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8 August 2004

RP051-04

Ms Vicki Cronan
Department of the Environment and Heritage
Migratory and Marine Species Section
PO Box 787
Canberra Act 2601

Dear Ms Cronan,

Re: Wildlife Conservation Plan for Migratory Shorebirds

Thankyou for inviting the Sydney Coastal Councils Group Inc¹. (SCCG) to provide a submission to the Department of Environment and Heritage (DEH) regarding the preparation of a *Wildlife Conservation Plan for Migratory Shorebirds*. The SCCG provides the following submission in an effort to highlight key issues of concern and those requiring further consideration by DEH for Local Government and local environment and community groups.

1. INTRODUCTION

The SCCG congratulates and welcomes the Department of Environment and Heritage in attempting to prepare the *Wildlife Conservation Plan* (herein referred to as "the Plan") including the *Action Plan for the Conservation of Migratory Shorebirds in the East Asian – Australasian Flyway*. Given the Plan will be the first developed under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) it provides an exceptional opportunity for DEH to address International, National and Regional issues including future conservation and strategic measures for Migratory Shorebirds and their habitats. It will also provide the opportunity for DEH to contribute to a more coordinated approach to future monitoring and communication between Governments, conservation groups and industry.

SCCG is encouraged that DEH has put forward the proposed Wildlife Plan for migratory shorebird species. SCCG acknowledges and agrees with the benefits of the plan outlined in Section 7 of the Plan. SCCG are of the opinion that sub-marine and inter-tidal vegetation communities would also benefit from the plan by maintaining and enhancing species diversity and richness through added protection. SCCG agrees that the proposed plan would increase the regional awareness and importance for protecting and conserving shore-bird habitats. The Department of Environment and Heritage are to be commended for this pro-active approach regarding this important issue. SCCG also considers that and all relevant stakeholders have been acknowledged in the Plan.

¹ **Sydney Coastal Councils Group Inc.**

The SCCG consists of 15 Member Councils with sea and harbour frontages in Sydney, including, Botany Bay, Hornsby, Leichhardt, Manly, Mosman, North Sydney, Pittwater, Randwick, Rockdale, Sutherland, Sydney, Warringah, Waverley, Willoughby and Woollahra. Collectively we represent over 1.3 million Sydneysiders. The Group is concerned with the promotion of cooperation and coordination to achieve the sustainable management of the urban coastal environment.

Sydney Coastal Councils Group prepared a Model Development Control Plan" *Protecting Sydney's Wetlands*" (2001). The DCP outlines a number of measures that ensured the protection and conservation of wetland environments such as wetland biodiversity and habitats that support fauna such as Migratory Bird Species. SCCG encourages DEH to give consideration to the recommendations that are outlined in the Wetlands DCP in the preparation stage of the Plan.

2.0 SUGGESTED OBJECTIVES OF THE PLAN

Objectives set out on page 6 of the document, refer to goals that the Plan will aim to achieve. These goals, however are not outlined in the Plan and it is uncertain therefore which goals these objectives are meant to address. In support of the objectives that have been listed SCCG would like to suggest the following additional points:

1. Objective 3 (page 6) states that wetland habitats should be protected and conserved. SCCG considers that where possible, potential sites for wetland rehabilitation to support migratory shorebirds should be encouraged along Australia's coastline as well as inland wetland regions via guidance materials and supporting funding schemes.
2. Is DEH considering adopting a tri-lateral co-ordinated strategic planning approach between Federal, State and Local Governments to achieve a coordinated approach to identification, research and management of sites that are nationally and internationally important under Objective 3 (page 6)?
3. SCCG encourages DEH to consider including an objective that takes into consideration external boundary factors (i.e. other developments surrounding wetland sites) that have the potential to adversely affect areas zoned or identified as habitat for migratory shore bird species. This should involve communicating with strategic and environmental planners at a Local, State and Federal Government level and reviewing all land use planning policies over the short and long term (see section 2.2), for example as outlined in the SCCG DCP under wetland zone / buffer zone.

2.1 OPTIONS TO ACHIEVE OBJECTIVES

SCCG encourages DEH to consider outlining time frames within the Plan against which the objectives can be implemented. The time frames would allow for a cycle of assessment to ensure that the objectives are being met. SCCG suggest the following time frames be given consideration by DEH.

1. Present time: To adopt short-term goals that are clear, unambiguous and can be realistically met within 12 months (operational phase).
2. Short Term: The adoption of a 2 - 5 year plan to ensure that a consistent framework can be used for current and future planners and environmental managers, taking into consideration staff turn-over (strategic phase).
3. Long Term: The adoption of a 5 – 20 year plan for Australia to ensure that the objectives initially set out in the framework are being met over a sustained period of time (strategic phase).

2.2 LEGISLATIVE REQUIREMENTS

SCCG requires clarification as to how State and Local legislative requirements would be used in conjunction with the EPBC Act to protect and conserve migratory bird habitats and populations. It is unclear within the draft plan as to what other pieces of environmental legislation should be given consideration, particularly for local councils wishing to incorporate the Plan into their local environmental management plans.

SCCG considers that an independent assessment panel should be set up to evaluate the performance of the plan with respect to the objectives. The panel could be made up of delegates including those outlined in Section 6 of the Plan. The panel should meet annually to identify and discuss the Plan's successes and shortcomings and the findings should be reported and made public knowledge as soon as possible. The suggested time frames should be signed off by all concerned i.e. Local, State and Federally supported. Any findings that stem from an annual assessment of the Plan could then be fed back into the suggested time frames outline above. For example, based on an assessment of time frames (2) and (3), the Panel could determine targets to be met over 12 months.

Furthermore, SCCG believe that without a Nationally coordinated policy approach to coastal management, many of the objectives that are set out in the Plan would be jeopardized by constant changes at Local and State Government levels.

3.1 LOCAL GOVERNMENT RESPONSIBILITIES

The Plan does not adequately address roles and responsibilities for Local Governments with issues associated with migratory shorebird species. SCCG are of the opinion that DEH should provide Local Government organisations with the appropriate guidance to assist Federal agencies in achieving their objectives. This would also be applicable to State agencies if they were to be involved. It would also assist in achieving tri-lateral consistency in the decision-making and approval process.

SCCG is works on behalf of 15 coastal councils across the Sydney region. One of the main strengths of the Group is the promotion and exchange of information. SCCG would be happy to facilitate the exchange of information in order to raise appropriate awareness among Local Government organisation as well as community groups. SCCG are of the opinion that DEH should consider adopting a communication strategy to ensure the aims and objectives of the Plan need to be communicated to Local Government to ensure objectives can be met at a local government level.

3.2 COMMUNITY RESPONSIBILITIES

SCCG would like DEH to clarify whether data collected by community and environmental groups involved with the monitoring and observation of migratory bird species populations be integrated into a National database. By integrating research scientists with local community and environment groups, SCCG is of the opinion that this approach would be a successful method of reducing the gap between science and the community. It will also allow information to be more publicly available and reduce the loss of information that is collected by these groups.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Whilst it is recognised within the Plan that a collaborative effort of all levels of government, conservation groups and industry will aim to protect migratory shorebird habitat through legislative and policy frameworks, SCCG consider that the statutory role and involvement of Local Government, local environment and community groups is not clearly defined and requires further attention by DEH.

The development and implementation of effective site management protocols, communication tools and education programs needs to be more clearly defined, particularly at a local level. These tools need to reflect exactly how actions can be integrated into Natural Resource Management Plans so as to improve guidance for relevant stakeholders, environmental planners and managers and to ensure that the proposed actions will have tangible results. Section 5 of the document does not reflect this and should outline how contributions from interest groups, landowners or Local Government can be fed back into the framework for review and assessment.

SCCG acknowledge that the *Framework for a National Cooperative Approach to Integrated Coastal Zone Management* released in October 2003, attempts to set up a framework for National Action on coastal management, but it fails to outline specific details that would deal with tackling issues such as providing protection and habitat for migratory shore bird species. SCCG considers that a more robust and issue specific related legislative framework (such as a Coastal Zone Management Act) should be adopted by the Australian Government to provide more specific guidance to Local Government and community groups.

I trust these comments and recommendations will receive appropriate attention when considering the implementation of the Proposed *Wildlife Conservation Plan for Migratory Shorebirds*. The Group supports in full the preparation of the *Wildlife Conservation Plan* including the *Action Plan for the Conservation of Migratory Shorebirds in the East Asian – Australasian Flyway*.

If you wish to clarify any matter in outlined within this submission or require further information, please contact Richard Phillips, Coastal Projects Officer on (02) 9399 0675 or email richard@sydneycoastalcouncils.com.au

Yours sincerely,

Richard Phillips
Coastal Projects Officer