



Love the Coast

Sydney Coastal Councils Group

LOVE THE COAST

Ewen McDonald

Publisher: Sydney Coastal Councils Group Inc.

Town Hall House, 456 Kent St

Sydney NSW 2001

AUSTRALIA

www.sydneycoastalcouncils.com.au

© SCCG and Ewen McDonald

First published 2014

ISBN 978-0-9802808-6-9

This publication is copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study, research, criticism or review, as permitted under the Copyright Act, no part of this publication may be reproduced by any process without written permission. Inquiries should be addressed to the publisher.

Design and artwork by Eva Kiss

Illustrations by Astrid Milne

Photographs courtesy of the Manly Environment Centre,

Beachwatch and the SCCG

Printed by Carbon8 on recycled paper.

Contents

- 3** The First Wave: Foreshore activism and action
- 11** Keeping Watch: 'The Future Of Water is in Our Hands'...
- 19** The Second Wave: Consolidation, Research and Projection
- 31** 25 Years: Recognition, acknowledgement... a celebration
- 35** Notes

1989

SCCG established

1990

Regional Coastal Environment Officer employed
SCCG Constitution and logo
Stormwater Management Task force
Election of first office bearers. Chairperson, Cr Barbara Armitage

1991

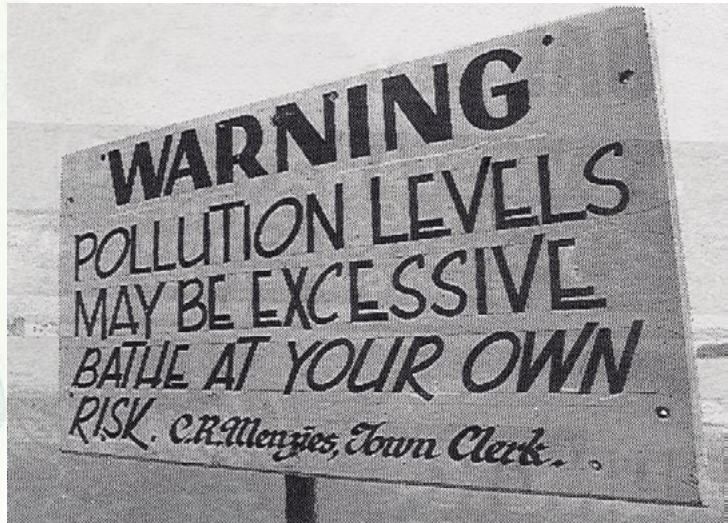
Clean Up Australia Day
Installation of GPT at Bondi
Design of a Stormwater Pollution Interception Treatment System
Stormwater Control Code

1992

Regional Stormwater Pollution Control Guidelines
Standard warning signs for contaminated water

1993

Intertidal protection areas - media release
Urban Stormwater Quality Management guidelines
Ocean Rescue 2000 partnership
Sewage Overflows Strategy - draft



Pollution Warning, 1995 Courtesy of Manly Environment Centre



Clean 'em up, 1980 Courtesy of Manly Environment Centre



THE FIRST WAVE

Foreshore activism and action

In March 1994 the Sydney Coastal Councils Group embarked on a four-year forward plan. In essence, this encapsulated and built upon five years of groundbreaking work: it summarised the group's achievements and ongoing concerns.

As much as the four-year plan was a projection into the future, the document was a distillation of Sydney's poor environmental history - a history that no city could be proud of. Sydney's coastal zones were in a very poor state of health - the harbour and waterways had become the city's dumping ground, pollution had become a major health issue, there was an urgent need for action and rehabilitation.

Looking back now, given that the coast and beaches figure so prominently in the national consciousness, in the nation's history, culture, character and lifestyle, it's unimaginable that for so long Australians continued to foul one of their most treasured environments.¹



Bondi, 1991. Courtesy of BeachWatch



It was not until the mid 1980s that a persistent widespread community demand for an immediate solution emerged. After three years of front-page, investigative exposés about the inadequacies of the city's sewage systems and disposal of industrial waste - for instance, the revelation that toxic chemicals were being flushed into open stormwater drains that ran through suburbs and out to sea (and into the food chain) - it was obvious that a well coordinated approach was necessary to fix the mess.² Enter an enlightened group of local councillors, lobbyists, swimmers and surfers who banded together to lobby state and federal governments for solutions, to support a non-partisan approach for long-term coastal conservation and protection.³ There was a determined effort to rid the beaches of their offshore stain - 'the murk' - and its particular species of brown invader, the notorious in-your-face 'blind mullets' that floated in on every tide...

The late 80s saw 'poo-marches' and protests. There was a loud and persistent battle cry on Sydney's beaches: everyone's focus was on a colour change ... brown was out, blue was in! Turn Back the Tide drew thousands of residents to Bondi Beach for a concert and rally to voice their anger at the lack of action: this represented overwhelming support for the initiatives of the five coastal councils and their fledgling organisation. The group was united in their response to the public outcry. Realising that local councils were major contributors to



1994

Regional Coastal Management and SCCG Forward Plan
Sydney Regional Coastal Management Demonstration Project

1995

Risk management guidelines for coastal bluffs and cliffs

1996

SCCG hosts Sydney regional Coastcare program
State of the Waters Report
'Water Quality guidelines for Sydney - Estuarine, Fresh and Groundwater - A vision of the Future'
Coastal State of the Environment Reporting guidelines - draft
Options for Cleaning Sydney's Estuarine Tidal & Sea Rock Pools for Local Government - draft

1997

Beachwatch and Harbourwatch program extended
Regional Water Quality Monitoring Guidelines - draft

the urban stormwater pollution problem (at that time, for instance, councils sanctioned the spraying of laneways with the herbicide 2,4,5-T that then flowed into the network of city drains), they recognised the urgent need for coordinated action and embarked on a campaign demanding local, state and federal governments clean up their acts.⁴

1988 was an election year. Regardless of political affiliations, industrial waste disposal and the largely untreated sewage pumped directly into the ocean at Bondi, Malabar, North Head and Cronulla became an election issue. The State Labor Government proposed to simply extend the pipes further out to sea at seabed level where the sewage would 'naturally' dissipate. This notion - that the 'solution to pollution is dilution' - was controversial: it goaded the Liberal opposition into listening to and accepting environmentally-sound approaches to sewage treatment prior to its dispersal into the ocean.

The following year, the new Minister for the Environment introduced the Environment Protection Authority (EPA) - a more rigorous entity to displace the previous, seemingly industry-compliant State Pollution Control Commission. Behind this proposed legislation however, serious work had already begun...

Established in 1989, the Sydney Coastal Councils Group (SCCG) was a non-partisan, co-operative entity that welcomed experts and advocates ready to confront the unwieldy bureaucratic complacency that for too long had hindered effective action. The Group - spearheaded by the then Councillor and Mayor of Waverley Council, Barbara Armitage - comprised Council representatives, dedicated individuals and staff (including Dawn Fraser, Ben Castle, Ted Plummer, Dr Peter MacDonald and Brent Gerstle), and local authorities who were responsible for the adjacent marine and estuarine environments and waterways that make up the much-loved natural beauty

CLEAN UP SYDNEY
The Sydney Morning Herald WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 17, 1990

Time to turn back the tide

Sunday's clean-up will be even bigger than last year's, reaching further around Sydney's coastline and waterways but also extending to 204 other Australian cities and towns, reports


Be part of the team

VOLUNTEERS wishing to join the campaign should report to...
 material that can be recycled...
 such as aluminium cans, glass bottles...
 and plastic bottles... should be used.

"I think it is important for all Australians to realize that the country belongs to us - not the Government - and that we should take an active role in looking after our environment," Mr Kierman said yesterday.

*Clean Up Australia is company

Time to Turn Back the Tide, 1990, Sydney Morning Herald. Courtesy of Manly Environment Centre



of the metropolitan region. It was obvious to them that the ongoing and sustainable management of close to 600 kilometres of Sydney's coastal and harbour foreshores would need a united front to guarantee long-term conservation and protection.

A Regional Coastal Environmental Officer position was created in July 1990, initially located at the Warringah Shire Council building. In his first technical report to the SCCG, Michael Chanell outlined the key issues, initiatives and research: sewage, urban run-off and stormwater management were priorities along with beach and water quality monitoring, surf and public health issues. Public awareness and education programs were equally significant, as was collaboration with key research institutions: a valuable asset for the Group, opening up the science for application to better coastal management - particularly marine and estuarine wave rock platforms that were being heavily foraged for food and shells and under significant ecological stress from polluted waters.

The five founding coastal and harbourside member Councils were: Manly, Randwick, Sutherland, Warringah and Waverley. The multilateral nature of this union of local councils fighting for environmental goals was a first - their aim was to clean up Sydney's ocean beaches and local waterways.



One original Councillor representing Manly Council was Dr Peter MacDonald - a product of community politics and resident action groups. In 1991 he was elected to State parliament as the Independent MP for Manly and in his maiden speech he took the opportunity to propose a comprehensive environmental philosophy: his aim was legislation that embraced an integrated approach to conservation and protection. Based on first-hand experience of the inadequacies of the North Head sewage treatment pouring untreated effluent just metres from one of Sydney's most famous beaches and tourist destinations, the fight for clean water was an obvious issue.⁵

MacDonald noted that while we can't turn back the clock we can recognise easily our mistakes and problems. Quoting one of his constituents about bathing at Manly Beach - "it's not swimming... it's just going through the motions" - he emphasised it was not just about pollution control, the real goal - backed by legislation - was pollution prevention. Addressing State parliament about the proposed Environmental Protection Act, MacDonald was determined the bill would cover the future protection of the environment. And, given the State Government's record on pollution controls in New South Wales, amendments were necessary to restore public faith and ensure protection and conservation were integral to urban planning and coastal development.



Harbour Sampling, Courtesy of BeachWatch



North Cronulla, 1992. Courtesy of BeachWatch



KEEPING WATCH 'The Future of Water is in Our Hands'...⁶

With ongoing public health issues associated with Sydney's beaches, a key initiative in the first years of SCCG was the expansion of coastal monitoring and warning systems into Beachwatch - a co-operative venture that established a coordinated approach to water quality and swimming conditions.

To this day, many Sydneysiders remember playing in the warm waters that flowed in the drains at Bronte and at the south end of Bondi beach. Now with the knowledge that a cocktail of potentially harmful pathogens, animal faeces, sediment and hazardous chemicals was being discharged into the network of stormwater drains, they recoil at what could have been in that run-off trickling down to the shore. Polluting the waterways had been ongoing and, seemingly, without any thought of the long-term consequences. For instance, since the 1800s chromium waste from the tanneries (now buried beneath Sydney airport) had flowed into Botany Bay, and as it was discovered with Homebush Bay and the construction for the 2000 Sydney Olympics, former industrial sites around Sydney Harbour were the source of unabated contamination - so much so at the Olympic site that its



1998

Public Wharf Ownership
Stormwater Management Plans
Summer Activities program -
'Summerama'
Establishment of PENGOs
SCCG Regional Policy and Strategy
for water quality monitoring

1999

Regional Water quality
tendering proposal
Regulating the use of personalised
water craft
Sea Defence Working Group
Regulating the use of Insinkerators
'Protecting Wetlands through
Better Planning'

2000

Benchmarking Stormwater
Quality Management
Programs
PipeCheck - Issues Paper
H6 Kurnell Peninsular
Development

2001

Resource package for local
government to prevent
Cigarette Butt littering
SCCG/ WSROC - 'Water
Sensitive Urban Design in
Sydney' program

removal was impossible and best left undisturbed for effective remediation.⁷

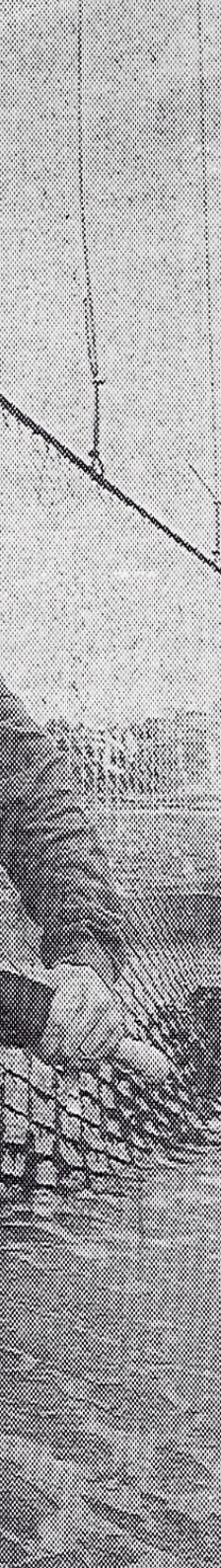
Beachwatch soon had off-shoots: Harbourwatch was established in 1992 to monitor water quality in the bays, estuaries and waterways of Sydney Harbour and, later expanded to Streamwatch, to monitor the water quality of the Parramatta and Lane Cove Rivers, Botany Bay and Port Hacking, and the impact of contaminants on oyster farming in the Georges River. These key achievements - which now include Waterwatch, an education program encouraging schools and communities to monitor the health of local waterways - continue to be part of the Group's coastal and waterway management network.

As well as the urgent need to solve untreated sewage on Sydney's beaches, sewage overflows after heavy rains were a major concern. By late 1993, the Group had prepared the Draft Sewage Overflow Strategy aimed at solving the effluent problem in Sydney's waters. Importantly, the legislative responsibilities for local councils regarding public health issues were investigated. The Draft proposed a four-year plan that would map the city's stormwater network and catchment areas and resulted in an effective management plan for councils and state government to enforce.

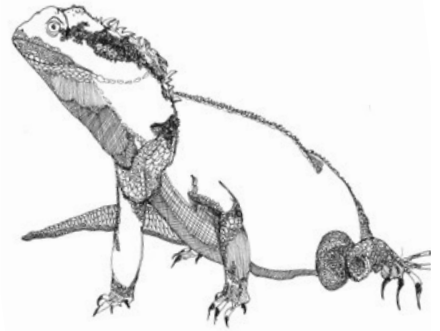
The Group's Stormwater Management Task Force was another significant achievement in the early years. One outcome, a control code for local government - Stormwater Pollution Control Strategies (May 1992) - was a joint winner of the Keep Australia Beautiful Council (NSW) Stormwater Awareness Awards sponsored by the Sydney Water Board. In the same year the Group was instrumental in establishing the Stormwater Industry Association aimed at encouraging research into re-use and stormwater management, developing guidelines for the improvement of existing stormwater infrastructure, and facilitating proactive, integrated approaches to deal with urban run-off from private properties. At this time the SCCG instigated research into the design of Gully Pit Interception devices for stormwater pollution control. The Group's focus on stormwater management in the metropolitan region laid the foundation for the all-important Total Catchment Management movement. Given that, prior to the advent of the SCCG, water catchments were administered by numerous local and regional authorities, the coordinated approach promoted by the SCCG led to a greater understanding of the integrated network of waterways and other forms of water catchment management.

In the first decade of operation, the national Caring for Country program was extended to embrace coastal





Ed Halmogyi at Bolmorol Beach, 1994, SMH, Courtesy of Manly Environment Centre



and marine conservation and protection. Coastal zone management and local government responsibility were reviewed as part of the State Government's NSW Coastal Policy, and driven by public outcry regarding beach pollution, a House of Representatives Inquiry into beach pollution was set up to which the Group made numerous, significant contributions. The result was the substantial publication, *The Injured Coastline* (launched April 1991).

In the same year, *Ocean Rescue 2000* - an offshoot of the national *Landcare* concept - was established to address the conservation and sustainable use of Australia's marine environment, and to ensure the long-term health and future of its ecosystems and species. One particular area of concern was the destruction of intertidal habitats on rock platforms along the New South Wales coast through indiscriminate foraging and over-fishing. As one writer suggests, attitudes to fishing in this country imply that the sea is 'a great aquatic common', there for everyone to exploit.⁸ Focusing on the protection of these intertidal habitats in partnership with NSW Fisheries, the Group instigated the mapping and identification of species in order to establish protection zones and a management plan which, in turn led to *Intertidal Protected Areas* legislation.

Given its non-partisan, collaborative capacity, the Group was a major contributor to debates and discussion



papers instigated by state agencies. It participated in an Environment Protection Authority review, a State of the Environment report in 1992, and later to the NSW Natural Resources Package (Sept 1992) - a discussion paper on existing legislation regarding endangered and other threatened species, environmental planning and assessment, forestry resources, and heritage. The SCCG also made submissions to the Resource Assessment Commission (RAC), a Commonwealth Government Coastal Inquiry regarding the financial requirements of local governments to sustainably manage coastal areas. The outcomes established a National Coastal Action Plan.

If, in the 1970s, Green Bans had been the focus of activism in Sydney (fighting unsympathetic development in The Rocks was the key example), the 1980s was the era when community agitation led to the fight for clean waters and a solution to the city's sewage problem. By the 1990s there was greater widespread environmental awareness: this was epitomised by the drive to Clean Up Australia.⁹ What began as a local Mosman/ Sydney Harbour initiative soon ballooned into an Australia-wide endeavour to resuscitate choked and rubbished areas.

This is the climate within which the Sydney Coastal Councils Group flourished. Within a decade, it had established itself as an effective advocacy and lobbying group - its inclusive, cooperative approach setting

an example for local and regional authorities to follow. Having emerged from community activism and action, the Group's effectiveness in many ways is the result of dedicated member council - elected and technical - representation. Further, by engaging key researchers and institutions to contribute to publications and submissions, it ensured coastal conservation and management was firmly grounded. To reinforce its position, when Geoff Withycombe took over the reins as Executive Officer, the Group became an Incorporated Association in 1998: it could remain independent and self-determining, thereby maintaining a healthy and critical distance from government agencies and other authorities. Galvanising people power into a united, proactive entity to deal with coastal management meant that, without doubt, the 1990s would be acknowledged as the decade when, as the saying goes, 'Blue became the new Green'...





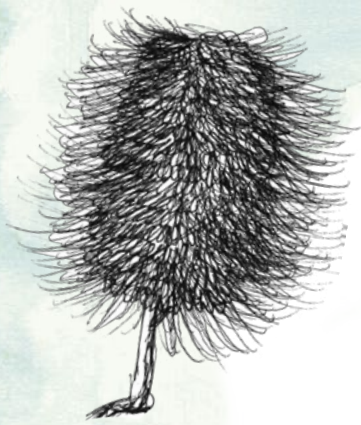
THE SECOND WAVE

Consolidation, Research and Projection



In early 2000, the Sydney Metropolitan area suffered a water crisis - first a drought, then cryptosporidium invaded the city's water supply. It was time for a study to be made of Sydney's drinking water catchments and to review water use in the greater Sydney region. The Department of Land and Water Conservation released a paper setting out the State Government's proposed legislative framework for water management to ensure the sustainable use and protection of the city's precious water sources. This led to an investigation by the SCCG into water planning, recycling and guidelines for recycled water use: the outcomes contributed to a review of Sydney Water's WaterPlan 21, the development of a related SCCG policy statement, and the Water Sensitive Urban Design in Sydney Program with a focus on both Eastern Sydney and Western Sydney/ Parramatta (in partnership with the Western Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils), including an inter-council competition, the Sustainable Water Challenge.

The second decade of the Sydney Coastal Councils Group, under the chairmanship of the indefatigable Patricia Harvey OAM, continued its momentum. Its ongoing



2002

Malabar Headland - History and Future
Developer Contributions
Investigations and Scoping paper
Public Liability case, Bondi Beach
Six new Aquatic Reserves for Sydney established

2003

SCCG/ UNSW, IES -
Collaborative Environmental
Practice Programs
Management of Phytophthora
- Issues Paper
SCCG Buspak Program

2004

Establishment of the SCCG
Geotechnical Expert Panel
SCCG Groundwater
Management Handbook

2005

SCCG/ CSIRO Science in the
Sydney region workshop
SCCG/ Macquarie University
partnership program
SCCG/ Macquarie University -
Climate Change Forum
SCCG/ Australian Geomechanics
Society Landslide Risk
Management
Beach nourishment project

stormwater research was extended to embrace a PipeCheck program to not only check the condition of pipes across the urban network (including those on private property) and to provide a low cost self-sustaining pre-purchase sewer plumbing inspection service, but to monitor the contents being flushed through the ageing system. The realisation that 'cracks, chokes, illegal connections and tree root intrusions' were emerging as significant blockages, led to the release of an Australia-wide campaign: brochures were produced to ignite public awareness about remedial options. Included in the publicity was information about issues such as unrestricted leaching of untreated sewage from private lines into waterways, and the dangers of contaminants from car-washing, footpath cleaning and other forms of domestic run-off... ultimately a public health concern when dispersed into receiving waters.

As a result of community action in 2001, cigarette butt littering became a focus and led (with support from Clean Up Australia, Keep Australia Beautiful and NSW Health) to the launch of Preventing Cigarette Litter - A package for local government. In 2003 the Group received a grant from the Stormwater Trust for an education program based on six evocative images to be displayed on strategically placed banners and as Buspak advertisements across Sydney's bus network. The anti butt-littering campaign was highly successful, as was the Group's in-house publication, Groundwater

Management: a handbook for local government (2006) - the missing element in water cycle management. This seminal handbook combined technical, educational and environmental information for the sustainable management of groundwater resources. The State-wide distribution of this book, a series of workshops across Sydney, and simplified fact sheets based on its contents, ensured that councils, engineers and development assessors had the confidence and capacity to enforce not only the appropriate utilisation of water resources but the protection of groundwater dependent ecosystems.

One proposal to solve the city's water crisis was the construction of a desalination plant at Kurnell. The SCCG began research into desalination technologies, plant operation and treatment processes. The Group also joined



Manly and Middle Harbour, SCCG



South Curl Curl, 1994. Courtesy of Manly Environment Centre



Pollution at North Head. Courtesy of BeachWatch



with key non-government organisations to form SCUD - Sydney Community United against Desalination.¹⁰

The SCCG also joined forces with a group of environmental agencies that included representatives from the Australian Conservation Foundation, Friends of the Earth, Nature Conservation Council, Colong Foundation for Wilderness, National Parks Association, Oceanwatch, and the Total Environmental Centre. This combination of PENGOs (Peak Environmental Non-Government Organisations) ensured a range of voices were included when it came to proposals, submissions and reports focusing on strategies and management of Sydney Water. One such report concerned biosolids (handling and transport) - especially the need to incorporate sludge and water recycling pipes within the North Side Sewage Storage Tunnel, as required by urban planning guidelines. Another was a submission concerning Sydney Water's Draft 2000-05 Environmental Plan, A New Course for Sydney Water. A key PENGOs education initiative - connected with the Group's ongoing stormwater and catchment research - was the highly successful, state-wide 'The Drain is Just for Rain' program.

The capacity to respond immediately to significant social and environmental issues such as the water crisis and possible solutions, was enhanced by the Group's expanding engagement with experienced and quality



2006

Valuation of Sydney Beaches project
Urban Sustainability Support Alliance
New SCCG Website

2007

SCCG/ Macquarie University - Climate Change Fact Sheet series
Shark Protection Summit
SCCG/ AGS - Geotechnical Management Guidelines
Geotechnical Forum
Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Natural Resources Management - Climate Change

2008

SCCG/ CSIRO Systems Approach to Climate Change Adaptation
GIS tool for assessing coastal building vulnerability to catastrophic marine floods
Groundwater Education Workshop Series
'Walking Coastal Sydney' website launch
Systems Approach to Regional Climate Change Adaptation Strategies in Metropolises
'Coastal Councils - Planning for Climate Change'

researchers: it sought collaborative partnerships with university departments and other institutions.

One such collaboration was established with the Institute of Environmental Studies at the University of New South Wales in 2002-03 - the first formalised partnership with a university department. Focused on post-graduate research, masters students investigated topics including ecological footprints of local councils, education programs to decrease Greenhouse emissions, the economics of reuse and recycled urban water, sustainable tourism for coastal councils, conservation on private lands, and community engagement in natural resource management. Later, in 2008-09, the SCCG and the UNSW School of Risk and Safety Sciences tested a newly-developed GIS tool to assess the vulnerability of coastal infrastructure to catastrophic marine floods.

The success of this ongoing relationship led, in 2005, to another partnership with the Department of Physical Geography at Macquarie University. Setting up workshops to investigate the impact of climate change and produce fact sheets for local government, the exchange led to the Group's first formal climate change forum. In 2006 a key national document, Economics of Climate Change was published. In the same year the SCCG initiated a PhD study that assessed the costs and benefits of necessary coast protection abatement measures as a result of enhanced climate change

impacts. The aim of this long-term research project, Quantifying the Value of Sydney Beaches (completed at the end of the decade) was to determine the total economic value of selected Sydney beaches. Another related research project was initiated in conjunction with two CSIRO divisions (Sustainable Ecosystems, and Marine and Atmospheric Research) and the University of the Sunshine Coast to investigate regional approaches to managing areas vulnerable to extreme climate conditions.

A significant achievement for the Group was its research into wetlands and their protection from inappropriate development. Working with the Department of Urban Affairs and Planning, the SCCG collated and digitised wetland map sheets for the Sydney region - a first for both agencies and essential to the award-winning publication Model Development Control Plan: Protecting Sydney's Wetlands, launched by Senator Robert Hill, Minister for the Environment and Heritage in 2001.

Regional environmental monitoring at this time was expanded to cover the management of ecosystems and standardised procedures for water sampling - the information then distributed to water managing agencies and the wider community via CD and the Internet, thus allowing for ongoing review and updating.

As well as external partnerships such as those with NSW



2009

SCCG/ CSIRO Mapping and Responding to Coastal Inundation
SCCG Groundwater Management Capacity Building - Education Package
SCCG/ CSIRO win the Eureka Award - 'Innovative Solutions to Climate Change'
Extraction of Offshore sands for Beach Nourishment - Scoping Study
SCCG/ UNSW Antifouling technologies for coastal pools and platforms
Alternative Energy for Coastal Cities Forum
Empowerment for Landslide Risk Management - education project
Climate Change Forum Series
NSW Government Sea Level Rise Policy, Risk Management Guides and Draft NSW Coastal Planning Guideline
Sydney's Integrated Spatial Future - forum

2010

Demonstrating Climate Change Adaptation of Interconnected Water Infrastructure Project
Prioritising Coastal Adaptation and Development Options for Local Government Project

EPA & Fisheries (investigating anti-fouling technologies to counter toxic growths in coastal pools and on rock platforms - all part of ongoing conservation and protection programs); NSW Fisheries and the NSW Maritime industry (to investigate the eradication of the invasive seaweed, *Caulerpa taxifolia*); the Royal Botanic Gardens (researching the tree-killing virus, *Phytophthora*); and Sydney Water (to consider licensing strategies) - the Group established specialised internal committees to focus on particular concerns such as the Sea Level Rise Expert Panel. Its persistent efforts with intertidal habitats and Sydney rock platform research led to six new aquatic reserves being identified and protected under Fisheries legislation. With the assistance of the Group, a panel of Geotechnical experts began a six-year task investigating landslide hazard zones and risk management, coastal inundation and erosion. This culminated in the Landslide Risk Management project (spearheaded by the SCCG and the Australian Geomechanics Society) winning the prestigious Warren Medal in 2008 - an award established in 1929 for outstanding contributions to literature associated with the engineering profession.

As part of its natural disaster mitigation program, the SCCG instigated a scoping study for sand extraction - a controlled and sustainable beach nourishment program for those areas under threat from coastal storm

activity. In turn, these initiatives and continuing concerns to effectively manage coastal processes, led to a review and update of legislation such as the Coastal Protection Act 1979, the Coastal Protection and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2010. One strategic and well-received document was the State's Coastal Design Guidelines for NSW (2003), another was the Group's recommendations to the Federal Coastal Zone Inquiry, *Managing our Coastal Zone in a Changing Climate: the Time to Act is Now* (2009).

The work of the SCCG during the decade extended beyond coastal policy and practice to enhancing the connections between community and place. In response to member council surveys and with the assistance of The Walking Volunteers, the Group initiated a series of accessible coastal walking tracks with consistent mapping and promotion: the result, 'Walking Coastal Sydney', was the SCCG's contribution to the Sharing Sydney Harbour program. This community-focused endeavour extended the Group's already successful education project, Summerama - an ongoing activity-based program to encourage enjoyment and respect for the city's coastal and marine environments. Further to these initiatives the SCCG partnered with Underwater Australia, Sydney Aquarium, Google and the advertising agency BMF, to develop a quirky, vibrant and inspirational education program and interactive website, Underwater Sydney.



Partnerships and collaborations meant that the SCCG could broaden its appeal when seeking funding for future projects - not just for research and development but for dynamic community education programs to raise awareness about coastal zones, conservation, and the challenges associated with climate change. If the first ten years can be encapsulated as the era of community activism, the second decade can be considered a period of consolidation, research and projection. By 2010, having cemented its position as a key research and advisory group for coastal and harbour management - with much of its ground-breaking work extending to areas beyond the Sydney region - the Group was in a strong position to broaden its horizons. It could move beyond present concerns and leverage its expertise to become forward-thinking and proactive.

At the end of the second decade the Group's inclusive, collaborative approach was rewarded. Having worked closely with the CSIRO since 2005 on approaches to climate change adaptation strategies, the partnership received a well-deserved accolade - the coveted Eureka Award in 2009 for its innovative 3-stage project on the implications of climate change for large urban areas. From an initial audit of what councils would need to consider with regard to planning and development, to a systematic evaluation of Sydney's climate vulnerability - especially the impact of climate change upon coastal

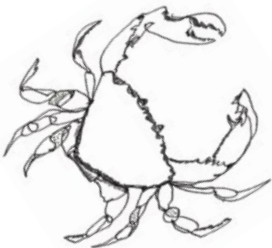
communities and environments - the case studies of adaptive capacities and regional adaptation strategies revealed the significance of solid, well-grounded research when it comes to future planning.

After 20 years of operation, vigilance, enduring advocacy and research, characterise the activities of the now expanded Sydney Coastal Councils Group. The 15 local council members - Botany Bay, Hornsby, Leichhardt, Manly, Mosman, North Sydney, Pittwater, Randwick, Rockdale, Sutherland, Sydney, Warringah, Waverley, Willoughby and Woollahra - represent well over a million residents and a vast number of tourists for whom the city's beaches, waterways and coastal walks are an essential part of everyday existence.

What is it we love about the coast? Whatever it is for each one of us - as this history shows - it's worth fighting for.

“

The operating framework under which the SCCG formed was one of change. From 1970 to 1990, State Government had moved from a position of limited understanding of coastal management while relying on engineering controls to 'react' to severe weather events, to one of acceptance of coastal management as a delicate balancing act requiring input from multidisciplinary professionals and all community stakeholders. It occurred in the aftermath of the Turn the Tide campaign against the pollution of Sydney beaches resulting in the construction of the Deep Ocean Outfalls and a moratorium on the construction of further short ocean outfalls along the NSW coast. It was clear the community held a deep love and concern for the coast and could no longer be ignored. The SCCG provided a coordinated voice for the various coastal councils in the Sydney metropolitan area when dealing with State Government while developing coastal management policies and practices. This role over the next 25 years has included focusing relevant coastal research, developing management tools for local government and providing information to assist those member Councils in working with their communities. This role has been successful and of value well beyond the Sydney metropolitan coastline. It has always been fulfilled by a very few passionate staff, working closely with similarly motivated staff in their member councils, outside agencies and external professionals. As a contributor to coastal management in the Sydney area and beyond, the SCCG is an organisation that always 'punches well beyond their weight', providing focused, useable and timely support to coastal management issues in the Sydney region. It has been my pleasure to work closely with the group since taking on the role of Manager Coastal in the NSW Government in 2000 and since 2010, in my role as a private coastal management consultant. Congratulations and well done SCCG!



DOUG LORD

MEngSc., MBA., MIE Aust., CPEng.

”



25 YEARS

Recognition, acknowledgement... a celebration

Since 2010 the Sydney Coastal Councils Group has continued its focus on the challenges associated with climate change hazards, vulnerability, adaptive capacity and community resilience. Anticipating that oceans will get warmer, that sea levels will rise and severe weather conditions will impact upon low-lying coastal regions not only through inundation and possible water acidification, the realities of foreshore and coastal bluff erosion pose a real threat to both urban areas and protected natural habitats along Australia's shoreline.¹¹

The Group's investigations into Coastal Adaption Pathways has attracted major financial support. The Demonstrating Climate Change Adaptation of Interconnected Water Infrastructure project (2012), the Prioritising Coastal Adaptation and Development Options for Local Government project (2013), and the Group's continued advocacy, have played a major role in climate change debates and draft legislation - for instance, the NSW Coastal Reform package, the State Government's guidelines for sea level risk management and future planning, and amendments to the Coastal Protection Act 1979. Working in partnership the Group has been investigating appropriate asset management

2010

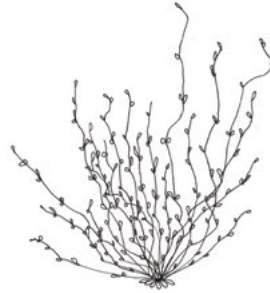
Seawall Structures Project - assessment
SCCG website relaunched
GIS in the Coastal Environment Forum
SCCG/ Sydney Water - Water Recycling
Opportunities Forum
'Underwater Sydney'

2011

'Coastal Connections' - SCCG's first social
media project
Building for Sustainability Forum
Economics of Coastal Management Forum
Engaging Communities:
Social Media Workshop
Release of 'Mapping and
Responding to Coastal Inundation'

2012

Invitation to present Climate
Change Adaptation in China
Mapping and Responding to
Coastal Inundation completed
Report on Plastics in the Marine
environment
SCCG - Becoming Social Project
initiated
Demonstrating Climate Change
Adaptation of Interconnected
Water Infrastructure Project
completed
Boundaries & Barriers: Managing
the Intertidal Zone - Forum
Assessment and Decision
Frameworks for Seawall
Structures Project completed
Emergency Management
Planning: a Health Check for
Local Government Project
initiated
Sydney Harbour Coastal Zone
Management Plan: Stage 1 -
Scoping Study initiated
Coastal Vulnerability to Multiple
Inundation Sources Project
(COVERMAR) initiated



systems - especially in relation to long-term coastal development, guidelines, responsibilities and options for local government.

Given the possibilities of dramatic, unpredictable weather patterns, emergency planning strategies are a key concern for local councils: not only has SCCG prioritised the mapping and identification of vulnerable coastal areas, it has instigated comparative assessments in order to evaluate the impact of sea level rise and to monitor coastal flooding and erosion - including the Mapping and Responding to Coastal Inundation project (2011). Continuing its work with the Australian Geomechanics Society (AGS), the Group has proposed maintenance measures to mitigate against landslides. The SCCG has also coordinated an assessment of existing seawall structures and future requirements. Related to this study, the Group's current investigation of emergency management planning - a 'Health Check for Local Government' - and the award-winning project, Coastal Vulnerability to Multiple Inundation Sources (2014), are important contributors to coastal and harbour management proposals and schemes.

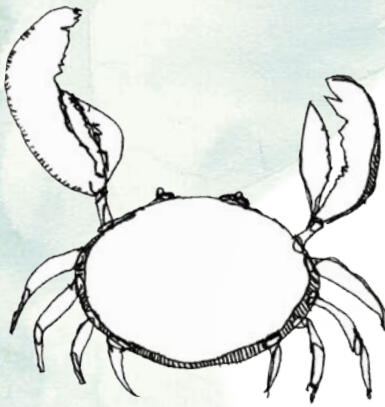
It is clear from this ground-breaking work that forward planning is both strategic and pertinent. Key to the Group's existence is the dissemination of material and, to this end, the SCCG's website and its annual capacity-building program now play a vital role - they are

updated continually, promote knowledge-sharing and generation, and encourage interaction with a wide range of projects. Their objectives are to facilitate the exchange of information - especially the latest scientific and technical research into ecological/ environmental protection and management. Education has always been important: not just to raise awareness but to encourage community participation - continuing the trend that began with the demand for action over two decades ago.

The Sydney Council Coastal Group is now recognised internationally as being at the forefront of integrated coastal zone management. In recent years, the SCCG has been invited to China, the USA and South America to present



Summerama Bird Watcher's Breakfast, Rockdale. Courtesy of Rockdale City Council



2013

The Critical Decade: Extreme Weather - Seminar
Diverse Depths: Sea Beneath the Shallows - Forum
Barriers to Adaptation to Sea Level Rise - Seminar
Sydney's Salty Communities - Turning the Tide on Blue-Green Carbon Project initiated
Benchmarking Climate Change Adaptation and the SCCG
Art of Communication - Forum
Tapping into Local Knowledge - Community Engagement Forum
Amenity, Benefits and Costs: The ABC of Coastal Economics - Forum

2014

SCCG celebrates 25 years caring for the coast
Prioritising Coastal Adaptation and Development Options for Local Government Project launched
Coastal Vulnerability to Multiple Inundation Sources Project (COVERMAR) - continuing

its work on climate change adaptation. Rehabilitation and conservation projects, while embracing the challenges associated with sea-level and climate change, are reminders of the past when little was done to protect fragile ecosystems from undue stress. Lessons learnt now inform the Group's projections into the future.

Policy, Protection, Participation, Probity and Proactivity remain key words for the Group. When it comes to the health and wealth of the sea, the coast, the waterways and tributaries that make up Sydney's vast harbour, ecological boundaries are more important than political boundaries. This fact - the driving force behind many SCCG projects - is cause for celebration alone. Acknowledging 25 years is not just about recognising the achievements, successes and partnerships: it is also an acknowledgement of the persistence of beach and harbour-side communities who have driven coastal care campaigns from the beginning, and the SCCG's capacity to confront ongoing cross-border challenges.

After more than two decades of ground-breaking work, the real celebration is that the city and region, after decades of pollution, now has a coordinated system of coastal and harbour management. Sydney's great beaches, cleaner waterways, conservation and protection programs are testimony to the power of the people's voice, but this, we must remind ourselves, would amount to nothing without the muscle of a dedicated and authoritative, non-partisan body ready to confront the challenges.

Notes

1 Ian Hoskins, *The Coast: a history of the New South Wales edge*, New South Publishing, Sydney 2013, p 10.


2 In the late 1980s Sharon Beder, Richard Gosden and Kirk Willcox were instrumental in getting media attention - in particular, features on the beach pollution issues in *The Sydney Morning Herald*. Their group, Stop the Ocean Pollution (STOP), and other groups like Surfrider Foundation played a key role in the drive to get community support for action. One key revelation was the fact that Sydney Water was in breach of its own legislation and State pollution guidelines: it was not licenced to pollute. A Google search, 'Stop the Ocean Pollution' reveals a plethora of articles from this period, especially in *The Eastern Herald*.

3 The coalition of councillors, activists and environmental officers was inspired into action by Waverley Council Mayor Barbara Armitage.

4 While there had been a Beach Pollution Act around since the 1940s, under the Whitlam and Fraser Governments - because of the public outcry - there was renewed federal interest in the issue. This led to a House of Representatives Inquiry Report prepared by a Committee chaired by Jeannette McHugh, the federal MP for the eastern Sydney beaches electorate of Phillip. The SCCG (Luke Galante, Brent Gerstle, Dr Peter MacDonald and Alderman, Ted Plummer) made a submission and gave evidence to this Committee much of which was incorporated in the final report. In its early days, the SCCG was already an influential advocacy group. The report *The Injured Coastline: Protecting the Coastal Environment* can be downloaded at: http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House_of_Representatives_Committees?url=report_register/bykeylist.asp?id=1665.

5 Ref: Dr Peter MacDonald's maiden speech, *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)*, 16 October 1991.

6 'The Future of Water is in Our Hands', the catch-cry for National Water Week 21-27 November 1993.



7 Ref: Michael Wayne, 'Past/Lives Flashback #1 - 10', a series of 10 articles summarising sites associated with contamination and the notion 'Out of sight / out of mind'. ['Past/Lives' website accessed 29.07.14].

8 Hoskins, op cit, p 413.

9 Clean Up Australia Day began in 1989, the brainchild of avid sailor and environmentalist Ian Kiernan. It is now the nation's largest community-based environmental event. Ref: [www.cleanupaustaliaday.org.au].

10 The desalination plant at Kurnell was turned off in mid-2012 as, due to heavy rainfalls, Sydney's dams rose to be nearly 100% full. Water levels have remained high ever since, so the plant was never switched back on. Under current arrangements, the plant would be restarted once Sydney's dam levels drop to 70%. The operating rules are being reviewed as part of an overhaul of the Metropolitan Water Plan which will be complete in mid-2015. The Sunday Telegraph, 24 August 2014, p 13.

11 Hoskins op cit, pp 419-22.

In the preparation of this text, the author acknowledges the contributions of Geoff Withycombe, Emma Norrie, Stephen Summerhayes, Cathy Griffin, Barbara Armitage, Michael Chanell, Doug Lord, Ted Plummer and Bruce Thom.

Reference material was sourced from SCCG archives.



Randwick City Council
a sense of community

