

C. H. Coedior 8/12/99

Land handover pleases Mayor

The announcement of an agreement between NSW Department of Land and Water Conservation and MINGALETTA Development Cooperative on the management of Christmas Bells Plains reserve has been welcomed by Hastings Mayor Wayne Richards.

"Christmas Bells Plains is an important area to the Hastings for many reasons said Cr Richards. This decision recognises its significance to the Biripai Nation who as traditional owners actively used the site over many generations. Hastings is an area proud of our heritage but in general, the history of settlement and European activity has been more obvious than that of the original Aboriginal people. Middens and camping sites are as important to preserve and learn from as convict ruins or early buildings.

"Christmas Bells Plains offers both a view into history as well as significant flora and fauna habitat and an asset that encourages the appreciation of visitors and local residents. As previous reserve manager Hastings Council welcomes the new management arrangements and the intention of MINGALETTA to preserve its cultural and environmental values for the whole community."

The Mayor noted "The draft Native

Vegetation and Management Plan currently on exhibition highlights the significance of these coastal wetlands and their potential for nature based tourism. It is appropriate that this opportunity is in the hands of the Aboriginal community whose cultural knowledge can add considerably to understanding and appreciation of an area.

Council has had discussions with MINGALETTA representatives with a view to calling meetings with interested parties to hear about plans for the area as they develop. Weed control and beach erosion protection are likely to be amongst initial work priorities. Beach tracks have been abused by some in the past as a rubbish dump and it is hoped encouraging people to appreciate the qualities of the reserve will put a stop to this sort of vandalism.

Earlier in the year an agreement was reached between native title holders and Queens Lake Yacht Club over land use and recognition of traditional ownership at Laurieton. "Together with the Christmas Bells Plains management we are moving positively in the Hastings on addressing both Aboriginal and non Aboriginal interests in land issues", said Mayor Richards.