



Wollongong City Council

Cruise Wollongong

The Ideal Location for
a Third Cruise Terminal
and Turnaround Port in NSW





Ruby Princess
departs Port Kembla

Executive Summary

As the cruise industry continues to grow in NSW, the state is facing increasing pressure on its cruise ship infrastructure. The NSW Government has taken action and established the Cruise Industry Advisory Panel to identify the preferred location for a third cruise terminal.

There is a compelling case for Wollongong via the Port at Port Kembla to become the third turnaround Port in NSW and a critical piece of the state's cruise future. Located just 80km south of Sydney, Wollongong offers a unique blend of deep-water port capability, transport connections, scalable infrastructure and an excellent tourism offering for the domestic travel market.

During the period of 2016-2019, Port Kembla also hosted seven cruise vessels with strong operational success and high passenger satisfaction (dubbed 'The Friendly Port' thanks to outstanding post-visit surveys and fantastic volunteer cruise ambassadors). These visits were well received by the cruise industry and the community, showcasing Wollongong's ability to offer an enthusiastic and warm welcome to cruise passengers and crew.

This warm welcome was in force during the difficult outbreak of COVID 19 when Port Kembla hosted the Ruby Princess and our community stepped up to demonstrate our support and showed kindness to the impacted crew with 1,200 care packages provided.

The proposal that Wollongong become the third location for a cruise terminal is strongly supported by Wollongong City Council, Destination Wollongong, and Destination Sydney Surrounds South, who together recognise the opportunity for Wollongong to emerge as a major cruise gateway for NSW.

Adding to the strength of this proposal is the united support of regional stakeholders through the Cruise Wollongong Taskforce working together to champion this opportunity.

Key stakeholders in this group include:

- Lord Mayor of Wollongong, Tania Brown - Wollongong City Council
- The Hon Paul Scully MP - Minister for Planning and Public Spaces and Member for Wollongong
- The Hon Ryan Park MP - Minister for the Illawarra and Member for Keira

- Alison Byrnes MP - Member for Cunningham
- Carol Berry MP - Member for Whitlam
- Mayor Chris Homer - Shellharbour City Council
- Mayor Cameron McDonald - Kiama Municipal Council
- Mayor Patricia White - Shoalhaven City Council
- Mayor Darcy Lound - Campbelltown City Council
- Mayor Ashleigh Cagney - Camden Council
- Mayor Matt Gould - Wollondilly Shire Council
- Mayor Jesse Fitzpatrick - Wingecarribee Shire Council
- Destination Wollongong
- Destination Sydney Surrounds South
- Illawarra Shoalhaven Joint Organisation
- Ports Authority of NSW
- RDA Illawarra Shoalhaven
- Business Illawarra
- Australian Cruise Association
- Cruise Lines International Association
- NSW Tourism Association

As outlined in 2024 'The Value of Cruise Tourism' report released by Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA) and the Australian Cruise Association (ACA), total cruise tourism output generated in NSW was estimated at approximately \$4.4 billion in 2023-24 and supported 13,714 jobs.

The addition of a third cruise terminal at Port Kembla would not only ease congestion in Sydney's Circular Quay and White Bay terminals but also unlock significant visitor economy benefits and increase economic activity across the Illawarra, Shoalhaven, Wingecarribee and Macarthur region.

The activation of a cruise terminal at Port Kembla aligns with NSW's strategic Visitor Economy priorities, regional development, and transport objectives, while delivering balanced economic growth, enhancing visitor dispersal, and increasing cruise sector resilience in NSW.

 **Wollongong is the right choice!**

At a Glance: Why Wollongong is the Right Choice

Wollongong provides a powerful and pragmatic solution to NSW’s growing cruise demands:

- Port Kembla harbour is a deep-water, sheltered port capable of accommodating vessels up to 300m in length and 14.5m in draft, without air height restrictions or the need to navigate congested shipping lanes.
- The Port provides the perfect location for a cruise terminal and turnaround port for the cruise industry that would cater directly to the domestic cruise travel market.
- It is located less than 90 minutes from Greater Sydney via road or rail, with direct motorway connections and ongoing upgrades to the South Coast rail line enhancing accessibility.
- The Port is situated close to Shellharbour Airport (Regional Airport for the Illawarra), less than 90 minutes from Sydney Airport and Western Sydney Airport and within two hours of Canberra Airport.
- The Port currently handles commercial vessels with potential capacity for cruise berthing which could be adapted for passenger use with minor capital investment.
- Unlike Garden Island or Port Botany, Port Kembla is free of competing military or container operations, offering flexibility in scheduling and turnaround logistics.

Beyond infrastructure, Wollongong is a thriving regional city with a highly attractive visitor experience. The region offers escarpment lookouts, coastal drives, pristine beaches, tourist attractions (including a wildlife park and action park), award-winning food and wine, and rich Aboriginal cultural heritage, all within 30 minutes of the Port.

Wollongong’s commitment to the visitor economy and cruise industry ensures the region is not only ready to welcome increased cruise visitation but also has the partnerships and planning capacity to deliver lasting economic outcomes.

Finally, Wollongong as a location for a cruise terminal would directly contribute to the NSW Government objectives of regional dispersal, economic resilience, and infrastructure optimisation.

By investing in Wollongong as the third cruise turnaround port, NSW can meet current demand, accommodate future growth, and ensure that cruising remains a vibrant and sustainable part of the state’s visitor economy.



✓
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Aerial looking north to Wollongong from Port Kembla

Opportunity: Benefits of a Cruise Terminal in the Illawarra and South Coast

1. The Growing Need for Cruise Capacity in NSW

The cruise sector is one of Australia's most significant tourism drivers:

- The 2023-24 Australian Cruise Industry Economic Impact Analysis shows a powerful surge in the value of cruise tourism, setting a new high of \$8.43 billion in total economic output created by cruise tourism (\$2.80 billion more than the previous year).
- Cruise line expenditure also rose significantly in 2023-24, increasing 36% over the previous year to reach \$1.60 billion. In addition to the extensive supply chain that supports cruise operations, cruise line spending also included a record \$351.0 million paid in port fees.
- New South Wales remained Australia's biggest beneficiary of cruise tourism, increasing its share to 52.3% of national economic output providing 13,714 jobs and \$4.41 billion total economic output.
- Cruise visitation to NSW is forecast to grow to 2.3 million passengers per annum by 2033.
- Sydney's current infrastructure at Circular Quay and White Bay is already under significant

pressure, with limited scope for growth due to congestion, heritage limitations, and freight conflicts.

- There is a pressing need for alternative berthing solutions that allow cruise lines to maintain and expand operations in NSW.

2. Wollongong: An Untapped Cruise Gateway

A. Port Infrastructure and Accessibility

- Port Kembla is a deep-water, sheltered port already handling large vessels, including automotive and bulk carriers.
- The location offers immediate access to a working harbour with a range of cruise-ready berth options, requiring only minor modifications for passenger processing and available land for car parking and provisioning.
- Port Kembla offers an area for development that is already in an industrial zone and will not impact residents. This reinforces community support and interest in welcoming cruise ships.
- Unlike Botany or Garden Island, there are no competing defence or container priorities to disrupt scheduling.

- The planning redevelopment of nearby BlueScope land offers significant opportunities for both visitors and community, with the potential for large scale tourism product that caters for the cruise market.
- Port Kembla is an ideal turnaround port location for cruises that attract the domestic market.

B. Transport and Turnaround Readiness

- Direct motorway access (M1) connects Port Kembla to Greater Sydney and Canberra.
- The South Coast rail line is undergoing continued improvements and offers connectivity to Greater Sydney. Existing rail infrastructure to Port Kembla offers an opportunity for rail to ship transfers (similar to that enjoyed at Circular Quay).
- Shellharbour Airport is within 15 mins of the Port, alongside Sydney and Western Sydney airports, providing options for passenger transfer within 70 minutes of the port.
- Turnaround operations would benefit from low-congestion logistics and local coach access.



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Port Kembla can accommodate vessels up to 300m in length and drafts of 14.5m, with no air draft restrictions.



Destination Wollongong
Ambassadors greet arriving
cruise passengers

3. Exceptional Visitor Appeal

Wollongong and the broader South Coast and Macarthur regions are home to a rich variety of experiences aligned with cruise passenger preferences:

- Grand coastal drives, escarpment lookouts, and pristine beaches.
- Nature-based experiences and recreational activities, including whale watching, rainforest walks and horse riding.
- Local events, award-winning wineries and farm-to-table culinary experiences.
- Historical tours, Aboriginal cultural heritage and immersive tours.
- Boutique shopping, adventure tourism, and wellness retreats.

Wollongong, the South Coast and Macarthur regions deliver distinct tourism assets within 60 minutes of the Port, minimising transfer time and enhancing guest satisfaction.

4. Economic Opportunity and Regional Equity

The introduction of a cruise terminal in Wollongong would:

- Create hundreds of local jobs across tourism, transport, logistics, and retail.
- Benefit a multitude of other local businesses including food and beverage suppliers, fuel, hotel consumables, equipment, maintenance, transportation and embarkation staff.
- Drive new visitor expenditure through day trips, local business spending and hotel stays (50%-60% of turnaround port visitors stay at least one night).
- Support regional dispersal goals by offering access to Shoalhaven, Eurobodalla, and Southern Highlands.
- Contribute to economic resilience in regions recovering from bushfires, floods, and the pandemic.

The activation of Port Kembla supports the NSW Government's goals to decentralise economic growth and increase the competitiveness of regional ports.

5. Industry and Stakeholder Alignment

- Royal Caribbean, Carnival Cruise Lines, Royal Norwegian Cruise Lines, and other cruise lines have previously trialled or expressed support for Wollongong as a port of call.
- The Port has already hosted successful cruise visits with positive passenger feedback and operational ease.
- Wollongong City Council, Destination Wollongong, and Destination Sydney Surrounds South have demonstrated strong alignment on activation plans.
- The proposal has wider regional support from a range of government and industry stakeholders through the establishment of the Cruise Wollongong Taskforce.
- There is clear synergy with the NSW Cruise Infrastructure Strategy and Cruise Development Plans for the NSW Government.



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6. Comparative Advantage Over Other Options

Criteria	Wollongong	Newcastle	Eden
Proximity to Sydney	✔ 80km	✘ 160km	✘ 480km
Existing deep-water port	✔	✔	✔
Turnaround capability	✔	✔ (limited by travel time)	✘
Tourism attractions within 60 mins	✔	✔	✔
Road/Rail access	✔	✔	✘
Underutilised infrastructure	✔	✘	✘
Congestion or commercial conflict	✘	✔	✘

7. What’s Next – Pathway to Activation

To realise this opportunity, the following actions are recommended:

1. NSW Government to recognise Wollongong as the preferred location for a turnaround port and commission a feasibility study for cruise terminal development at Port Kembla.
2. Assess capital investment required for port-side infrastructure upgrades, including parking solutions and a multi-use facility which would host customs and passenger processing facilities and be available for other uses.
3. Engagement and collaboration with cruise lines be commenced to develop, implement and schedule pilot turnaround services and acceptable dockside support services.
4. Commence destination marketing collaboration to prepare local experiences, transport, accommodation options and opportunities for visitors pre and post cruise.
5. Audit of current accommodation facilities and shuttle services for cruise passengers and strategy for the inclusion of cruise-based accommodation in the development of accommodation services across the Illawarra region.

Conclusion

Wollongong is the right choice. Port Kembla stands as the logical, cost-effective, and sustainable choice for Sydney’s third cruise terminal, with a focus on the domestic market. Wollongong is also uniquely positioned to complement existing ports and relieve pressure on Sydney with minimal compromise or additional cost.

With unmatched proximity, infrastructure readiness, and support from community, local government and industry, Wollongong can help futureproof NSW’s cruise sector and deliver significant economic and visitor economy outcomes for generations to come.

Wollongong is the right choice for a third location for a cruise terminal in NSW.



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On Dharawal Country, from the mountains to the sea,
we value and respect each other, our places, past,
and future. We will be a sustainable, connected,
vibrant, and innovative city, with a diverse economy.

We are a sustainable and climate resilient city

We have well planned, connected, and liveable places

We foster a diverse economy, and we value innovation, culture, and creativity

We have a healthy, respectful, and inclusive community



Wollongong City Council

wollongong.nsw.gov.au

Phone (02) 4227 7111



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