', *Leader*, 27 February 1974, 3.

The following night, council once again endorsed the reclamation plan, with Alderman R. MacKenzie arguing that:

‘It was not right to call the groups “conservationists”’. He said he had made up a new name for them – ‘mangrovites’. ‘Why should they want to conserve a dirty, stinking mass at Poulton Park which is not an asset to the community?’ Alderman A. H. Hardiman agreed: ‘Perhaps we can see if we can save a patch of the mud at Poulton Park for the “mangrovites” to wallow in.’²⁷

Philip Sutton wrote a broad analysis of the threat to bays in general for the *St George Pictorial*, using Poulton Park as the example. His article was headlined ‘Poulton Park: Waste or Wonderland?’ and the *Pictorial* by-lined him as ‘a common-sense expert’. Sutton pointed to recent Victorian Government support for the Environmental Studies Association and urged New South Wales to recognise the educational value of all estuarine swamps:

One of the most utilitarian values of bushland in general and Poulton Park in particular is that it is an exceptionally useful tool for educational purposes. Environmental education and the associated field studies are becoming ever more important in the school curriculum ... If we allow Poulton Park to be submerged under tons of silt we will be severely disadvantaging the children in the St George area.²⁸

Sutton pointed out that only those lucky enough to live close to such resources, or who had the money to travel to them, would benefit from such richness of education, and he warned that ‘it is the less well-off who will suffer most’.²⁹

Although Minister Beale had not assisted the Save Poulton Park Campaign, the conservative state government, of which Beale and Willis were both members, began to move to address the problem of massive solid waste

27 ‘Teachers’ Park Probe’, *St George Pictorial*, 28 February 1974, 8; ‘Angry Residents Rout Protesters’, *Leader*, 27 February 1974, 3; ‘Committee Fights Council Move to Reclaim Park’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 January 1974, 16; ‘Garbage Plans for Oatley’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 February 1974, 9; ‘Conservationists at Poulton Park’, *Leader*, 6 March 1974. All cited in Fairley, *Being Green*, 49.

28 ‘Poulton Park: Waste or Wonderland?’, *St George Pictorial*, 27 March 1974, 16. In its early planning, the Environmental Studies Association was identified, in Reid’s diary notes, as the Association for Environmental Education.

29 Ibid.

accumulation. Harold Hunt had argued in his report to Bankstown Council and before the Senate Select Committee on Water Pollution that state and federal governments had to recognise their responsibilities to address the problem of waste, whether liquid, gaseous or solid, so that there were overarching standards rather than individual councils setting their own rules. In August 1974, the Metropolitan Waste Disposal Authority announced that there would be 10 regional garbage depots across Sydney with a number of councils entitled to take their waste there rather than operating their own tip within municipal boundaries. The waste depot for the Georges River councils was to be at Menai so Hurstville and Kogarah councils were directed to take their collected rubbish to that tip and to cease their own garbage disposal.

Both Hurstville and Kogarah councils were outraged and refused to stop their use of garbage for reclaiming land. Hurstville Council said that continuing to dump at Lime Kiln Bay and other areas was simply 'cheaper than other methods and will result in much-needed sporting areas'.³⁰

Kogarah Council asked for an extension of time on its garbage dumping programs, particularly those at Oatley Bay, wanting permission to dump rubbish for 'several more years'. Councillors' attitudes to land and vegetation were made very clear by former mayor, Alderman Ernest A. Duggan (1965–68), who argued: 'All we want is the right to dump in our own municipality, so we can establish more playing and recreation areas out of wasteland'.³¹

30 'Tipping Cheapest', *Leader*, 31 July 1974, 7.

31 Fairley, *Being Green*, citing *Leader*, 28 August 1974.

This text is taken from *Georges River Blues: Swamps, Mangroves and Resident Action, 1945–1980*, by Heather Goodall, published 2022, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.

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