

From the Archives of South Maroubra Surf Club, Part 5.

Angst at the beach: the great 1960s surfboard row, new clubhouse occupied, our beach anti-pollution campaign, preserving sand dunes and mayhem with an irate shark in a surfboat.

By Bob Wurth.

The great surfboard confrontation of the sixties



The council sign above, similar to most Sydney beaches, designates the area right of the flag as a board riders zone.

But in the early sixties little attention was paid to regulations. Many Sydney swimmers were injured by surfboards between the flags and some board-related deaths were recorded in Sydney.

Below (*right*) Rod Morris, of the Newcastle city surf club, sports a typical surfboard wound stretching from his nose to the top of his forehead. Severe injuries were common.

The surfboard confrontation with patrol members and beach inspectors had a major impact along the full length of Maroubra beach in the early to mid-sixties.



Surfboards in the early 'sixties rapidly became popular around Australia and South Maroubra was no exception.

The long '16-footer' hollow plywood boards were replaced by heavy balsawood boards and the sport took off. The balsa boards in time were replaced by not quite so heavy fibreglass boards, yet the new boards were far bigger and far weightier than the boards of today.

Maroubra beach in the early 'sixties included a designated main surfboard area between Maroubra and South Maroubra, but that board area wasn't always the best place along the beach for a good wave and frequently boards were being ridden into the flagged areas, north and south, presenting significant problems to beach inspectors (now called lifeguards) and surf lifesavers.

According to Fairfax media, three people were killed and many injured by surfboards at Sydney beaches in the 1962-63 season alone.

While large balsa boards were the most common, when the newer fiberglass boards came out, they were both long and still quite heavy.

SLSA national president Sir Adrian Curlewis at a conference on youth misbehaviour expressed concern about 'unattached' and 'unclubbable' young people. Rod Morris (in previous picture), of Newcastle surf club, who was cut from nose to forehead when hit by a surfboard at Newcastle beach. Some councils vainly proposed a complete ban on all surfboards at some beaches.

South Maroubra Surf Club members treated many injured swimmers who had been struck by the heavy boards. In those early days none of the boards had leg ropes to stop them from hurtling away and into surf swimmers.

Casualties were taken by ambulance to hospital.

In July 1963, Randwick Council decided to introduce the licensing of surfboards and as the Fairfax press said: "The number of surfboards has increased tremendously in recent years and with them have come the risk of injury, even death, to surfers."

While Randwick was getting tough, the Warringah Shire Council met with club delegates from 14 clubs in the Manly-Warringah branch of the SLSNSW.

Collaroy Surf Club recommended a surfboard ban in their branch on surfboard riding at all but three beaches, although lifesavers would be exempt.

Police, beach inspectors and lifesavers joined forces in a combined military-style operation against surfers at Bondi, which created great disenchantment, according to Douglas Booth in his history book, *Australian Beach Cultures* (Publisher, Routledge).



Boards soon had to be licensed. At least Randwick Council's fee of one pound, 15 shillings per board (close to \$50 today) included an insurance cover should a board injure someone. Of course the imposition of any fee caused anger among board riders.

As a board rider, I joined the South Maroubra Surf Club and was immediately ostracised by surfer 'mates'. Max Murphy (on patrol second on left -,above picture), like the writer, was a board rider (*front second from right*) and a surf club member: "I couldn't understand what all the fuss was about. It was simple. You just didn't ride your board between the flags."

Boards found between the flags could be confiscated for hours, days or even weeks and the owner could be fined.

Randwick Council called a joint conference around 1964 to sort out problems. John Dynan took the writer along and both sat in the aldermen's spare leather chairs. 'What are you going to tell them?' John was asked. 'Nothing. *You're* doing the talking.' Strewth, this was a bit tough for a junior who was a clubbie and a boardie. Alderman Evan Hughes hoed into the surf club representatives and their 'heavy handiness'. We knew his son was a board rider. Injuries to swimmers between the flags continued apace. Without leg ropes, heavy boards came bouncing in on broken waves and one memory is of a woman who stood in front of a broken wave holding her arms out to 'catch' the board. Despite cries of 'dive under!' the board struck her a heavy blow to the head. She became another casualty raced out to the Prince Henry Hospital. Beach inspectors Len Haskins and Ron Siddons had the toughest job because they had to confront the boardies and some of them were big boys. One repeatedly punched Len as he was marched up to Len's office in the northern dressing sheds. Len kept his cool and called the police. In May 1967 Alderman Charlie Molloy, one time president of Maroubra Surf Club and a regular body surfer, sponsored a Council resolution that banned boardriders from about a third of the length of Maroubra beach even during winter months. He said that on April 28 1967 'there was a complete takeover of the beach by board riders.' He presented a petition signed by 50 regular swimmers protesting about this 'wanton disregard for public safety. Molloy repeatedly raised the issue in council: 'Some areas should be set aside for surfers. I have spoken with many board riders and most of them agree. They have to be controlled.'

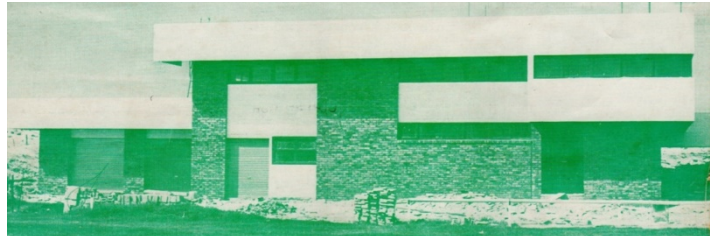


"Last Sunday two children were struck by boards and two adults were also hit and were taken to hospital. I don't want it on my conscious that someone was killed on a weekend at Maroubra beach." - Alderman Charlie Molloy, *photo left*, May 10, 1967.

In 1964, boardriders formed the Maroubra Surfriders Association (it later had other titles) and over time the beach inspectors were able to establish a relationship with the boardriders to sort out board riding problems and the anarchy of Maroubra beach gradually dissipated.

By about 1966-67, the 'great boardriders' showdown' with surf lifesaving clubs had diminished and a truce of sorts set in. Maroubra boardriders now had their own organisation and surfing zones.

Injuries and debate at the beach very gradually diminished.



After many delays the 1967-68 surfing season saw the first stage of the new clubhouse close to completion. The building committee had been stonewalled by club president John Dynan for well over a year before work began. It later became clear that JD had been working flat out behind the scenes. Paul Duffy had just qualified as a building inspector at Randwick Council and, as he says of Dynan: 'He sucked me right in'. For years JD had infuriated younger committee members with his saying 'Now, hasten slowly boys!'. There even were heated voices from the young guns about an apparent lack of action at building committee meetings.

Paul soon had the back-up of the whole RCC engineering and building staff: "I approached architect Ken Finn who did a lot of work through the Council. Ken was a good friend of the surf club and later became Randwick City's mayor. Subbing the work out and employing a foreman was the way to go. It would save us money and give us flexibility to take on sponsors who wished to donate in kind. Early on I went to see the late Jack 'Pud' Cannot, of Coogee Surf Club, who was a master builder. He concurred that subbing out was the way to go and he recommended Billy Dihm, his 'son', as he called him, as a foreman. I sold the idea to JD and the rest was history. Our office was the Coach and Horses pub at Randwick each Friday night where it was tradition for tradesmen to meet to arrange jobs - concreters, brickies, electricians, plumber etc. JD wanted everything for nothing and amazingly he had a lot of success at that. I was watching a true expert in action.

“That early exposure to building a structure of that size, the project management it required, learning from watching JD operate, although often to my frustration, but appreciating the trust he showed in me, taught many lessons. It also gave me early exposure to the political scene at Council, State and Federal level. My career involved the political side more than anything else and if you didn’t know what made it all go round you would not rise above the level of second lieutenant. That early exposure gave me invaluable experience and insight. I think that Ken Arthur would agree that the experience of being on the committee, although at times volatile, taught us strategies to use in later life.” The clubhouse was almost finished prior to the official opening in October 1969. The building estimate had started at \$28,000 to cater for an expected 150 future active members. The first stage was planned as a lengthy single story building. But modest plans and budgets soon blew out. Changes included an additional storey, separate facilities for women and nippers and a host of other requirements bringing the then total cost to an estimated \$54,000 (or over \$635,000 in today’s money.) The Maroubra Seals Club, Randwick Council and the local building trade were generous donors. The initial clubhouse became a concrete and brick two-storey structure topped by a beaut deck with more to come. Local M.L.A. Bill Haigh and John Dynan officially opened the clubhouse before a big crowd on a warm sunny day.



Wall plaque in the new clubhouse in 1969; building committee members Paul Duffy, Ken Arthur & John Dynan.

The building’s opening on Sunday 26 October 1970 began with speeches on the lawn in Byrne Reserve after which some 50 guests retired to the clubhouse to celebrate. Paul Duffy was secretary of the building committee also comprising John Dynan, Ken Arthur, Bob Spankie and the writer.

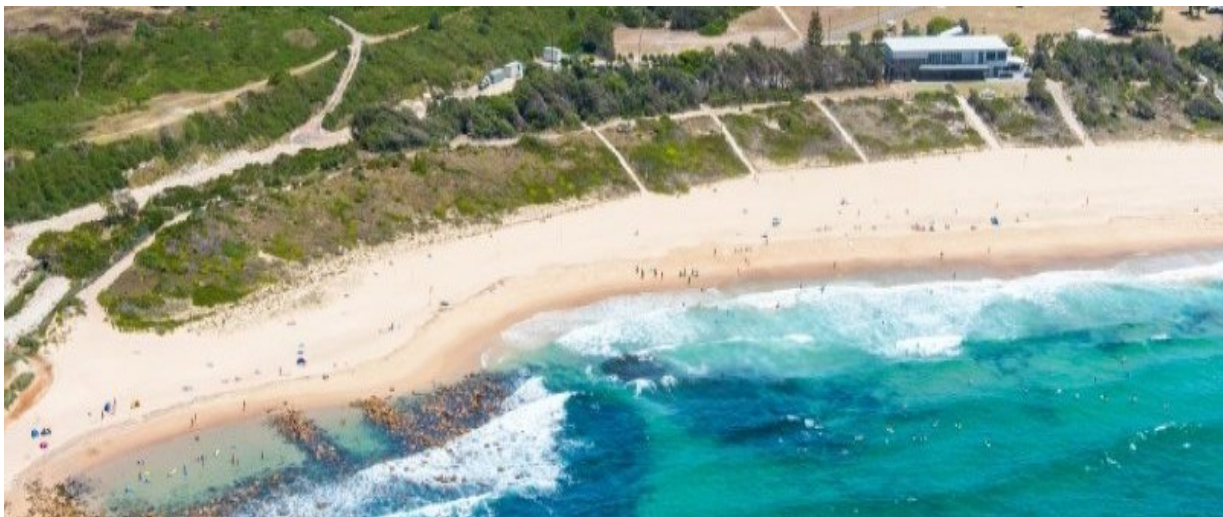
In 1968 Paul Duffy had written about caring for the clubhouse: “A point to bring to members’ notice is that the lounge will be carpeted in sections and furnished with modern lounge tables and chairs. A parquet floor will be provided in the lounge for dancing. It cannot be stressed too strongly that members treat these amenities with the utmost respect.”

The surf club was still \$2,500 in debt, but \$10,000 had been raised in the past year, so that wasn’t too much concern.

With the new clubhouse opening, conservation of the battered, eroded and mostly unprotected sand dunes had become an essential part of the overall beach project at South Maroubra.



The old clubhouse shows the extent of sand dune erosion but heavy machinery begins to restore the dunes.



The sand dunes at South Maroubra beach today are the result of the major works between 1968 & 1970.

Paul Duffy, later awarded club life membership, liaised closely with experts from the University of NSW, the NSW Soil Conservation Service, Randwick Council and the club's architect, Ken Finn, to ensure that the sand dunes would be reconstructed and rehabilitated, along with new planting and fenced walkways leading on to the beach. The aim was to rescue our section of beach from complete dune destruction and to restore a natural environment. Architect Ken Finn at the time said: "South Maroubra was one of the few areas left around Sydney where we could try an experiment in rehabilitation." Without this effort, the sand dunes, already badly deteriorated, would have eroded even further. So the dunes would be planted with suitable grasses, trees and shrubs with the new clubhouse set unobtrusively in a beautifully recreated natural environment. Between 1968 and 1969, in a \$50,000 (that's \$588,000 now) NSW Government backed project, the club had liaised with the university, government departments and Randwick council.

The result is clear to see today - a great 'natural look' with good access and, with maintenance, little prospect of future erosion.

South Maroubra Surf Club initiates public anti-beach pollution campaign

As the new clubhouse became a reality, our beach was hit with the worst sewage pollution in memory.

In 1970 barely treated sewage from the Malabar plant reached its worst stage and Maroubra beach gained a shocking reputation. The future of the beach seemed in doubt. Increasingly sewage was in the surf and on the sand and it stuck between your toes. That's when South Maroubra Surf Club, backed by John Dynan, decided to go public. The surf club actively campaigned to save the beach by insisting that the NSW Government construct a 3.22 km undersea pipeline taking the effluent out to sea. Media coverage was intense. The Daily Mirror ran the protest on the front page. The story even appeared in the New York Times (see below).

SAVE OUR BEACHES

THE ANTI-BEACH POLLUTION CAMPAIGN ASSOCIATION

Last season the president and secretary of South Maroubra Surf Life Saving Club played a major part in the campaign against pollution of beaches.

It should be of particular interest to members to know a little of the subsequent organisation formed, known as the Anti-Beach Pollution Campaign Association, which has been supported by the Sydney branch of the Surf Life Saving Association.

The Association was formed in February following a public meeting of some 350 people in Maroubra Surf Clubhouse. It widely promoted the problem of beach pollution. Some months later the N.S.W. Government announced that an additional \$17 million would be spent on sewage treatment plants.

Maroubra moves on pollution

Maroubra Beach is the hardest hit of all of Sydney's beaches, when southerly winds and tides wash the effluent of almost one million people and countless industrial establishments from the giant neighboring Malabar 'out-fall' right on to this beautiful beach. 4/2/1970

New York Times, 8 March 1970, 'SYDNEY COMBATS BEACH POLLUTION':

“SYDNEY, Australia — Pollution of swimming and surfing beaches around Sydney by sewage is expected to be ended in five years under a \$50 million program for purifying household waters before they reach the sea. The alternative to such project, for which the federal and state governments have just promised the funds that the city administration backed, was likely to be the disappearance of surfing and sea bathing from the Sydney area by the end of this century, according to a prominent scientist, Prof. L. C. Birch of the

University of Sydney biology department. A public normally apathetic to civic causes became aroused a few weeks ago when the popular beach at Maroubra, a Sydney suburb, was closed for a short time because of fouling by sewage at the height of the summer season, which in Australia is from December to March."

The back cover of South Maroubra Surf Club's 1969-70 annual report (*reproduced in part, left above*) told the story of the campaign initiated by our club called the Anti Beach Pollution Campaign under the banner of 'Save Our Beaches'. Maroubra Surf Club committee readily joined South Maroubra's movement. An angry crowd overflowed at the protest meeting and soon there was standing room only. Hundreds crammed into Maroubra surf club for the meeting, jointly chaired by Charlie Molloy and the writer. Paul Duffy's experience was repeated. John Dynan declined to join Charlie Molloy to co-chair the rowdy meeting: "No Robert, this one's for you and Charlie." First duty was to stop the heated crowd from verbally abusing (or worse!) the Premier's representative, who instantly came under attack when he tried to pass on the Premier Bob Askin's message. NSW government authorities up to this time hadn't really viewed sewage pollution as a health issue. They saw it as an aesthetic problem, despite the rapidly growing complaints from beachgoers and academic researchers who spoke about infections and illnesses from swimming in badly polluted waters. The meeting in February 1970 attracted not only a large, angry audience. The visiting Premier's representative was frequently shouted down, despite our best efforts to maintain decorum. Angry speakers attacked the Government for allowing sewage pollution from the Malabar plant to reach such a dire situation.

Maroubra beach had become a stinking mess more and more often. Barely treated sewage would wash on to the sand and it was difficult to avoid treading in it. The Anti-Beach Pollution Campaign was formed that February night and it received strong support from the SLSA's Sydney branch, Randwick Council and local and city newspapers. Only three days after the meeting, the Askin Government agreed to an additional \$17-million to improve sewage treatment. The Sydney Morning Herald came out with a blistering Saturday editorial referring to 'the great public alarm about water and air pollution'. The paper castigated the Askin Government saying that the Premier, in announcing the \$17 million, 'did not tell us exactly what the Government is doing or intends to do'. Initially we thought \$17 million sounded generous. But it soon became obvious that the sum was a mere drop in the polluted ocean. Gradually over the next decade huge funds were allocated after ongoing public and media agitation. In 1970 a Water Board spokesman (SMH, 5 March 1970) said that the primary treatment works then under construction at Malabar would remove pollution from the beaches and 'all that would remain of the pollution would be a harmless stain'. But the only way to remove this brown stain, the Board spokesman said, would be to install outfalls to carry the discharge kilometres out to sea. So that became our aim. As South Maroubra's 1969-70 annual report states, funds were needed 'for the construction of two-mile long underway effluent outlets to take the

filth away from our beaches to sea'. The NSW Government in July 1970 also established a new State Pollution Control Authority to monitor pollution.

The giant underwater pipeline to a cleaner, safer beach



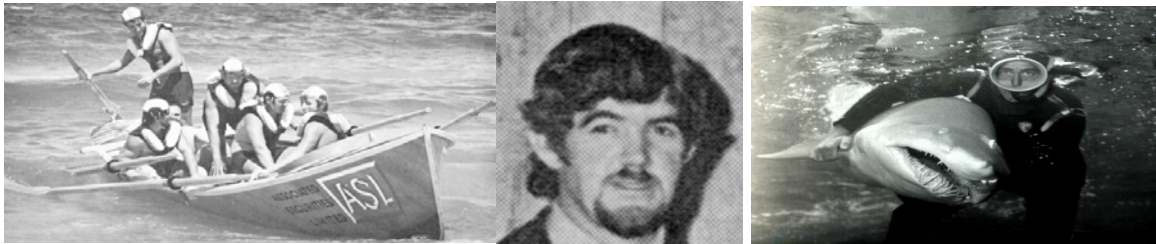
Photos: The underwater sewage pipeline ready to take sewage from Malabar headland out to sea.

South Maroubra Surf Club for over a year had been having regular meetings with Water Board officials at the Malabar treatment plant and we'd be escorted underground at Malabar to view (and smell) the latest works in action. Then we'd sit down upstairs over coffee and sandwiches and the friendly Board officials would tell us that everything was fine and dandy and we'd tell them that they were delusional. We'd invite them to come over the headland for a surf. Over the years, public and media pressure ensured that far greater sums of money were devoted to improving Sydney's treatment plants and to build submarine pipelines needed to carry the sewage effluent several kilometres out to the edge of the edge of the Continental Shelf. In October 1984 a drilling rig appeared at sea off South Maroubra signalling the start of a \$310-million project covering Sydney's ocean outfalls at Malabar, Bondi and North Head. The submarine outfall from Malabar would not become operational for another six years. In the interim beach pollution continued to regularly pollute Maroubra beach. When the ocean outfalls began working in 1991 two surf club sceptics, Paul Duffy and Ken Arthur, took the club's rubber duckie kilometres out to sea. They went round and round finding no sign of sewage pollution whatsoever. Victory at last! Suddenly Maroubra beach was free of the sewage filth. However, better treatment on land was needed. The NSW government now promised more than \$6 billion dollars worth of improvements to the sewerage system, including sewage treatment to at least secondary treatment standards before being pumped well out to sea.

The underwater world in the vicinity of Yellow Rock on Malabar headland began to change immediately. Scuba diver and club member Michael McFadyen witnessed the ocean floor recuperate: "As soon as this outlet was put into use, the waters at Yellow Rock became clean overnight. Within a year, the kelp, sponges and other fixed marine life returned to health from the previous stunted form. It was soon after this that we started diving this area ... Both the caves and gaps are full of fish, seapike and yellowtail mostly. In the caves there are lots of very large eastern rock blackfish and luderick, the main species the rock fishers are after... There are lots of

Port Jackson sharks and I have also seen a number of wobbegong sharks and a very large black ray. It's a very good dive site and worth many dives," Michael said.

Cuddly shark joins a dodgy boat crew on a bizarre fishing trip



On a quiet mid-week day one time boat captain Brian Lawrence (*above*) assembled a ragtag crew and headed out at South Maroubra to do a little fishing off the rocks. That's Brian or 'B' as he was known, *above*. And in the left pic he is making his way for'ard in the ASL boat. Jim 'Jet' Jackson remembers that the day when 'B' borrowed the boat for a fishing expedition. A school of Dolphins played around the boat which had a well-stocked Esky 'to keep the fish cool'. But the boat leaked like a sieve and only constant bailing kept her afloat. The boys caught a few small fish until Brian hooked something substantial. He hauled in a small shark with big teeth. Everyone tried to stand on the seats. Soon the shark was swimming happily in the boat while crew members had dived into the sea. "I'm lucky to be alive!", Jet Jackson later recalled, (*The grey nurse being cuddled, right, is a tad larger than the one actually landed.*) **In other archived club news...** South Maroubra's first open surf carnival was staged in February 1969 in big seas. The ASL company donated the new surfboat (*pictured above*) and soon after a greyhound, Milos Charm, allocated to South Maroubra, won a new surfboat for the club, courtesy of the National Coursing Association. ** On a hot Sunday, 29 November 1970, 20 people were washed out in a rip when a sandbank collapsed at South Maroubra and the club's power boat took 16 of the surfers to shore while beltmen rescued the other four. ** By 1970 South Maroubra Nippers had a committee of ten chaired by Bruce Rutherford and 92 boys were registered, a huge increase on previous years.



... And in the first ten years from South Maroubra's foundation in 1959, South Maroubra Surf Club recorded 1,009 surf rescues with no loss of life during patrols.