

SYDNEY COASTAL COUNCILS GROUP Inc.
C/- City of Sydney Council
Level 12, 456 Kent Street
GPO Box 1591, SYDNEY NSW 2001
Phone: (02) 9246 7791
Facsimile: (02) 9265 9660
Email: info@sydneycoastalcouncils.com.au
Internet: www.sydneycoastalcouncils.com.au
ABN: 39 638 876 538



1 October 2005

GW058-05

Ms Angela Shepard
Australian Local Government Association
8 Geils Court
Deakin ACT 2600

Dear Ms Shepard,

Re: Increasing Coastal Councils Capacity to Manage the Natural Resource Base.

INTRODUCTION

The Sydney Coastal Councils Group Inc. (SCCG)¹ would like thank the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) for the opportunity to provide comment on the discussion paper "Increasing Coastal Councils Capacity to Manage the Natural Resource Base". Information on the SCCG is provided in the attachment.

The SCCG commends the efforts of ALGA to coordinate and prepare this paper that provides a good summary of the current situations and issues facing Coastal Local Governments across the country. The Group looks forward to seeing the specific actions program that is to be developed to assist in building the capacity of coastal council to better manage the coastal zone.

The SCCG understands that the focus of the discussion paper is on high growth regional areas. However the SCCG strongly suggests that attention be also placed on larger metropolitan areas such as capital cities and other large regional centres. It is acknowledged that many Local Governments in these areas may appear to have better capacity and resources to deal with coastal issues however this significantly varies between Councils and also fluctuates over time. The complexities and competing interested for coastal resources, the impacts of tourism and the demands for infrastructure in these areas should also be considered in any final actions plans developed by the ALGA.

The SCCG strongly endorses the ALGA recognition for the urgent need for access to untied recurrent funding for coastal and natural resource management from alternative means other than the traditional rates base. The concept put forward for direct Commonwealth funding from taxation for all coastal councils is supported, particularly if this is allocated via a priority based system and not a grant process with competing Councils.

The SCCG is very concerned with the reduction in Australian and State based funding for integrated coastal zone management. The regional investment delivery model established by the Australian Government for NHTII has not only excluded Local Government from the process but has resulted in a significant net decline in funding available for coastal management activities (estimated to be as much as 75% since NHTI - Thom. B, 2004). The demise of the Coast and Clean Seas initiative and the focus on improving rural landscapes has significantly effected the ability of State(s) and particularly Local Government to address the enormous management pressures being faced in coastal areas. Without the establishment of national coastal zone legislation backed by a sustained and secure national funding scheme, is it seemingly unlikely that there will be any significant improvements to coastal areas and the likelihood of the continual degradation, over development and loss of 'values' of our precious coastal zone.

Some additional issues that could be included in the final strategy and action plan would include:

- **Coastal Risk Management** (assessment, reduction, communications and management structures and auditing),
- **Education, Training and Capacity Building** for professional staff, elected members, industry (including the tourism sector), and the broader community,
- **Marine Issues** including associated management responses and impacts,
- **Political will, opportunities and consultation,**
- **Community participation and effective consultation,**
- **Research programs and Government – Research organisation partnerships,**
- **Institutional arrangements, change management and best practice,**
- **National standards, guidelines and targets.**
- **Local Government / State Government / Private, coastal (administrative) boundary issues.**

SPECIFIC COMMENTS

- **Purpose of the Document**

The SCCG supports the purpose of the document however seeks to clarify the assumption that it will trigger discussion, and generate conversations between Councils.

Recommended that clear processes be defined in the Action strategy to encourage regular communications and resource and experience sharing between Local Government. This includes facilitation processes such as forums, seminars, discussion groups, conferences, papers, toolkits, guidelines and best practices.

2. Situation Analysis – A Framework for a National Approach to Coastal Zone Management

The Group highlights the critical importance with the identified issues that there is no funding attached to this National Framework and encourages the ALGA support to address this most significant limitation with the Commonwealth Government. The Group acknowledges that the Framework does indeed highlight some opportunities to 'tap into existing funding' however as clearly highlighted in the ALGA Discussion paper, these opportunities are very slim or simply non-existent under the current structure and priorities defined in the revised NHT II regional catchment based NRM investment process(es).

Please find attached the SCCG submission on the Draft Framework for a National Approach to Coastal Zone Management for your information.

Recommended that the ALGA focus on identifying and securing funding and clear implementation time frames and defined responsibilities under the "Framework for a National Approach to Coastal Zone Management" including the development of National Coastal Zone legislation and an associated National Coastal Zone Strategy (that is appropriately funded).

The Regional NRM Arrangements

The Group supports the commentary in the discussion paper and again highlights that the revision of NHT and the associated bi-lateral agreement has not only now sidelined Local Government participation and partnership but has already proven to significantly fail the Coast. It is clearly obvious that the foundations and structure of this process need to be reviewed before any real progress will be achieved. Tinkering around the edges and now trying to incorporate Coastal issues in this flawed process will not achieve the desired outcomes for Local Government and coastal communities generally.

Recommended that ALGA seeks a National review of the present regional NRM arrangements to better deal with nationally significant integrated coastal zone issues at the Local level.

2.3 Major Issues in Coastal Zone Management

The Group supports the development of toolboxes, and practical guides on coastal zone management together with supporting national capacity building programs.

Recommended that

- 1) ALGA pursue the development of relevant toolboxes and practical guides in close consultation with Local Government to address specific management, technical and strategic planning limitations and opportunities identified in the Discussion Paper.
- 2) ALGA pursue the development of model coastal planning provisions to assist achieve integrated outcomes.

2.3.1 Planning

The Group acknowledges the shortage of planning expertise in Councils and endorses the possible activities identified in the Discussion paper.

Recommended that ALGA pursue the identified activities and also consider the establishment of a centralised planning assistance body specifically established for those councils who have expertise limitations and to provide a central planning communication point for Local Government to facilitate appropriate capacity building programs. The organisation could be funded through Commonwealth Government assistance and potentially be consultancy / pay for service based.

2.3.2 Water Supply

The demise of the very successful Coast and Clean Seas Program has had significant impact on the ability for Local Government to support potable and reuse water initiatives and infrastructure development and upgrades.

Recommended that

- 1) ALGA pursue the re-establishment of the Commonwealth Coast and Clean Seas Program,
- 2) ALGA pursue the identified 'Possible Activities' as highlighted in the discussion paper,
- 3) Governments also work with WSAA together with the AWA to ensure better communication, knowledge sharing, demonstration projects and potential financial support.

2.3.3 Biodiversity

The Group supports the commentary outlined in the Discussion Paper. The Group highlights that an additional issue for consideration is the need for better National and State Government support to protect biodiversity particularly when Local Government is having to legally defend National and State legislation and regulations in the courts.

Recommended that ALGA seek partnership agreements between National / State Government to better assist Local Government implement and enforce National and State Government biodiversity legislation and regulation.

2.3.4 Climate Change

Recommended that ALGA work with National and State Governments to provide some national generic policy positions on climate change including the development of national targets and standards. This is to provide specific 'best guess' planning guidance eg all new developments in the coastal zone be planned to incorporate a 2 metre sea level rise. (This will provide Councils with some guidance, will ensure consistency and will reduce potential legal challenges by the development industry).

2.3.6 Funding

This is obviously the most critical issue that will need to be addressed to ensure improvements to current situations. As noted earlier a National funding scheme will be critically important to achieve positive and consistent outcomes.

The Group strongly supports the “Possible Activities; highlighted in the Discussion paper.

2.4 Funding for Coastal Zone Management

The Group endorses the summary provided and refers to above comments.

Recommended that The action identified in the text box be expanded to not only explore funds for individual councils projects but address the needs for better cross Councils and regional strategic planning policies, programs and plans.

Chapter 3. Planning

Recommended that

- 1) ALGA also address the need for ‘cooperative partnership regional strategies’ lead by Local Governments with financial and expertise assistance of State and Commonwealth Governments.
- 2) ALGA pursue options to increase Councils planning capacities and available resource pools including national bodies and pay for service consultancies,
- 3) ALGA pursue an investigation to identify a suite of incentive mechanisms for Councils to implement conservation outcomes on public and private lands and waters.

3.2.1 Unforeseen Pace of Development

It is clearly obvious that better partnership and collaborations are needed between to all levels of Government to address this significant issue. Resources are also required for regional and national assessments of existing and potential growth areas to ensure an integrated national response moving away from individual and inconsistent Council by Council area assessments.

Regional plans should be developed and implemented via consistent and politically supported local strategies.

3.2.2 Implementation of Local Plans

*If council has a local plan, such as a biodiversity strategy, an integrated water strategy etc, are the outcomes of the plan being achieved by council? Is biodiversity still being lost, is council still facing water quality and supply issues etc?
What is the missing link between the development of the plan and it being implemented?*

Recommended that

- 1) ALGA promote and potentially develop capacity building modules for Councils,
- 2) ALGA push for the better assessment and consideration of existing local plans when State Government develop their Regional NRM investment strategies,
- 3) Missing links between the development of the plan and it being implemented include: lack of integration between strategies and between councils; lack of available resources; lack of political will to implement, the identification of often unachievable actions and / or timeframes, and the lack of accountability, auditing and promotions of implementation.

3.2.4 Burden of Development Assessment

What is your council doing to address the burden of development assessment applications? Is this an issue for your council?

Recommended that

- 1) ALGA help promote a better link between DA assessment and goals and desired outcomes of local and regional strategic plans.
- 2) ALGA promote the implementation of selective fast tracking DA assessments to reduce assessment periods for appropriate and compliant coastal zone development,
- 3) ALGA promote the need (and establishment in some cases) of effective developer contribution systems that drive sustainability and cost recovery.

3.2.6 The Burden of Historic Zonings

Recommended that ALGA also consider the issue and associated impacts of existing and future 'coastal process' considerations when attempting to deal with inappropriate historic zonings (coastal recession and accretion, storm surges, sea level rise) to prevent the need for any future coastal protection and reinforcement works.

4.1.3 Improved Design, Reuse and Recycling

Should WSUD be driven at the local or state level? What would assist local government to develop and implement appropriate WSUD projects? Are there any impediments to councils developing WSUD programs at a local level?

Recommended that ALGA is encouraged to promote WSUD however suggested to move toward the concept of 'Integrated Water Cycle Management.

5.2.1. Regional Arrangements

Please note issues and concerns highlighted above. The Group acknowledges the point outlined in the Discussion paper noting the potential to use Coastal issues as the 'hook' to better engage Councils. However this is considered an assumption and significant review of Local Government consultation and participation is needed to ensure support of these processes, if any meaningful integration and partnership is to be realised.

Recommended that ALGA seek significant review of Local Government consultation and participation to ensure support of these processes if any meaning integration and partnership is to be realised

Do you have an example of where local governments and their regional NRM organisation are working well together to achieve good environmental outcomes? Why do you believe this relationship has been successful ? **Not yet**

5.2.2 Vegetation Mapping

What are the impediments to councils undertaking broad scale vegetation mapping across their Shire? How can better links be made in this area between local and state governments and the regional NRM organisations?

This issue highlights the concerns in relation the bi-lateral agreement for Regional NRM under NHTII. With Local Government not officially part of the process has resulted in funding projects (nominated and

lead by State agencies) that are not at the mapping scale needed by Councils. This has prevented any potential collaborative approaches nor information sharing between Governments.

5.2.5 Assistance with Legislation Changes

Is this a priority for council and if so, what are some suggestions for improving information/interpretation of legislation? Are there examples of how this is done effectively?

The Group acknowledges that this issue is a fundamental impediment to achieving integrated and consistent biodiversity management, protection and enhancement.

Recommended that

- 1) ALGA work with State and Federal Governments to investigate communication processes to improve on current situations.
- 2) Information provisions and updates needs to also consider specific target audiences such as Local Government professional staff, Councillors, developers and the general community.

5.2.7 Provision of incentives and Council purchase of Land

Recommended that in addition to focusing on land purchases for biodiversity conservation, ALGA be encouraged to also focus on the critical need for land purchases in areas affected or to be affected by coastal processes (eg. coastal erosion).

Chapter 6. Climate Change

6.2.1 Provision of Local Data Modelling

- **SCCG and Macquarie University Partnership Program – Climate Change**

For the information of ALGA, the SCCG and staff from Macquarie University (MU) have to identify a range of fundamental research questions, strategic objectives and policy and management related needs of the SCCG in relation to future climate change. Staff at MU have a variety of skills, expertise, experience and knowledge in relation to delivering outcomes that will meet the needs of the SCCG. Specifically, MU staff and students may make to assist the SCCG address the impacts, effects, and management of future climate change. An MOU to formalise the partnership between the SCCG and Macquarie University has been developed and will be signed off at the SCCG December meeting.

- **Expected Strategic outputs of the Program**

Executive Summary documents (i.e., briefing notes) of key issues in relation to climate change – targeted at decision makers and stakeholders. These documents will be jargon free and written in plain English: - e.g., science of climate change; impacts of climate change, definitions of key terms – hazard, risk, vulnerability; the nature of vulnerability assessment frameworks; potential regional and local impacts of climate change, etc.

Stakeholder Public forums and seminars (information / capacity building) ie the SCCG Climate Change in the Sydney Region seminar– held 20 July. NB outcomes report is available.

Detailed literature reviews of key issues - extensive reviews of core issues relevant to the needs of the SCCG.

Tools and instruments - tools and instruments that may be utilised at the local council level to develop adaptation, mitigation and policy measures within the framework of sustainable development– e.g., vulnerability assessment, cumulative impact assessment and SEA frameworks and methods for collaborative planning,

• **Expected Strategic outcomes of the Program**

Improved understanding – of core issues and problems (for SCCG institutions/employees and stakeholder/community groups).

Formulation of sustainable policy – to meet the challenges of climate change and its impacts within the framework of sustainable development.

Improved integration and collaboration between stakeholders and management officers.

Recommended that This form of partnership may provide a useful model for other regions and will hopefully result in some useful information and management processes for other Local Government across the country.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR CLIMATE CHANGE RESPONSES

As part of the establishment of the partnership program, the SCCG and Macquarie University convened a seminar on 20 July entitled “Climate Change and the Sydney Region”. Some of the outcomes included:

Additional needs of Local Government were identified in the forum feedback forms include:

- The need for more information on all aspects of climate change was identified by all of the delegates who responded to the feedback form. Issues addressed included:
 - (i) The impacts of climate change to the NSW coastline;
 - (ii) The impacts of climate change to your Local Government Area;
 - (iii) Climate change and risk management; and
 - (iv) Integrating climate change into Local Government policy.
- Other areas where information was required included:
 - (i) Scenario modelling;
 - (ii) Information on asset protection; and
 - (iii) Managing uncertainty.

Capacity to address climate change

Most respondents felt that their organisation was beginning to address the impacts of climate change through education. However, very few considered their organisations were adequately addressing the impacts of climate change through the planning process, management activities and capital works.

Activities for the SCCG and Macquarie University Partnership program

Major activities to be suggested by delegates for the SCCG and Macquarie University Partnership program included:

- Through a gap analysis develop a research and policy framework for integration into Local Government policy;
- An agreed scenario for predicting the cumulative impacts of climate change;
- Pilot projects for mitigation and adaptation strategies;
- A Climate change information webpage; and
- An assessment of the impacts of climate change on human behaviour.

Intergovernmental Partnerships

Throughout the forum the need for an integrated government response to climate change was raised a number of times. Representatives from the Australian and NSW Greenhouse Offices and the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural resources agreed that a coordinated approach to managing the needs of Local Government was required when addressing issues related to climate change.

As a result of the forum SCCG will be discussing and defining the role of the group and its member councils with the Commonwealth and State agencies present. A Specific aim of these discussions for SCCG will be a commitment to development of a regional research and policy project framework to identify key research, planning, policy mapping and partnership activities all levels of government in managing for climate change.

Seek partnerships and/or funding to achieve:

- A Gap analysis of existing policies and strategies for addressing the impacts of climate change;
- A framework that identifies key research, planning, policy mapping and partnership activities of Local, State and Commonwealth government to ensure that all levels contribute in an effective and timely manner; and
- The development of scenarios and modelling to assess the potential impacts of climate change including, but not limited to, sea level rise, major storm events and reduced overall rainfall.

Advocate for:

- Local Government involvement in the development of climate change policy and strategy;
- The integration of climate change measure in strategic plans such as the Sydney Metropolitan Strategy and the Hunter and Illawarra regional strategies;
- The consideration of climate change provisions for Environmental Planning Instruments;
- The development of climate change hazard, risk and vulnerability maps to assist in decision making and strategic planning; and
- An integrated and coordinated climate change education strategy for decision makers and the community.
- Urban Design that is conscious of the impacts of climate change and the need to limit or mitigate for outcomes.

6.2.5 Impediments to preparing climate change strategies

18. What sorts of information and tools do councils want in relation to planning for climate change? How could this be provided? What impediments do councils face in developing effective adaptation strategies?

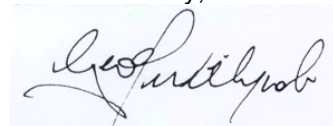
Some of the impediments include:

- The need key national targets and standards for future climate change impacts ie best guess numbers on issues such as sea level rise
- The concerns about legal challenges by the development industry without above
- The critical need for better support by State and Federal Government to assist Council prepared plans to develop generic policy, associated strategic planning and regional and local mapping to support management interventions and legal challenges.

CONCLUSION

The SCCG hopes that the above comments will be of assistance for the development of the Actions Plan(s). The SCCG also looks forward to further opportunities to assist ALGA with this important initiative. If you wish to clarify any matters raised in this letter, please contact me directly on 9246 7791 or email geoff@sydneycoastalcouncils.com.au.

Yours sincerely,



Geoff Withycombe
Executive Officer