

RATHMINES CATALINA MEMORIAL

Mr GREG PIPER (Lake Macquarie) [5.52 p.m.]: I bring to the attention of the House a proposal and vision that if delivered will preserve and pay respect to an important part of our State and national heritage. The proposal, if realised, would be of significant benefit to the local community, being broadly the people of Lake Macquarie and, more specifically, residents of the Rathmines area. The Rathmines Royal Australian Air Force base played a pivotal role in the defence of Australia in World War II. It was the largest seaplane base in the Southern Hemisphere and the longest serving during the war effort. The base's Catalina flying boats were involved in the mining of Manila Harbour and played an important part in the Battle of the Coral Sea. The Catalina was one of the most successful flying boats produced and was crucially important for the defence of Australia. Its role in World War II for Australia has been equated to that of the Spitfire in Britain.

The Rathmines airbase was also a significant centre for training and for repairs. Even now, having been closed for more than 50 years, it is regarded as the most intact example of a Royal Australian Air Force World War II seaplane base in Australia. The layout of the base can still be seen in a number of Rathmines streets and in elements of the 61-hectare Rathmines Park, which occupies the former base. On Thursday 24 November 2005 the former Royal Australian Air Force base was added to the State heritage list at a ceremony attended by more than 350 people, including dozens of former Catalina aircrews and former Royal Australian Air Force and Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force personnel. The role of Minister Sartor in achieving this listing and attending on this day to proclaim it was greatly appreciated by local residents and former base crew. The heritage listing is a credit to Don Lowe and other dedicated people who pursued this goal.

An inaugural Rathmines Catalina Festival was held in Rathmines Park on Saturday 29 September this year. The event, organised by the Rathmines Progress Association, brought together many people and organisations that love this area and wish to see its heritage properly recognised and retained. Among these was the Rathmines Catalina Memorial Trust, whose members were all associated with the activities of the base and the Catalinas. As part of this event I was pleased to name the eastern end of the site as Catalina Bay. A flypast and landings by the Seaplane Pilots Association and others evoked memories of the military past. Funds raised on the day will go towards the proposed Catalina Flying Memorial, which aims to return a Catalina flying boat and exhibit it at the site. This is a fabulous vision to honour not only the aircraft but also the men and women who serviced and flew them.

The success of the inaugural Catalina Festival is due to the dedicated efforts of the Rathmines Progress Association, with particular credit going to Mr Alan Brady, who conceived the idea and contributed much of the effort. Catalina Flying Memorial Limited has raised considerable funding and has purchased a Catalina, which is currently in Portugal. They are ensuring that the aircraft is in good working order and on 10 November the aircraft will begin its flight to Australia. The fuel alone for the flight will cost \$100,000. Particular mention must be made of Mr Phillip Dulhunty,

OAM, and Mr Neville Kennard in this endeavour. Mention should also be made of Mr Alec Howard, who, on behalf of the Lake Macquarie and District Historical Society, has elicited an enthusiastic public response in amassing a collection of memorabilia for a museum that will be co-located with the Catalina.

I commend to this House the efforts of so many people in recognising and acting on the heritage value and the potential of the former Royal Australian Air Force base. Credit goes to all those in achieving the heritage listing, the naming of Catalina Bay, the inauguration of the Catalina Festival and the purchase of an aircraft. I foreshadow that there may be a request made to the New South Wales Government for assistance with the permanent location of the aircraft at Rathmines. I respectfully ask the Government to identify ways in which it can assist in realising this wonderful vision.