MOTION

That Council:

1 Notes that 5 August 2018 marks 200 years since the laying of the Macquarie Pier Foundation Stone, marking the beginning of construction works for the Macquarie Pier;
2 Acknowledges that Macquarie Pier was proposed to connect Coal Island (later Nobbys Island, now Nobbys Head) with the mainland, creating a safer passageway for ships coming into Newcastle Harbour that would often get caught on Stockton's oyster banks;
3 Notes that the construction of Macquarie Pier significantly shaped the landscape of colonial Newcastle, forming Nobbys Beach and surrounds, Nobbys Breakwall as well as ensuring safer passage into Coal River, now known as the Hunter River;
4 Establishes a working party with representatives from Council, the Port of Newcastle, the Port Authority of NSW, NSW Roads and Maritime Services, NSW Office of Environment and Heritage, the University of Newcastle’s Hunter Living Histories Group, Parks and Playgrounds Inc. and the Coal River Working Party to explore opportunities to recognise significant milestones that should be marked regarding the history and heritage of the Coal River Precinct, including Macquarie Pier.
5 Marks the Bicentenary of the laying of the Macquarie Pier Foundation Stone on 5 August 2018 with an event about the significance of the Macquarie Pier to the City of Newcastle’s history and heritage.

BACKGROUND

Macquarie Pier

Governor Lachlan Macquarie laid the foundation stone for ‘Macquarie Pier’ on 5 August 1818. The pier was the most ambitious harbour improvement project of the convict era. The connection to Nobbys Island was completed in June 1846. Heavy seas in subsequent years breached the pier, which was later strengthened on the seaward side by using huge sandstone blocks transported by rail from a quarry at Waratah.

The work was completed by 1872. A sand dune system and the popular Nobbys Beach have formed on the ocean side of Macquarie Pier. In 1957 the harbour side of the breakwater was cement rendered except for a small stairway near Nobbys. The Macquarie Pier, constructed to enable safe entrance into the harbour was started in 1818 with Governor Macquarie laying the foundation stone.

This was the Colony’s largest public works project and is not only important to the history of capital works programs of the Colonial Government, but to convictism and early technology in Australia. The construction of Macquarie Pier assisted in safe harbour access, it was essential structurally and strategically in enhancing the efficiency of the coal exported, thus increasing profits for the British Empire. The provision of convicts to construct Macquarie Pier was in the economic interest of the Colony.

Source: Hunter Living Histories: https://coalriver.files.wordpress.com/2013/03/nncrmgd-final1.pdf
Plaque marks Macquarie Pier history

Newcastle Herald | Jacqui Jones
4 August 2010

IT was 192 years ago today that Newcastle's economy was born when then Governor Lachlan Macquarie laid the foundation stone for Macquarie Pier.

That connection, now known as Nobbys breakwall, linked Nobbys island to the mainland and provided a safe passage into the harbour where coal, lime and timber was loaded onto ships for export.

Yesterday, that foresight was honoured with the unveiling at Nobbys surf club of a commemorative plaque to be laid where pier stonework began.

Newcastle's Coal River Working Party organised yesterday's event, ahead of mission to find the original foundation stone that Governor Macquarie laid. NSW Governor Marie Bashir attended the unveiling to honour the work of her predecessor.

She said Governor Macquarie made an enormous contribution to the nation, something that the people of the Hunter continued to do. "I feel most moved and privileged to be participating today with you all," she said. "We will be unveiling this tribute not only to those that have gone before but to the people of Newcastle who value so strongly their heritage."

Coal River Working Party chairman Gionni Di Gravio said the historical acknowledgment would have meaning for generations to come.

"In order to create a future for our young we need to recognise the accomplishments of the past," he said.

Macquarie Pier revival

Newcastle Herald | Janek Speight
9 August 2013

IT saved numerous ships from sinking to the bottom of Stockton's coast, assisted a booming coal industry and also created what we know as Nobbys Beach.

Yet many people might not realise that the Macquarie Pier was one of the Hunter's most important pieces of infrastructure and one that helped the region thrive in its early beginnings.

Part of the original foundations lie about seven metres underground, while the remainder is more commonly known as Newcastle breakwall. Now, after more than 195 years, the Coal River Working Party are trying to bring the pier back to life to highlight an important part of Newcastle's history.

They are using ground penetrating radar investigations in order to find the exact location of Macquarie Pier and hopefully garner enough interest to restore the artefact and use it as a tourist attraction. Chairman Gionni Di Gravio said the investigation had been a long time coming since a preliminary search in 2010 proved inconclusive.
“This will give us an idea of what’s under the ground and if we can confirm its existence then further down the track hopefully we can get funding,” he said. “To excavate is beyond our scope really. That would cost around $100,000 to $200,000.”

Construction on Macquarie Pier began on August 5, 1818, when Governor Lachlan Macquarie laid the foundation stone at 4pm. Commandant Captain James Wallis named it Macquarie Pier in his honour. The causeway was proposed in order to connect Coal Island with the mainland, creating a safer passageway for ships coming into Newcastle Harbour that would often get caught on Stockton’s oyster banks.

Work wasn’t completed until 1846 due to Governor Macquarie heading back to England and in 1866 the pier was reinforced using stone quarried at Waratah. Mr Di Gravio said the area is “Newcastle’s birthplace” and already home to tourist attractions such as Fort Scratchley. “It would just be fantastic to bring it back to life,” he said. “If we want to turn the place into a major tourist attraction then we should preserve it and use it to showcase our city.

“People need to take account of the city’s heritage and what it means to them.” Geologist Russell Rigby has matched maps from James Meehan, 1818, and John Armstrong, 1830, with an aerial shot of Nobbys to estimate where the pier’s foundations started.

Geophysicists from GBG Australia will carry out the work starting on Tuesday thanks to a $10,000 grant from state government. Mr Di Gravio said the Coal River Working Party were excited and hopeful the investigation would bring back strong evidence.

“A lot of people might argue, ‘who cares?’ but we’ve got to rise above that argument,” he said. “This is the structure which made shipping safer, created Nobbys beach and made our city what it is today. “We wouldn’t be here today without it. We take it for granted and it’s a story worth telling.”

Nobbys Island and Macquarie Pier January 1820 (Anonymous artist) Courtesy of the Mitchell Library
The quest for Macquarie's pier

ABC Newcastle | Carol Duncan
16 August 2013

The quest to find Newcastle's original Macquarie Pier is underway. After years of planning, The University of Newcastle and Coal River Working Party are on the site where they believe Governor Lachlan Macquarie laid the foundation stone in 1818.
Governor Lachlan Macquarie laid the foundation stone for the Newcastle breakwater, named in his honour by Commandant Captain James Wallis as "Macquarie Pier" during one of his three visits to Newcastle on the 5th August 1818.

Gionni Di Gravio says it's taken three years to get the GPR here but this is the likely place. "According to our overlays of the 1830 Armstrong plan on a Google Earth image, our surveyors have checked it, so this is where we think the original pier began and is the site of the original 1818 coastline."

"I'm hoping the original stonework of the pier is still there under the dirt. I can't imagine it's about seven metres down but that's what we think."

"Today we'll hopefully detect a faint heartbeat - the city's 1818 heartbeat."

"I would love to see the stonework again and I don't see why this can't be a beautiful public project to uncover this and hopefully the inscription that was there when Governor Macquarie and Captain Wallis said, 'Let's go ahead and build this bit of infrastructure.'"

"People could come and see it and be standing in the footsteps of those men."

Leading Australian archaeologist, Kerrie Grant, has worked all over the world but says it’s very exciting to be thinking about archaeology in her hometown, "Newcastle has got an incredible archaeological history that I don't think we look at enough."

"The idea that the pier is underneath our feet will show us what was going on here in the early 1800's and people will see the worth in that."

"I think people get terrified and think of archaeological excavations of being 50 metres by 100 metres and everything gets ripped up, but once the ground penetrating radar has done its job and they find some sign of a structure underneath, you put in a test pit which is probably 1 metre by 2 metres and you have a look first."
"It's only small but the information you'll gain from that is immense, and then you plan accordingly."

In the early 1800's Newcastle's port was a very different place. Kerrie Grant says it would have been the 'dodgy side of town'.

"I always love the dodgy side of town. Ports, houses already built, good stone foundations for the pier, that should all be here because people wouldn't have wanted to come down here but a lot happens in the sleazy side of town and it would fill up and get covered pretty quick."

"The GPR will tell you where the stonework is." Geologist Russell Rigby says the start of the pier should be very close to the spot being investigated.

"I think it's likely the original stonework on the edge of the breakwater will be there. Above that there's almost 200 years of fill of Newcastle in houses, the edge of the coal yard for the power station and all the things people lost on their way to the beach."

"There were houses here. In the 1880s and 1890s the harbour pilots lived here. There were maybe 20 houses because it was close to the mouth of the port and very handy to get to the pilot station or the lifeboat."

The Nobby Rock Newcastle

Extract from Illustrated Sydney News | 25 November 1871

“Newcastle whose trade is second only to Sydney, owes its commercial importance, if not its existence as a large shipping port, in no small measure to the works that have been completed there. There are at present two breakwaters in course of construction at Newcastle – one about 2000 feet long, connecting the main land with Nobby Island, a high rock at the southern entrance to the port and the site of the lighthouse.
The southern breakwater was constructed in olden times by prison labour, the stone procured by blasting the rocks on the beach within a short distance. The works were much damaged by the sea in consequence of the stone not being sufficiently hard to resist the action of the waves. The Government therefore in the year 1866, commenced to repair the breakwater with stones of a much harder description, and weighing on an average, not less than ten tons; in order to procure this stone a new quarry was opened at Waratah a few miles from Newcastle, from whence the stone is conveyed in trucks by railway and tipped from the end of the breakwater; the inner side is afterwards hand packed. Up to the present date 350 yards of breakwater have been repaired, and it contains 90,000 tons of stone. It will probably be completed as far as the Nobby in the course of a year or so. The work has been tested by heavy gales, but as yet not a single stone has been displaced...A further extension to Big Ben (a reef of rock some distance off the Nobby) is contemplated.”

**NSW Governor Macquarie’s diary notes**

The following transcriptions of NSW Governor Lachlan Macquarie’s personal diaries account for the laying of the Macquarie Pier Foundation Stone, as well as Governor Macquarie’s subsequent inspection of the work in 1821.

The original diaries are held in the Mitchell Library, at the State Library of NSW in Sydney.
Tuesday, 4 August 1818:

The Antelope sailed at 8 o'clock this morning on her return to Sydney, and to search all along the intermediate Coast for the Pirate Convicts lately escaped from Sydney. At 11:00 am I inspected Capt. Wallis's Company, and found them in very clean good order. — I directed an extra allowance of Rum to be issued to the men as a Donation.

At 1:00pm I went along with Capt. Wallis to look and examine the Channel dividing Coal Island (Nobby) from the South Head of Newcastle Harbour, with the view of filling it up entirely by constructing a Strong Mound or Causeway [sic] between the Island and the Main for the purpose of deepening the Main Channel or Entrance into the Harbour. — We landed on the Island and Sounded the Channel between it and South Head – which does not exceed 7 feet in depth at low water and only about a quarter of a mile in Breadth. — After examining both sides of the Channel, it was finally determined to commence forthwith filling it up by constructing [a] Strong Causeway of 30 feet Broad from South Head to Coal Island. After deciding on this important work, we went to visit the new Jail, the new Hospital, the new Guard-House, the Battery & Light House, and the several Work-Shops. — We did not return Home till after 5 o'clock, soon after which we sat down to Dinner.

Wednesday 5 August 1818:

Soon after Breakfast Mrs. M. myself and Lachlan, set out in the Barge accompanied by Capt. Wallis, to visit the Govt. Farm and the Lime Burners; the former being about one mile and the latter six miles from the Town of Newcastle. — We found the Farm in very good order, with a very neat cottage on it.

I travelled over the Grounds where the Lime is burnt from the shells collected on the Shore. — I mustered the Lime Burners Gang Consisting of an Overseer & 54 Men as Labourers, guarded by a Corpl. & 3 Privates. —

We returned from our Water Excursion about 2 o'clock – Capt. Wallis's Band having attended & played for us in another Boat during our Excursion.

At 4. P.M. accompanied by Capt. Wallis, Revd. Mr. Cowper, Major Antill, Lt. Macquarie, Ensn. Roberts and Mr. Meehan, I went to the Shore of the Channel dividing Coal Island from the South-Head, for the purpose of laying the Foundation and first Stone of the Causway [sic] or Pier to be constructed across from the Main to the Island; and the Stone being cut and ready, with an inscription, it was laid accordingly with all due Form in presence of the Artificers & Labourers to be employed in the construction of it; and Capt. Wallis having proposed that it should bear my name it was accordingly called after me "Macquarie Pier" – which the present year 1818 – was cut and inscribed on the Foundation Stone.

After the Foundation Stone had been laid, the Artificers and Labourers were served with an allowance of Spirits to drink success to the Undertaking – which they did with 3 hearty cheers.

On my return Home I called at the Provision Store to inspect it and found it in good order and well supplied with Provisions. I also called at the Watch on the Beach recently erected by Capt. Wallis – and was much pleased with the neatness and appropriate Situation of it.

We then returned Home to Dinner at 5 o’clock, well pleased with my Day's work.
Monday, 19 November 1821:

The Weather has cleared up this morning, but the Wind continues still foul, and directly against our getting to Sydney. — Feeling my Bowels rather out of sorts this morning, I took some medicine and kept my Room the greater part of the Day.

Between 1 and 2 o’clock today, the Govt. Sloop Sally arrived from Sydney, and brought me a very pleasant Letter from my dear Mrs. M. dated the 14th. Inst., by which I had the happiness to learn that herself and our darling Boy were well in Health.

Feeling myself greatly better from the medicine I had taken in the morning, I rode out for an airing between 3 and 4 o’clock and accompanied Major Morisset to inspect the two new Wind Mills and New Guard House he had sometime erected.

The Grand Pier or Mole (named "Macquarie Pier"), I was rejoiced to find on inspection is now about half completed across the channel which separates Coal Island – or Nobby – from the Main Land on which the Town of Newcastle is situated.

This channel is Half a mile across. — This Pier is a noble and most important piece of work, but a most arduous and Herculean undertaking. — It was commenced by Capt. Wallis three years ago, and it will most likely take two years more to complete it. — When this is done, however, the Harbour of Newcastle will be both safe and commodious, and fit to receive Ships of 500 Tons Burthen. Indeed, the good effects of this Pier is already felt, as it has already rendered the Harbour secure, and deepened considerably the Channel by which Vessels must enter. The Wreck of the Nautilus has been removed from where it choaked [sic] up one side of the Channel, in consequence of the force of the River Current and Freshes being confined to the principal Channel by the erection of the Pier.

Coal River Precinct from the NSW Office of Environment & Heritage website

The Aboriginal presence in the Coal River area predates European contact and has been continuous to the present day. The associations, over time, of particular places, sites and areas of the Precincts and of their distinctive landforms with Aboriginal culture can be revealed, as permissible, through further consultation and study.

Coal River is one of a number of sites in Australia first settled by convict transportation. Slavery, indentured labour, convict transportation and penal settlement have contributed to the spread of diverse cultural influences throughout the world and are global heritage themes. The national significance of Fort Scratchley and the national and state significance of the Convict Lumberyard/Stockade have been recognised.

The Coal River Historic Precincts have State significance because they concentrate the whole story of the development of New South Wales’ first and most important industrial centre. They encompass the site of Newcastle’s first coal mine, the site of the first navigational aids for coastal shipping and Hunter River traffic, and the site of a series of fortifications designed to protect the growing settlement and its precious coal reserves. These resources are largely due to the skills and labour of transported convicts, committed for secondary punishment.

Date significance updated: 23 January 2003
Historical notes:

1796 Informal accounts reach Sydney of the reserves of coal at 'Coal River'.
1797 Lt Shortland and his crew enter Coal River and confirm the coal resources
1801 Formal identification of the great potential of the coal reserves and the river and first
and brief attempt to set up a coal mining camp.
1804 Formation of a permanent convict/military outpost to mine coal, harvest timber and
prepare lime. A light beacon and gun emplacement were built on the southern
headland. Nobbys Island was seen as a useful place for confinement. Aboriginal-
European encounters.
1814 Expansion of the settlement in line with Governor Macquarie's policies. Lumberyard
developed. Coal mining extends away from 'Colliers' Point'. A farming outpost was
established at Paterson's Plains, inland from Newcastle
1816 Marked increase in development of convict settlement from 1816 to 1822
1818 Increase in trading envisaged. Macquarie Pier commenced, also other aids to
navigation. Significant expansion of building program including hospital, stores,
accommodation, gaol, church and windmills.
1822 Penal settlement was moved to Port Macquarie. Variable convict workforce retained
for public works such as road making, breakwater building, coal mining, property and
tools maintenance, and so on.
1823 Beginning of era of transition from a penal/military establishment to a civil settlement
with civil administration. Work was suspended on the Pier. The built environment of
the penal era was gradually replaced.
1831 End of era of government-controlled coal mining and beginning of private enterprise
mining by the Australian Agricultural Company.
1830s Work resumed on Pier building and was completed in 1846. Ballast and sand
reclaimed the foreshore. Building wharfage and harbour formation, and pilot facilities
and navigational aids were ongoing.
1847 Occupation of new military barracks. Lumberyard stockade was reused for other
purposes from the late 1840s.
1855 The barracks complex was vacated by the Imperial military when the last convict
workers left Newcastle.
1857 Lighthouse was built on Nobbys Island.

South Head later was used for fortifications and colonial and then national military purposes.
Newcastle East emerged as a complex rail, warehousing, industrial, commercial, residential and
leisure precinct (Hunter, C. 2001/HO).

Sources: NSW Office of Environment & Heritage website:

Hunter Living Histories, Quest for Macquarie Pier Foundation and Inscription Stone:
https://hunterlivinghistories.com/2010/02/24/quest-for-macquarie-pier-foundation-and-
inscription-stone-1818/

ATTACHMENTS

Nil