WATERBIRD USAGE OF ROBERT BAY AND THE PT. GREY PENINSULA (PT. BIRCH - MEALUP PT, PEEL/HARVEY ESTUARY)

The following observations are based upon the results of six surveys of waterbird usage conducted at two month intervals from August 1976 to June 1977. Surveys of Robert Bay were conducted by aircraft and boat. Surveys of the shoreline and shallows from the western edge of Robert Bay (point "A" on attached map) to Pt. Mealup were conducted by aircraft only.

1. The shallows of Robert Bay (Pt. Birch to point "A" on the attached map) are of major importance as feeding grounds for a wide variety of waterbird species.

   Examples of usage are:

   Black Swans (Cygnus atratus) : 1300 in August 1976 (representing 24% of the total swan population of Peel/Harvey estuary at that time);

   Eurasian Coot (Fulica atra) : 1600 in October 1976 (10% of the Peel/Harvey population);

   Banded Stilt (Cladorhynchus leucocephalus) : 4700 in December 1976 (55% of P/H population):

   Great Egret (Egretta alba) : 30 in October 1976 (approx 30% of P/H population);

   White-faced Heron (Ardea novaehollandiae) : 95 in June 1977;

   Hoary-headed Grebe (Podiceps poliocephalus) : many hundreds in April 1977;

   Grey Teal (Anas gibberifrons) : 550 in February 1977 (2% of P/H population).

2. The various promontories or "points" from Robert Bay to Mealup Point provide important, little-disturbed roosting sites for cormorant (Phalacrocorax spp. and pelican (Pelecanus conspicillatus) populations of Peel/Harvey estuary. They are also used to a lesser extent by duck and wader populations. The most favoured roosting sites are listed below, together with examples of levels of usage. See attached map for locations.

   Point "C": Several hundred cormorant in August 1976, April 1977 and June 1977. Approx. 100 migratory waders and 100 ducks in December 1976.

   Point "D": Approx. 1000 cormorant in April 1977. Several hundred cormorant in October 1976 and February 1977.

Point "E": Approx: 300 grey teal in June 1977.

Point "F" (Pt. Grey): Several hundred cormorant in April 1977. Approx. 100 migratory waders in December 1976. 122 pelicans and approx. 100 ducks in February 1977.

Point "G": Several hundred cormorant in February 1977. 28 pelicans in January 1976.

Point "H": Approx. 500 cormorant in June 1977.

Point "I": Approx 250 cormorant in February 1977. 83 pelicans in March 1976.

Point "L": (Stony Pt.): Approx. 50 duck in December 1976. 62 pelicans in March 1977.

3. The shallows and bays on the Western side of the Pt. Grey Peninsula are used by relatively low numbers (in a Peel Inlet context) of waterbirds. Maximum numbers recorded during the 1976-77 aerial surveys were:

H-I : 30 cormorant August 1976, 6 pelicans October 1976. 7 swans December 1976. 20 cormorant, 1 egret, 1 darter (Anhinga melanogaster), 25 avocet (Recurvirostra novaehollandiae) and 7 swans Feb 1977. 4 swans Apr 1977.
I-J : 40 swans Dec 1976.
J-K : c10 white-faced heron Dec 1976.
L-M : 2 shelduck (Tadorna tadornoides) Aug 1976. 1 greenshank (Tringa nebularia) and 12 swans Dec 1976. c50 migratory waders, 50 avocet and c350 grey teal and shelduck Feb 1977. c140 grey teal and 20 shelduck Apr 1977.
M-N : 25 cormorant Aug 1976 and 3 black duck (Anas superciliosa) Aug 1976. 150 migratory waders Feb 1977. c55 grey teal Apr 1977.

4. The shallows and bays on the Eastern side of the Pt. Grey Peninsula are used by higher numbers of waterbirds than those on the western side, but lower numbers than those using Robert Bay. Largest numbers recorded were:

A-B : 260 swans Apr 1977.
B-C : 100 swans Aug 1976, 85 swans Oct 1976, 50 migratory waders and c75 teal Dec 1976. 148 swans and 12 pelican Feb 1977. c300 swans Apr 1977.
B-D : 7 pelican Aug 1976. 16 greenshank Oct 1976. 139 swans Apr 1977.
C-E : 1000-1100 migratory waders Dec 1976.
D-E : 500 cormorant Aug 1976.

Conclusion and Comments

1. Priority should be given to minimizing disturbance levels

   a) in Robert Bay, and

   b) at several of the more important roosting sites of the Pt. Grey Peninsula from point "C" to point "L".

2. Construction of the Dawesville "Cut" (if it goes ahead) will result in an increased tidal range in Peel Inlet and Harvey Estuary and will thereby reduce the number of sandy cay roosting sites (some current sites will be covered at high tide). Protection (from disturbance) of remaining sites such as the promontories or "points" of the Pt. Grey Peninsula will then become all the more important.

3. My experience suggests that total exclusion of human (including canine) disturbance within 50 metres both sides of a roosting site is adequate for continued usage by waterbirds. Disturbance levels should also be reduced within a further 50 metres.

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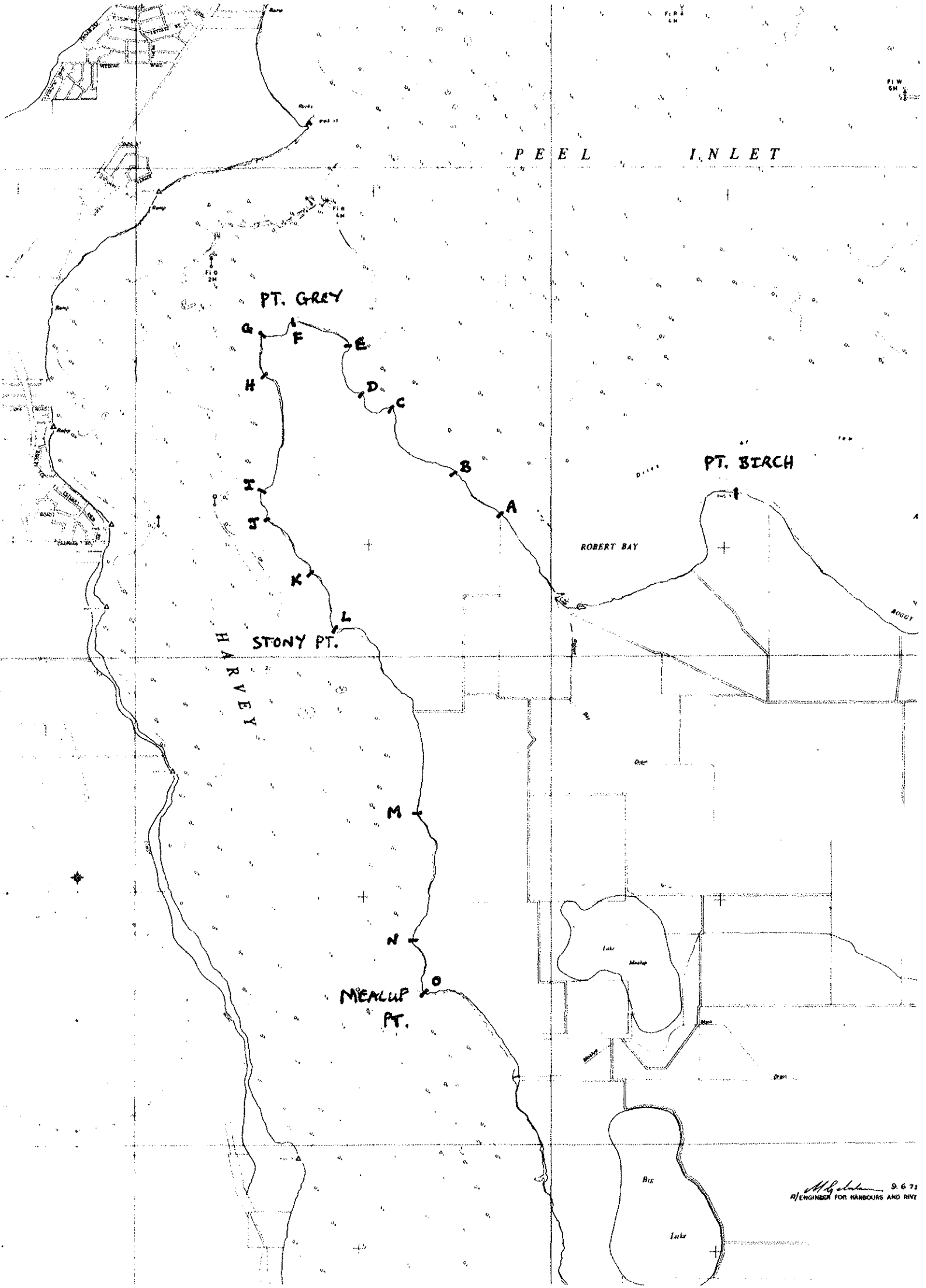
PEEL INLET
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ROBERT BAY
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Lake Meelup
Big Lake
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