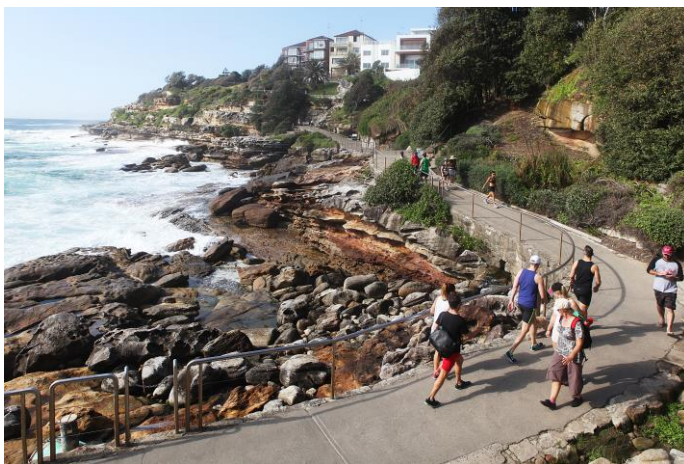




Sydney Coastal Councils Group

Resilient Coasts. Engaged Communities. Local Leadership. Regional Impact.



2014-15 ANNUAL REPORT

1989-2014
25 YEARS
SYDNEY COASTAL
COUNCILS GROUP
Caring for the Coast



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Sydney Coastal Councils Group Inc.

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From the Chair

At the end of my first year as Chairperson of the Sydney Coastal Councils Group, I am proud to report on the activities and achievements of the Group in 2014-15.

It has been a busy year for the Group. We completed two major projects and continued implementation of our largest ever grant-project – *Sydney's Salty Communities*. We also maintained a strong influence on government reviews and policy development relating to coastal management. Through the drafting of numerous policy submissions - including our key policy recommendations for parties contesting the 2015 State Election - participation in a number of government committees and working groups, and ongoing development of strong relationships with agency staff and elected representatives, we continued to provide a regional and cohesive voice representing the interests of Member Councils.

A highlight for the year was celebrating our 25th Anniversary. The event provided an opportunity to reflect upon our history and the achievements we have made over the last quarter century. What started as a coalition of concerned councillors and staff in 1989, now comprises 15 Councils, representing 1.4 million Sydneysiders. We are proud to be able to celebrate with our partners a cleaner coastal environment and a history of leadership in sustainable coastal management. This legacy forms the foundation upon which we will confront the challenges and opportunities that the future holds.

It is a privilege to be the Chairperson of an organisation that has a long and rich history of advancing sustainable coastal management. In this role I have come to appreciate that the strength of our organisation rests in its members and the collaborative framework under which they work together to advance shared interests. The SCCG is a non-partisan entity that promotes regional solutions to issues of regional significance. We approach challenges such as coastal hazards and biodiversity resilience without any party political bias or directives from minority interest groups. We share a common vision to advance integrated management of Sydney's unique urban coastal environment. In an environment of significant change and uncertainty for Local Government, this is a core strength of the Group and will ensure we remain resilient and adaptive to changing circumstances.

During the year, we reviewed and redeveloped our Strategic Plan with the assistance of a Directional Committee made up of elected and professional staff delegates from Member Councils, and external experts. Our new Plan, adopted in June 2015, sets the strategic direction of the Group over the next 4 years, allowing for annual evaluation and adjustments to ensure we are responsive and adaptive to change. The new Plan also introduces a new Vision for the Group, which encapsulates what we are collectively working towards:

Resilient Coasts. Engaged Communities. Local Leadership. Regional Impact.

I look forward to embedding this Vision in collaboration with our members over the years ahead.



Cr Geoff Stevenson
Chairperson

From the Executive Officer

It is a pleasure to present you with a review of the progress of the Sydney Coastal Councils Group in 2014-15. It has been a very exciting year for the Group.

A major highlight was celebrating our 25th Anniversary with a Conference and Gala Evening on 29 August 2014. The event provided a unique opportunity to reflect upon the coast, unite Member Councils and key partners, past and present, and promote engagement, dialogue, and visioning regarding future stewardship. There was clear recognition at the celebration that our organisation is indeed well placed as an experienced, sophisticated and effective organisation, eager and able to appropriately support, engage and service its Member Councils and the coastal communities they represent. This sentiment is reflected in the positive results we collected from our Annual Member Survey, with 97 per cent of respondents satisfied with our performance and over ninety per cent agreeing or strongly agreeing that membership conferred a wide range of benefits.

This Annual Report provides details of key performance highlights during the year and specific activities undertaken under our four new goals of Collaboration, Capacity Building, Advocacy and Research. In addition to our ongoing projects and providing direct support and representation of Member Councils, the Secretariat has focused on:

- Coordinating communications and interactions amongst Member Councils at all levels
- Identifying, securing and utilising substantial grant funding for various regional projects and programs, and
- Being an active advocate for the development of appropriate coastal policy and legislative initiatives and management responses.

I would like to thank all those who have assisted ensure the continued professional operation and successful outcomes of the Group during the year. Special thanks to delegates of the Full Group, Executive and Technical Committees for their contributions over the last 12 months in SCCG meetings and activities. Thanks also to our many project partners and funding agencies, whose continuing support and endorsement reflects the currency and importance of our work. A particular thanks to the SCCG Secretariat staff who have all made significant contributions to the Group and have ensured continuous improvements to the services provided to our Member Councils. Finally thanks to our host council, the City of Sydney, including the Lord Mayor, the CEO and other staff who have assisted with the operations of the Secretariat.

The year ahead will be an interesting year. It will be a year of change to Local Government and the release of numerous state reform programs including changes to the planning system and the NSW coastal management program. I am confident that the SCCG has a clear strategy and focus to address these issues. We will continue to improve our services to members, focusing on the implementation of our new Strategic Plan. Building the capacity of our members through the facilitation of new and existing projects, implementing new and improved communications and engagement with members, stakeholders and supporters, and providing comprehensive input to relevant reform programs.

With our long and successful history and a new strategic direction, we will continue to meet these challenges and advance the sustainable management of Sydney's urban coastal environment.



Geoff Withycombe
Executive Officer
Public Officer

About Us

Established in 1989, we are a co-operative organisation that advances sustainable management of Sydney's urban coastal environment. We comprise 15 Member Councils who represent over 1.4 million Sydneysiders. Collectively we cover an area of 1,794km² adjacent to Sydney's coastal and estuarine areas, encompassing the waterways of the Hawkesbury River, Broken Bay, Pittwater, Port Jackson, Middle and North Harbours, the lower Lane Cove River, Botany Bay, the lower Georges and Cooks Rivers and Port Hacking (Figure 1).

Our Vision is for Resilient Coasts, Engaged Communities, Local Leadership and Regional Impact. We work towards realising this Vision through four key activities – collaboration, capacity building, advocacy and research. Our activities build upon our 25 years' experience leading sustainable coastal management and our ability to harness the individual and collective knowledge of our Member Councils, a suite of technical and academic experts and other coastal stakeholders. Accordingly, we are able to provide unique insights drawing upon the technical, experiential and local knowledge of a range of practitioners in coastal management.



FIGURE 1: SYDNEY COASTAL COUNCILS GROUP MAP

Our Performance in 2014-2015

2014-15 was a year of reflection, consolidation and outcomes for the Group. Celebrating our 25th Anniversary in August 2014 provided a unique opportunity to reflect upon our achievements and consider how best to position ourselves for the future. This provided a useful and timely platform for the review and redevelopment of our Strategic Plan. As an outcome of the review, we renewed our Vision and Mission to succinctly articulate the core purpose of the Group:

Vision: *Resilient Coasts. Engaged Communities. Local Leadership. Regional Impact.*

Mission: *To lead sustainable management of the coast through collaboration, capacity building, advocacy and research.*

Key highlights for the year included:

- Completing and launching three major grant-funded projects (*Becoming Social, Piloting an Emergency Management Health Check for Local Government* and *Sydney Harbour Coastal Zone Management Plan Scoping Study*)
- Winning the State and National Local Government category in the 2014 Resilient Australia Awards for our project *Coastal Vulnerability to Multiple Inundation Sources*
- Winning Highly Commended in the Local Government category of the 2014 National Climate Adaptation Champions Awards for our project *Prioritising Coastal Adaptation Development Options for Local Government*
- Distributing some \$950,000 funding to 11 projects worth more than \$2 million under our Sydney's Salty Communities program (First Grant Round - Main round)
- Actively engaging with the NSW Government on the Stage 2 Coastal Reforms through meetings, workshops and committees
- Representing and advocating Member Councils' interests through the preparation of seven major submissions to Government reviews and announcements, including our key policy recommendations to political parties contesting the 2015 State Election.

Through these activities, the Group has continued to improve cooperation and coordination among Member Councils, their communities and many other stakeholders.

Scope and Structure of this Report


In our new Strategic Plan, we have distilled our activities into four key goals:

Collaboration	Facilitate cooperation between, and coordination of, actions by Member Councils and coastal stakeholders
Capacity Building	Develop and exchange knowledge and tools to support the role and build the capacity of Member Councils
Advocacy	Provide a regional and cohesive voice representing Member Councils
Research	Identify and address current and emerging regional coastal issues

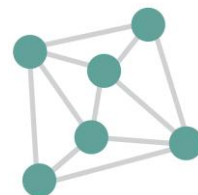
This distillation responds to feedback gathered through the review process, and simplifies our previous framework to achieve greater clarity in, and distinction between, our activities.

In this Annual Report we report our performance for 2014-2015 against these four goals. For each goal, we provide facts and figures, a summary of our performance and a case study of relevant work. This is followed by a summary of our 2014 Annual Survey results, a description of our team and organisational structure, and a reflection on 'Looking Ahead'.

Timeline of Highlights



24/07/14	Becoming Social Project Launch
01/08/14	Submission on Moorings Review
07/08/14	Technical Committee Meeting and Field Trip to Sydney Water Monitoring Services Laboratory
26/08/14	Adaptation Knowledge Sharing Breakfast
29/08/14	25 Year Anniversary Conference and Gala Evening
10/09/14	Coastal Reforms Preliminary Workshop with OEH
13/09/14	Full Group AGM and Field Trip to Little Bay Precinct
17/09/14	Emergency Management Forum
30/09/14	NCCARF Conference, Gold Coast
01/10/14	NCCARF Climate Adaptation Champions Awards (Highly Commended in Local Government Category)
07/10/14	Release of 'Guide to Monitoring and Evaluating Coastal Adaption' (2nd edition)
16/10/14	NSW Resilient Australia Awards (Local Government Category Winner)
22/10/14	Technical Committee Meeting and Field Trip to Foreshore Beach and Penrhyn Estuary
11/11/14	NSW Coastal Conference, Ulladulla
18/11/14	Submission on 10/50 Vegetation Clearing Code of Practice
24/11/14	National Resilient Australia Awards (Local Government Category Winner)
06/12/14	Full Group Meeting
15/12/14	Distribution of SCCG Inundation Exposure Assessment to Member Councils
16/12/14	Submission on Sydney Basin P/L Mineral Exploration Licence
01/01/15	Summerama 2015 (January)
04/02/15	Submission to Political Parties contesting the 2015 NSW Election
19/02/15	Technical Committee Meeting
14/03/15	Full Group Meeting
17/03/15	NCCARF Phase II Workshop (hosted by SCCG)
20/03/15	Political Party Response Report to 2015 NSW Election Submission
30/03/15	Submission on Commonwealth Marine Reserves Review
09/04/15	Submission on National Parks Establishment Process
09/04/15	Western Australian presentation / workshop - climate adaptation
23/05/15	Establishment of SCCG Coastal Reforms Advisory Committee
07/05/15	Technical Committee Meeting and Field Trip to North Sydney Council's Coal Loader Sustainability Centre
15/05/15	Engagement of CSIRO to develop Climate Ready tool
15/05/15	Submission on Review of Sydney Water's Sewage Treatment Environment Protection Licences
20/06/15	Full Group Meeting
24/06/15	Distribution of Main Round Salty Communities Grants
26/06/15	Completion of Salty Communities Literature Review
30/06/15	Launch workshop for the Sydney Harbour CZMP Scoping Study



GOAL 1: Collaboration

Facilitate cooperation between, and coordination of, actions by Member Councils and coastal stakeholders

Strategies

- 1.1 Ensure our governance structure continues to facilitate effective participation of Member Councils
- 1.2 Facilitate collaboration within and between Member Councils
- 1.3 Facilitate collaboration, dialogue and partnerships with coastal stakeholders, including government agencies
- 1.4 Facilitate information exchange and sharing with Member Councils, coastal stakeholders and the broader community
- 1.5 Promote community engagement in our activities
- 1.6 Provide efficient, effective and coordinated support to Member Councils

Facts and Figures

- Coordination of 13 guest presentations
- Coordination of 6 field trips
- Facilitation of 13 internal committees and groups
- Delivery of 48 internal committee meetings and events
- Representation on 14 external committees and groups
- Participation in 49 external committee meetings

Summary of Performance

Our quarterly **Full Group and Technical Committee meetings** continued to provide a valuable forum for networking and information exchange between Member Council delegates in 2014-15. Roundtable discussions enabled delegates to workshop key issues affecting their councils and share lessons learned. We also continued to arrange relevant and topical presentations and field trips from experts across government and stakeholder bodies. Throughout the year we coordinated 13 such guest presentations and six field trips, including a tour of the Sydney Water Monitoring Services Laboratory, guided walks of the Little Bay Precinct and Bondi Beach, and 'Behind the Scenes' tours of Sydney Sea Life Aquarium and Wild Life Sydney Zoo.

In addition to our core Committees, throughout the year we facilitated a further 13 **internal committees and working groups** to advance project-related and topical issues. These committees and working groups comprised Council representatives as well as technical experts from various research institutes, government agencies and other stakeholder organisations. In 2014-15, we coordinated 48 separate meetings and events associated with these groups. Bringing together Council practitioners with technical experts in this way, facilitates collaboration and dialogue to ensure our activities, as well as those conducted by Member Councils, are informed by the best available information, while cognisant of the practical realities of on-ground implementation for Member Councils.

Throughout the year, we also maintained participation in 14 **external committees and working groups**, including the Interagency Riparian Boundaries Working Group, the Sydney Regional Leadership Network (NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet) and the Towards Resilient Sydney Project partners group. In total, we attended 49 events and workshops associated with these committees. Our active participation in these groups ensures we sustain dialogue with a range of stakeholders and engage in collaborative initiatives across government, industry and community sectors.

Case Study | Collaboration

Our Technical Committee was highly active in 2014-15, attending a range of field trips, presentations and workshops coordinated by the Secretariat. These activities allow Council officers to engage with a wide range of field experts, policy-makers and practitioners and learn about the latest science and thinking behind coastal management issues. Activities included:

Field trips:

- *Tour of the Sydney Water Monitoring Services Laboratory* (August 2014)
- *Erosion and pest management at Foreshore Beach and Penrhyn Estuary*, led by Port Authority of NSW (October 2014)
- *Behind the Scenes Tours of Sydney Sea Life Aquarium and Wild Life Sydney Zoo* (December 2014)
- *The Coal Loader Platform Green-Roof* - David Banbury, North Sydney Council (May 2015)

Presentations:

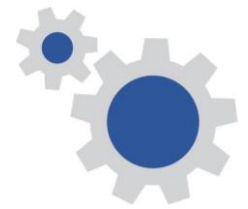
- *Sydney Water Monitoring Services Presentations and Field Sampling Demonstration* (August 2014)
- *Hydrographic Survey program*, Venessa O'Connell, Port Authority of NSW (October 2014)
- *The Marine Estate Reforms – Progress to Date and Future Work*, Graeme White, Fisheries NSW (December 2014)
- *The Past and Future of Marine Natural Resource Management*, Simon Rowe and Andy Myers, Oceanwatch (December 2014)
- *City of Sydney Energy Efficiency Master Plan*, Nik Midlam, City of Sydney (February 2015)
- *Restoring Sydney's missing underwater forests: Crayweed Restoration Project*, Dr Alexandra Campbell, UNSW (February 2015)
- *Review of Sydney Water sewage treatment EPLs* – Frank Garofalow, NSW EPA (May 2015)
- *Wastewater servicing in Sydney* – Iain Fairbairn, Sydney Water (May 2015)

Workshops:

- *How values science can influence attitudes and behaviours*, facilitated by Mark Chenery, co-founder, Common Cause (February 2015)
- *Future directions for urban water management*, with Sydney Water and the NSW EPA (May 2015)

In addition to these activities, Technical Committee meetings continued to provide a valuable forum for Council officers to get together, share updates and collaborate on issues of joint interest. The value of the meetings is reflected in the positive results recorded in our Annual Survey, with 94 per cent of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that 'they provide interesting and relevant information' and 100 per cent agreeing or strongly agreeing that 'they provide a forum for the individual needs of Council to be addressed'.





GOAL 2: Capacity Building

Develop and exchange knowledge and tools to support the role and build the capacity of Member Councils

Strategies

- 2.1 Provide accurate, timely and relevant information on sustainable coastal management
- 2.2 Build Member Council and stakeholder capacity to advance sustainable coastal management
- 2.3 Identify and secure external funding and support from Governments and other sources
- 2.4 Build Member Councils' capacity to engage with the Federal and State Governments and stakeholders to advance sustainable coastal management
- 2.5 Support Member Councils to engage with the community to advance sustainable coastal management

Facts and Figures

- Completion and launch of 2 major capacity building projects and associated resources
- Facilitation and/or participation in 22 workshops, seminars and professional development events
- Delivery of 6 formal presentations to external stakeholders
- Production of 4 print newsletters and monthly updates on coastal news and policy
- Support for Councils in the coordination of 60+ community engagement activities
- Increase in website activity of 14 per cent on 2013-14 results, with 13,851 individual visits

Summary of Performance

In 2014-15 we completed and launched **two major capacity-building projects** – *Becoming Social* and *Emergency Management Planning: Piloting a Health Check for Local Government*. *Becoming Social* provides tools and resources to increase Councils' understanding and use of social media as a relationship and policy development tool to engage, consult and educate coastal communities in relation to local and regional coastal environmental issues. The project produced a comprehensive survey on social media use in Local Government, a Literature Review and Report and an online platform to guide Councils through social media project development. Outputs from the project were launched at an interactive forum and workshop on 24 July 2014.



Our *Emergency Management Planning* project aims to improve the emergency management capability of Local Government for harm minimisation in response to natural hazards. A key output from the project was a 'Health Check' tool that allows a Council to review their performance in emergency management and

identify opportunities for improved outcomes, with reporting functions for ease of communication. The project outcomes were launched at an interactive forum on 17 September 2014, which featured a Panel Discussion with Mr Phil Koperberg AO BEM AFSM and other local and state government and industry representatives.

Throughout the year we also made substantial progress on our largest ever grant-funded project – *Sydney's Salty Communities – Turning the Tide on Blue-Green Carbon*. This is a 3-year research, capacity-building and on-ground rehabilitation program focusing on biodiversity and carbon storage in 'salt-influenced ecosystems' across Sydney's coastal environments and urban waterways. In 2014-15 we distributed some \$950,000 in grant funding to support 11 on-ground projects worth more than \$2 million. We also completed a comprehensive Literature Review and contracted the CSIRO to develop a 'climate-ready tool' to help Councils explore the consequences of climate change for their ecological management over the long term and scope near-term actions to start addressing those challenges. The project will continue in 2015-16 with a supplementary grant round, ongoing on-ground works and other research, capacity building and engagement activities.



In addition to these larger project outcomes, we facilitated a number of other **capacity-building events** for Member Councils and other stakeholders, including an Adaptation Knowledge Sharing Breakfast for Local Government and industry practitioners, a joint workshop with the National Climate Change Adaptation Research Facility (NCCARF) on their Stage II funding program and a forum with the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH) on the NSW Coastal Reforms.

Case Study | Capacity Building

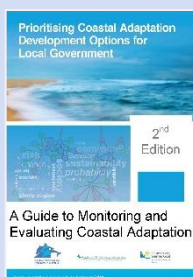
In 2014, we partnered with researchers from the University of the Sunshine Coast (USC) and five coastal Councils (Bega Valley, Leichhardt, Rockdale, Sunshine Coast and Sutherland) to trial our 2012 capacity building resource *A Guide to Monitoring and Evaluating Coastal Adaptation*. The trial sought to evaluate the utility of the Guide and the templates therein and identify opportunities to enhance it based on Councils' experience.

The trial comprised two half day workshops, building on a range of preparatory work completed by Councils ahead of each workshop. The first workshop focused on evaluating the efficacy and feasibility of Councils' adaptation plans / strategies and the second workshop focused on monitoring and evaluating the outcomes of those plans / strategies. Participating Councils were requested to complete the templates contained in the Guide ahead of each Workshop and provide feedback on their experience doing so.

The Workshops were jointly facilitated by the SCCG and researchers from USC. Workshop sessions were highly interactive, with participating Councils encouraged to share experiences and results from using the templates. As an outcome of the trial and thanks to the contributions of the Councils that participated, we developed a second edition of the Guide, which is available **online**. The revised Guide provides a solid framework for Councils to monitor and evaluate the climate change adaptation strategies and practices of Local Government in coastal areas.

Local Government is at the forefront of adaptation to climate change. As Councils continue to develop adaptation plans and related strategies, there is a need for guidance to promote consistency and best practice across the sector. Through projects such as this we help to deliver the tools and support needed by Councils to achieve that.

For more information, visit the project page:
www.sydneycostalcouncils.com.au/Projects/prioritising_coastal_adaptation



We continued to build Member Council and stakeholder capacity through **regular updates and analysis** of coastal-related news and policy in our quarterly newsletters and monthly updates. These bulletins include upcoming grant opportunities for Councils and other stakeholders, which complement our annual **Funding Guide**. The 2015 Guide included more than 60 funding programs as well as award opportunities for Councils and other organisations to present their achievements.

We also supported Member Councils to **engage with the community**, through coordination of our annual summer activities program, *Summerama*. Run through the month of January, *Summerama* aims to enhance community awareness of sustainable coastal and estuarine management through the coordination of family-oriented, engaging and informative activities. The 2015 program saw over 6,000 participants attend more than 60 activities across 12 participating Member Councils. In addition to *Summerama*, we continued to support the *Walking Coastal Sydney* and *Underwater Sydney* programs. These online programs provide the community with freely-available information on walking tracks along Sydney's coastline and the array of marine life found in Sydney's harbour and estuaries.



GOAL 3: Advocacy

Provide a regional and cohesive voice representing Member Councils

Strategies

- 3.1 Strengthen SCCG participation and influence in the development and review of Government policy, legislation, activities and programs
- 3.2 Present and raise the profile of Member Council interests at appropriate forums
- 3.3 Raise awareness of regional coastal issues in the media

Facts and Figures

- Research and preparation of 7 major Submissions
- Preparation of 31 letters to Government Ministers and Executive Staff
- Representation on 16 external committees and working groups

Summary of Performance

In 2014-15 we engaged in a number of **policy and legislative review processes** to advocate for sustainable and integrated coastal management on behalf of our 15 Member Councils. Our advocacy took three main forms:

- formal submissions to government reviews and policies
- participation in relevant external committees and/or advisory bodies, and
- direct correspondence to elected representatives.

Formal submissions are a core focus of our advocacy efforts. In 2014-15 we prepared seven major submissions to government reviews and policies on important issues such as bushfire hazard reduction, Commonwealth marine reserves and the licensing of sewage treatment plants. In preparing our submissions we extensively research the context and history behind the issue, seek advice and input from subject-matter experts and consult with each of our 15 Member Councils. We endeavour to maintain a regional, nonpartisan and long-term perspective on matters affecting our urban coastal environment.

Through the year we also maintained **representation on a number of committees and advisory groups**, including the 'Towards a Resilient Sydney' Project Partners Group, the Coastal Node of the NSW Adaptation Research Hub and the National Coastal Advocacy Alliance. We also formed an internal 'Coastal Reforms Advisory Committee', with representation from strategic planners, engineers, scientists and environmental officers across our 15 Member Councils. The Committee provides a forum for discussion, policy formulation and strategic direction in relation to the NSW coastal reforms and helps to advance a regional approach to sustainable coastal management through joint submissions and representations.

In addition to these activities, we regularly advocate Member Councils' interests through **formal correspondence** with Government Ministers and Executives. Over the year, we sent 31 letters to relevant Ministers, Executives and party representatives on issues such as risk-to-life from flash flooding, the NSW Coastal Reforms, coastal inundation and the NSW Shark Meshing Program. This correspondence ensures the interests and concerns of our Member Councils are formally registered with relevant agencies. We also

maintain positive relationships with agency staff across various departments and regularly call upon these relationships to address the concerns of Member Councils.

These activities enable us to maintain influence over the development and review of Government policy, legislation, activities and programs, while raising the profile of Member Council interests.

Case Study | Advocacy

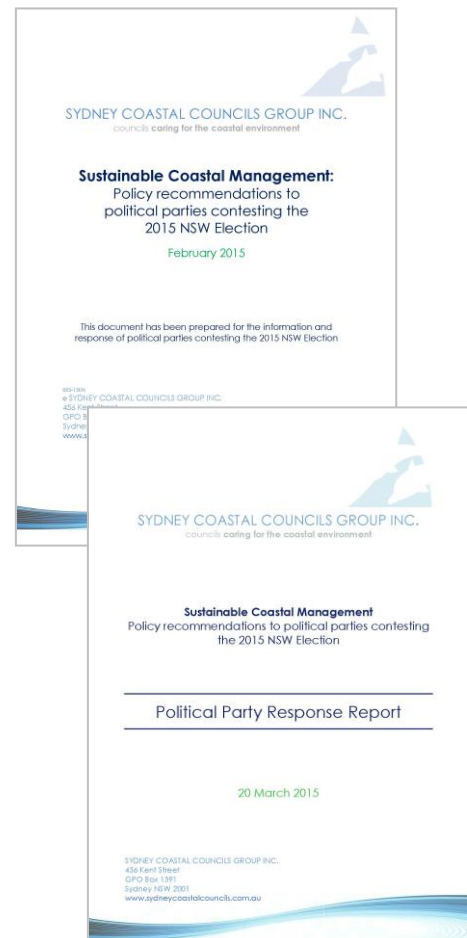
One of our major submissions for the year was our '**Key Policy Recommendations on Sustainable Coastal Management**', which we sent to all registered political parties ahead of the 2015 NSW Election. The policy recommendations encapsulate key activities that we believe would contribute significantly to the sustainable management of the NSW coast in the immediate future. They include:

- Adaptive, integrated and participatory management of the coastal zone
- An independent coastal advisory body for NSW
- A NSW Strategy and Action Plan for climate change adaptation in the coastal zone
- A review of, and significant increase in, funding for coastal programs
- A strategy for Integrated Water Management throughout the Greater Sydney region, with a particular focus on infrastructure renewal
- Maintenance of public access and public ownership in the coastal zone
- Improved planning controls to restore, protect and enhance coastal biodiversity
- A strategy and supporting implementation programs for sustainable marine management

The purpose of the submission was twofold - to succinctly communicate our position in relation to major coastal management issues, including specific recommendations on how they should be advanced, and to elicit responses from political parties contesting the election on those recommendations.

Responses to the submission were very strong, with **formal responses received** from the Liberal Party, the Labor Party, The Greens, the Christian Democratic Party and the Australian Democrats. Those responses provide a benchmark for future coastal advocacy activities and we will monitor and evaluate the Government's performance against our recommendations.

To view the Submission and Responses report, visit:
<http://www.sydneycoastalcouncils.com.au/submissions>



GOAL 4: Research



Identify and address current and emerging regional coastal issues

Strategies

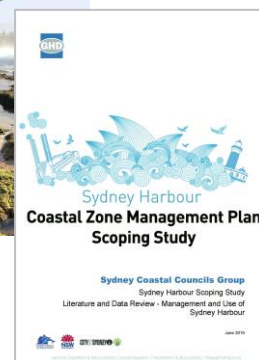
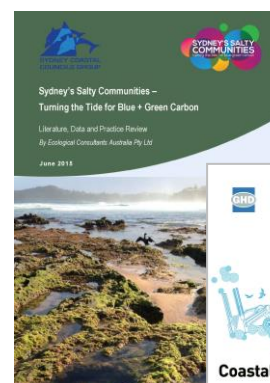
- 4.1 Identify current and emerging priority issues
- 4.2 Promote and distribute relevant research outcomes to inform best-practice management
- 4.3 Enhance the research capacity of the Secretariat and Member Councils
- 4.4 Engage with and drive strategic partnerships between researchers and policy makers

Facts and Figures

- Completion of 2 major Literature Reviews
- Recognition – SCCG bestowed with 3 prestigious awards
- Representation on 3 nation-wide research networks
- Coordination of 13 guest presentations

Summary of Performance

We embed a strong research element in all of our projects to ensure our work is evidence-based and robust. In 2014-15 we completed **two major Literature Reviews** – one on the integrated management of Sydney Harbour for our project *Sydney Harbour Coastal Zone Management Plan Scoping Study* and another on biodiversity and carbon storage in 'salt-influenced ecosystems' for our project *Sydney's Salty Communities – Turning the tide on blue-green carbon*. We also produced a comprehensive report on emergency management as part of our project *Emergency Management Planning: Piloting a Health Check for Local Government*.



In 2014, we were awarded three **prestigious awards for our research projects** – the Resilient Australia Awards for our hazard-mapping project *Coastal Vulnerability to Multiple Inundation Sources* (State and National Local Government category winner), and the NCCARF National Climate Adaptation Champions Awards for our decision-support project *Prioritising Coastal Adaptation Development Options for Local Government* (Highly Commended in the Local Government category). These awards are testament to the quality, relevance and originality of our research projects.



Through the year, we maintained engagement with our **network of researchers and experts**. We were active in helping to set up and secure ongoing political support for the National Climate Change Adaptation Research Facility (NCCARF) Phase II. We were represented at the inaugural National Phase II

scoping workshop in December 2014 and hosted a subsequent workshop with Member Councils in March 2015 on the development of a Coastal Climate Risk Management Tool. More recently, we accepted invitations to be represented on the advisory committees of two NCCARF research networks – the Settlements and Infrastructure network and the Social, Economic and Institutional Dimensions network, and we continued to participate in the Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) for Low Carbon Living (UNSW).

We also engaged our research contacts to deliver **educational presentations** to Member Councils. In 2014-15 we coordinated 13 presentations to our Full Group and Technical Committee delegates, including for example, the UNSW Crayweed Restoration Project, the Hydrographic Survey work of the Port Authority of NSW, the work of Oceanwatch in leading marine Natural Resource Management (NRM), and the NSW Shark Meshing Program. These presentations provide an opportunity for two-way engagement, where experts inform Member Councils of emerging research and thinking, and Member Councils inform experts of some of the practical issues around on-ground implementation.

Case Study | Research

In 2014 the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage undertook a Coastal Inundation Exposure Assessment of the Sydney region based on hydrodynamic modelling that was carried out as part of our 2010 project *Mapping and Responding to Coastal Inundation* by CSIRO Marine and Atmospheric Research. The assessment built upon our model by identifying the scale and extent of infrastructure exposed to storm surge and sea level rise at the LGA scale.

The Report investigates exposure to coastal inundation in the SCCG region for 1-year and 100-year inundation water levels, under present sea level conditions and for future sea level rise scenarios of 40 cm and 90 cm. The Report concludes that the total number of properties in the SCCG region that are predicted to be exposed to coastal inundation are:

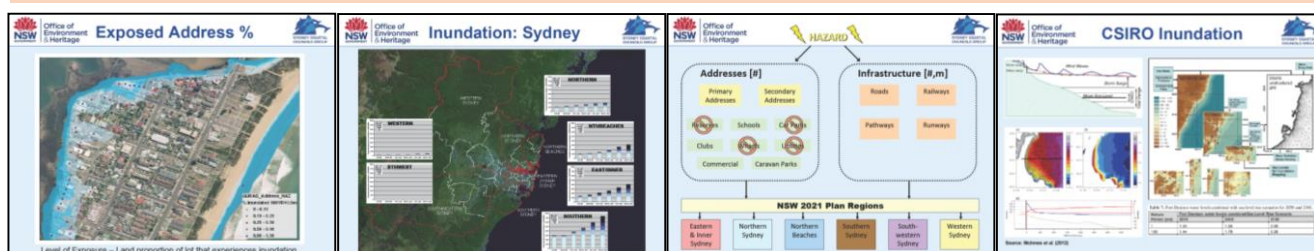
Sea level	1 year ARI	100 year ARI
Present	4,134	4519
+40 cm	5,739	7,189
+ 90cm	9,720	11,993

NB: Total property exposure to coastal inundation within the SCCG accounts for about 70% of total exposure within the Greater Sydney region, while the proportion of property lot inundation breakdown was comparable in both regions.

The findings suggest that a 90 cm sea level rise may exceed an important threshold for exposure to coastal inundation in Sydney, in that the number of properties predicted to experience >50% proportion-of-lot inundation increased steeply, as did lengths of exposed utilities, roads (including arterial roads), and the runway at Sydney (Kingsford Smith) Airport.

While modelling limitations mean that the results are not fit for assessment of potential impacts to individual properties, the approach is sufficiently detailed to consider the magnitude and distribution of exposure to coastal inundation at the LGA scale. This information greatly assists Member Councils to quantify the scale of immediate and potential future exposure to coastal inundation.

By driving research such as this, we continue to assist our Member Councils address the challenges of coastal hazards now and into the future.



Annual Members Survey

In addition to the quantum of our outputs and activities, an important measure of our success is our Annual Members Survey. The Annual Survey provides an opportunity for Full Group delegates and Technical Committee representatives to evaluate our performance and identify the continuing and future needs of Member Councils. The results are used to identify strengths and weaknesses in our performance, guide activities and assess where improvements can be made.

Results from our 2014 Survey were consistently positive. Along the continuum of agreement (from strongly disagree to strongly agree), 97% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they were satisfied with our performance. Summating results for all 39 rating-style questions (1,065 separate responses), 87% percent of questions received a positive response, 11% received a neutral response and only 2% disagreed with the propositions.

Snapshot of results:

- 97% of respondents were satisfied with our **overall performance**
- 88% agreed or strongly agreed that we performed well against our **Strategic Plan**
- 88% agreed or strongly agreed that we **communicate** well
- 69% agreed or strongly agreed that **projects and capacity building activities** were relevant to Council
- 82% agreed or strongly agreed that **meetings** were conducted well
- 91% agreed or strongly agreed that **membership** conferred a range of benefits.

This feedback enables us to tailor the delivery of services to Member Councils, focusing on areas which have been identified as priorities or which score lower on our satisfaction scale. The results also contribute to our baseline data against which future performance can be judged and which will enable the identification of any changes in needs and priorities.

The most significant conclusion drawn from the 2014 results is that both the Full Group and Technical Committee retain an overwhelmingly positive attitude towards our performance, though we recognise room for improvement, and will continually reflect upon the results and advance opportunities for continuous improvement over the year ahead.

Financial Performance

The Group maintained a good financial position in 2014-15. NB: The figures outlined below are subject to audit (currently underway):

○ Total Income:	\$1,361,659
○ Total Assets:	\$ 830,985
○ Total Expenditure:	\$ 1,121,275
○ Total Liabilities:	\$ 119,482
○ Total Equity	\$ 649,147

In addition to utilising \$389,820 in membership contributions for operational and internal expenditure, throughout the year the Group has sought, secured and utilised the following external funding:

- sought \$530,500 via funding and sponsorship applications
- secured \$157,500 in grant and sponsorship funds
- utilised \$672,979 in grant and sponsorship funds
- completed grant projects worth \$319,500.

Our Team

The strength of our Group rests in the shared expertise that Member Councils, through both their elected representatives and technical staff, bring to the organisation and the capacity of our Secretariat to facilitate that collaboration.

Our **Full Group Committee** provides a forum for Councillors to share information and direct the core activities of the Group. Our **Technical Committee** provides a forum for Council staff to exchange information, collaborate on current and emerging needs and develop regional projects and programs. We also have an **Executive Committee** that directs the operational matters of the Group. Executive Committee members in 2014-15 are shown below.



Chairperson
Cr. Geoff Stevenson
Randwick Council



Vice Chairperson
(Ocean)
Cr. Cathy Griffin
Manly Council



Vice Chairperson
(Estuarine)
Cr. Lynne Saville
Willoughby Council



Treasurer
(Honorary)
Cr. Peter Towell
Sutherland Council



Secretary
(Honorary)
Cr. Leon Goltsman
Waverley Council



Member
Cr. Irene Doutney
City of Sydney Council



Member
Cr. Greg Levenston
Woollahra Council



Member
Cr. Selena Griffith
Pittwater Council

Our Secretariat facilitates the operation of these Committees and manages the day-to-day work of the Group. Secretariat staff for the period 2014-15 are listed below.

- Geoff Withycombe | Executive Officer
- Stephen Summerhayes | Manager Projects and Programs (to April 2015)
- Belinda Atkins | Manager Projects and Programs (from June 2015)
- Emma Norrie | Coastal Projects Officer
- Fiona Shadbolt | Program Manager - Biodiversity Resilience (grant funded)

The Secretariat is also supported by a part-time Support Officer, who assists with the operational and administrative matters of the Group. Special thanks to Rachael Buzio and Shab Lane for their contributions in the role, and a warm welcome to Antonina Pilat, who assumed the position in June 2015.

Looking Ahead

With major reforms ongoing for coastal management, the planning system and Local Government, we are facing an uncertain environment. At the same time, there is growing consensus on the risks facing coastal areas and the need for a coordinated and adaptive response. In such an environment, our services are increasingly relevant for members and our regional collaborative model sets an example for other coastal communities around the country and internationally. So while we ready ourselves for potential change, we will continue to focus on improving the services and guidance that we provide to our members.

In addition to the various government reforms underway there are some existing and new challenges ahead for our members, including:

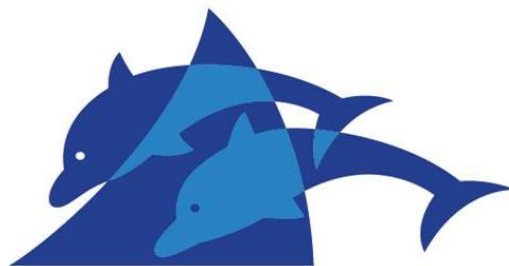
- Pressures of population growth and associated development - on our already stressed natural resources, infrastructure and service systems
- Need for better integration across, between and within governments in relation to coastal policy, management practices and resourcing
- Threats of climate change and the increasing dynamic nature of the coastal zone
- Increasing complexity of coastal management issues
- Ever growing demands for appropriate and long term resourcing
- Expectations of our coastal communities for a clean, sustainable, accessible and profitable coastal zone
- Requirements for capacity building and training to meet these challenges, and
- Taking every opportunity to further utilise new technologies as they emerge.

It is critical that our response to these developments builds on our institutional memory and lessons learned, while harnessing innovations in technology and management practices.

Over the year ahead, we will implement the goals, strategies and actions outlined in our new Strategic Plan. We will also develop new and improved operational systems, communications and financial management arrangements, to ensure the Group continues to operate efficiently and effectively. We will take a renewed focus on ensuring that our activities have real and practical utility for our members, and we will continue to create opportunities for productive interaction between researchers, policy-makers and on-ground practitioners.

Our strengths lie in our collaborative approach, our non-partisan standing and our partnerships. We will build on these strengths and look for new opportunities to harness the collective knowledge and skills of our members and many partners into the future. With our long and successful history and a new Strategic Plan, we are well-positioned for the years ahead.





SYDNEY COASTAL COUNCILS GROUP

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