

SYDNEY COASTAL COUNCILS GROUP Inc.
C/- City of Sydney Council
Level 14, 456 Kent Street
GPO Box 1591, SYDNEY NSW 2001
Phone: (02) 9246 7791
Facsimile: (02) 9265 9660
Email: info@sydneycoastalcouncils.com.au
Internet: www.svdnevcoastalcouncils.com.au



Mr John Carse
General Manager
Sydney Metropolitan Catchment Management Authority
PO BOX 3720
Parramatta NSW 2124

CM018-10

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Re: Draft Native Vegetation of the Sydney Metropolitan Catchment Management Authority Area GIS layers and explanatory reports

The Sydney Coastal Councils Group (SCCG) would like to take this opportunity to provide comment on the *Draft Native Vegetation of the Sydney Metropolitan Catchment Management Authority Area GIS layers and explanatory reports*. The Sydney Metropolitan Catchment Management Authority (SMCMA) and the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water (DECCW) are to be congratulated for the production of these materials.

The SMCMA in partnership with other stakeholders including State and Local Governments face a number of significant challenges in ensuring the existing vegetation values are maintained and where possible enhanced in the catchment. These challenges can be placed in the categories of data provision; action identification and implementation as well as monitoring and resourcing. The GIS layers and explanatory reports provide a significant resource in addressing issues related to data collection and provision.

This correspondence aims to provide some comment on the GIS layers and explanatory reports as well as identify opportunities and actions for their use to enhance vegetation management within the Sydney Catchment. The attached submission is structured in the following manner:

1. Application of the *Draft Native Vegetation of the Sydney Metropolitan Catchment Management Authority Area GIS layers and explanatory reports*;
2. Maintaining or enhancing existing vegetation values within the catchment;
3. Monitoring and evaluation of vegetation management actions in the catchment;
4. Managing vegetation in the catchment in response to climate change.

1. Application of the *Draft Native Vegetation of the Sydney Metropolitan Catchment Management Authority Area GIS layers and explanatory reports*

The aim of *Draft Native Vegetation of the Sydney Metropolitan Catchment Management Authority Area GIS layers and explanatory reports* is to provide Local Government and land management agencies with a consistent fine scale map of all native vegetation communities present within the Sydney Metropolitan CMA area. The SCCG also notes that the SMCMA intends that this information be used for the planning or decision making activities of councils.

At a viewing scale of 1:2000 the maps have been produced at a scale that allows for their use in the planning or decision making activities of councils. Consultation with SCCG Member Council staff has identified that the information layers provided is very large and complex making integration with existing information layers used for strategic planning, development assessment

and state of the environment reporting difficult without additional survey work. To assist councils with integrating this information with their existing maps and management processes the SCCG request that SMCMA clarify the following points:

- What councils should do if the information contained in these maps differs from their own mapping;
- If or how council should inform the SMCMA or DECCW if any changes to mapped vegetation occur over time; and
- If the SMCMA or DECCW are able to provide councils with any ongoing assistance in relation to integrating the GIS layers with their own mapping.

Consultation with SCCG Member Councils has also highlighted that the naming of the ecological communities within the maps differs from the names of communities listed as Endangered Ecological Communities listed under the *NSW Threatened Species Conversation 1995* (TSC Act). This makes the application of the maps for strategic planning and development assessment purposes difficult for councils resulting in councils needing to use their existing maps or rely on consultancy reports that contain names consistent with the TSC Act. To address this the SCCG requests that the SMCMA in partnership with DECCW produce a circular or guide as to how the information provided in the maps is to be applied when assessing the impacts of development applications on endangered ecological communities as defined by the TSC Act.

Increased technical guidance, training and capacity building activities would aid application of the GIS layers and explanatory reports. The SCCG believes that such assistance could be delivered in the form of:

- **Case studies** that summarise how the information in the GIS layers and explanatory reports have been applied by councils in the catchment in their planning or decision making activities.
- **Workshops** that promote the production of the maps and offer planners, environment staff and councillors from across the catchment the opportunity to interrogate the maps and discuss with their peers' opportunities for their application.

Such activities and information would provide councils with the necessary technical guidance to ensure their confidence in applying the information appropriately as well as assisting in the consistent application of the information across the catchment. Without the level of capacity building it is likely that the application of the maps will be limited.

2. Maintaining or enhancing existing vegetation values within the catchment

Councils invest a significant amount of time and financial resources in the protection, management and restoration of vegetation on public and private land within the catchment. The production of the GIS layers and explanatory reports could provide a significant information resource and baseline that can be utilised to identify actions that maintain or enhance existing native vegetation values within the catchment.

Maintaining the continuity and success of existing programs and identifying gaps in reporting and resources would be activities that ensure the value of the GIS layers and explanatory reports is maximised. To apply the information in the GIS layers for this purpose the SCCG recommends the SMCMA consult with councils on:

- Identifying and addressing gaps in existing programs and resourcing that will limit effective implementation of the CAP;
- Identifying opportunities for coordination in data collection, management and access to assist the CAPs monitoring and evaluation;
- Linking of the CAPs delivery and reporting with other reporting processes including council internal reporting processes and external reporting including integrating

sustainability reporting requirements, State of Environment reporting and State Plan Reporting.

Additionally, the SMCMA and DECCW need to clarify if and when they intend to provide updated versions of the information layers. It will require a significant amount of work for councils to integrate the information contained in the GIS Layers with their existing management activities. If the maps are to be produced as a one off the value of undertaking this work would be limited.

3. Monitoring and evaluation of vegetation management actions in the catchment

Monitoring of vegetation management activities in the Sydney Metropolitan catchment is undertaken by councils, the SMCMA and State Government agencies. The challenge is to ensure that these reporting efforts are well coordinated and that there is an efficient and ongoing system of reporting progress towards achieving the maintenance or enhancement of vegetation values. To assist with this and build on the information contained in the GIS Layers the SCCG recommends the SMCMA consider undertaking the following actions:

- Develop and implement a catchment wide Vegetation Quality Indicator that contributes to an overall assessment of progress towards maintaining or enhancing native vegetation in the region; and
- Develop and implement an approved framework for reporting key biodiversity assets (including but not limited to native vegetation) with the catchment.
- Develop and implement a Memorandum of Understanding relevant to all Natural Resource Management activities with all councils in the catchment.

4. Managing vegetation in the catchment in response to climate change

Climate change will have a significant impact on the vegetation of NSW and the Sydney Catchment. The GIS Layers and explanatory reports identify that in the coastal zone of Sydney the existing ecosystems and beach environments provide habitat for a broad range of species. These values must be maintained and protected from the potential impacts of climate change. To assist in achieving this the SCCG recommends the SMCMA consider the development and implementation of a framework and investment program that prioritises the necessary research and identification of risk management responses to build the resilience of coastal vegetation in the catchment to climate change. Documents that outline possible methodologies for achieving this include:

- *2004 – 2007 National Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan* (Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council 2004);
- *The National Climate Change Adaptation Framework* (The Council of Australian Governments 2006);
- *2007 -2008 NSW Biodiversity and Climate Change Adaptation Framework* (NSW Interagency Biodiversity and Climate Change Impacts and Adaptations Framework 2007); and
- *Implications of Climate Change for Australia's National Reserve System: A Preliminary Assessment* (Department of Climate Change 2008).

Conclusion

Both the SMCMA and DECCW are to be congratulated on the production of the GIS layers and explanatory reports. Outlined in this submission are a number of recommendations that aim to ensure the information contained in these documents is utilised to achieve the enhancement of native vegetation values in the catchment. The SCCG is happy to discuss with the SMCMA and DECCW the implementation of these recommendation, listed in full below, and the associated partnership and funding opportunities.

Recommendations

The SMCMA in partnership with DECCW produce a circular or guide as to how the information provided in the maps are to be applied when assessing the impacts of development applications on endangered ecological communities as defined by the TSC Act.

To assist in the provision of increased technical guidance, training and capacity building activities on the GIS layers and explanatory reports. The SMCMA and DECCW investigate opportunities to provide the following tool and activities.

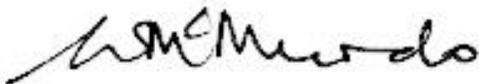
- **Case studies** that summarise how the information in the GIS layers and explanatory reports could or has been applied by councils in the catchment in their planning or decision making activities.
- **Workshops** that promote the production of the maps and offer planners and environment staff from across the catchment the opportunity to interrogate the maps and discuss with their peers' opportunities for their application.

To assist with the monitoring and evaluation of vegetation management actions in the catchment this and build on the information contained in the GIS Layers the SCCG recommends the SMCMA consider undertaking the following actions:

- Develop and implement a catchment wide Vegetation Quality Indicator that contributes to an overall assessment of progress towards maintaining or enhancing native vegetation in the region; and
- Develop and implement an approved framework for reporting key biodiversity assets (including but not limited to native vegetation) with the catchment.

I trust that the information provided in this letter will receive appropriate attention. If you wish to clarify any matter in this correspondence or require further information, please contact SCCG Senior Coastal Projects Officer, Craig Morrison on (02) 9246 7702 or craig@sydneycoastalcouncils.com.au.

Yours sincerely,



Clr. Wendy McMurdo
Chairperson

