




SYDNEY COASTAL  
COUNCILS GROUP



# SCCG Position Statement

## 2023 NSW State Elections

Sydney Coastal Councils Group Inc.

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# Introduction

The Sydney Coastal Councils Group (SCCG) is a Regional Organisation of Councils representing nine councils in the Sydney coastal region. It seeks to lead sustainable management of the coast through collaboration, capacity building, advocacy and research.

More than 85% of Australians live within 50 kilometres of the coast and the coastal population continues to grow, placing increasing pressures on natural values. The sustainable management of the NSW coast now and in the future, requires coordinated action through a whole of government approach.

With ongoing increases in population, development, commercial, and recreational pressures facing the NSW coastal zone there is an urgent need to increase the role of the NSW Government in providing leadership, guidance and support for sustainable coastal management. This includes providing Ministerial consistency to address these pressures.

The SCCG's vision is for resilient and healthy coastal and estuarine environments that are protected, conserved and managed in alignment with the principles of ecologically sustainable development.

The upcoming State Election presents an opportune time for political parties to review and reaffirm their commitment to sustainably manage our coast. As such, we have formulated key policy positions and associated recommendations that we believe are critical to ensure the SCCG and its member Councils can continue their important role in the management of beloved coastal and estuarine environments. These key coastal management issues are:

1. Establish a whole of government approach to climate change impacts, including coastal erosion, recession and sea level rise.
2. Provide greater support to the delivery of Coastal Management Programs which are critical to the ensure the long-term sustainability of our coasts and estuaries.
3. Formalise a catchment approach for our estuaries to ensure the threats to these highly valued areas are more effectively and efficiently managed now and into the future.
4. Breakdown barriers to sand nourishment by addressing the significant impediments to Councils who are responsible for our beloved beaches.
5. Establish a marine park for Sydney to improve the protection for marine biodiversity, ensure resilience in a changing climate, and better realise the tourism potential of marine sanctuaries



# 1. Establish a whole of government approach to climate change impacts

Sea level rise, increasing numbers of storms and their impacts, and other factors leading to coastal erosion, threaten the current framework of coastal management in Australia. The NSW State Government says there is a direct relationship between climate change and sea levels, which in NSW are expected to rise up to 2.3 metres by 2100 and 5.5 metres by 2150 [1]. This would impact infrastructure such as major roads and schools, homes as well as estuaries and the beaches themselves across Sydney.

Councils use the advice of experts and stakeholders in deciding whether to defend or retreat in parts of coastal Sydney and no government benchmarks exist to guide them. They are also forced to navigate a maze of legislation across multiple government agencies while the NSW State Government provides relatively little financial and expert support to Councils in general.

We therefore need the State Government to clear up uncertainties in the coastal management framework, including relevant state legislation, to resolve long term issues for Councils such as management of hotspot areas, funding, works on Crown Land and more specific development consent conditions so that Councils can deal with the threat of sea level rise and coastal erosion across Sydney - and in fact across coastal NSW.

**Establish a whole of government approach to coastal erosion, recession and the impact of climate change including sea level rise, recognising the serious challenges developing in coastal management.**

We urge the State Government to provide: a set of consistent reference benchmarks for all aspects of potential climate change interventions; clear legislative guidelines for effective and practical solutions; financial support for councils dealing with these issues; and create certainty for them and residents in line with the objectives of the *Coastal Management Act 2016*.

[1] <https://www.climatechange.environment.nsw.gov.au/sea-level-rise>



## 2. Provide greater support to the delivery of CMPs

Coastal Management Programs (CMP) provide a tremendous opportunity for Councils to set the long-term strategy for the coordinated management of the coast in accordance with the objectives in the *NSW Coastal Management Act 2016* (CM Act) and the aspirations of their community. Once a CMP is certified they provide much needed funding for Councils to deliver actions as well as provide important statutory protections all of which are critical in a changing climate.

Currently, the SCCG and its member Councils are either involved or developing six CMPs across the Sydney region – the Greater Sydney Harbour CMP, Eastern Beaches CMP, Hawkesbury-Nepean CMP, Cooks River CMP, the Georges River CMP, and the Bate Bay CMP. However, the date for completion of any of these CMPs is unknown at this stage mainly due to a lack of certainty over funding. For the Greater Sydney Harbour CMP for example, it took the SCCG three years just to get all 21 Councils to commit and then enable a Coastal and Estuaries Grant to be applied for (the grant is a 2:1 funding model). It should be noted that this was only enough funding for one of the five stages of the CMP.

Increases in funding and commitment by State Government agencies is needed to enable Councils and Regional Organisations of Councils to expedite the delivery of Coastal Management Programs so that there can be a certified and funded program of works established to manage our coasts and estuaries in the face of a changing climate.

Also, all CMPs have suffered from a lack of willingness by State Government agencies to commit to partnering on the CMP. This is despite s.23 of the CM Act making it a mandatory obligation to do so. Only one of the CMPs has been successful in obtaining additional funding from a State Government agency (Sydney Water) to develop the CMP. The project management fee of 20% for multi-Council CMPs is also not enough to cover the true costs of managing a complex project across many Councils.

If the state is truly committed to assisting Councils respond to the myriad of threats to our estuaries and coasts in the face of a dramatic changing climate, then there needs to be an injection of resources to support the expedited delivery of CMPs, increases to funding to provide adequate administrative support to ensure delivery of CMPs and a whole of government approach to their development and implementation.





### 3. Formalise a catchment approach for our estuaries

There are a myriad of threats to our estuarine environments that cannot be adequately addressed by individual Councils acting alone. These threats include marine litter, stormwater discharge, sewage overflows and poor planning decisions and developments in the catchments. A holistic approach is needed to tackle these threats through a catchment management approach where there is collaboration and integrated planning and coordination of land, water and biodiversity management.

To improve waterway health in Greater Sydney Harbour, the SCCG is project managing a whole of catchment Coastal Management Program (CMP) under the *Coastal Management Act 2016*. Although the CMP now involves 20 Councils in the catchment and various State Government agencies, it has been an extremely challenging project given the CM Act does not formally recognize catchments or the role of Regional Organisations of Councils such as the SCCG who are critical to the delivery of multi-Council CMPs. No one Council is likely to take on the leadership role of developing a multi-Council CMP. It is therefore left to Regional Organisations of Councils, who have a fragile membership base, to nominate themselves to develop a CMP.

To tackle the increasing threats to our estuaries, formal catchment entities are needed to deliver coordinated catchment-based approaches to their management. These entities need to be adequately resourced and endorsed by the State Government whilst supporting Councils to meet community aspirations for waterway health.

The threats to our beloved estuaries of Sydney Harbour and Botany Bay are only likely to be exacerbated by climate change, population growth and aging stormwater and sewer infrastructure. Yet our communities are urging for the establishment of more local swim sites and other areas to recreate as our climate gets hotter. To meet community aspirations for improving waterway health outcomes, we urge the State Government to formalize catchment entities which will greatly assist with the delivery of catchment wide CMPs. Sydney Harbour is of national and international significance and deserves its own manager to ensure its long-term future is sustained.



## 4. Breakdown barriers to sand nourishment for Councils.

Local Government councils are responsible for the maintenance of coastal and estuarine beaches within their local government areas (LGA). These highly valued assets are subject to periodic and/or ongoing erosion due to changes in ocean and atmospheric conditions including large ocean swell, ocean tides and currents, storms and strong winds. Many of Sydney's beaches need regular sand nourishment and it only takes one or two storms with strong sea swells for sections to be washed away. Extremes in these conditions are exacerbated by climate change and associated sea level rise and coastal development has often impeded natural processes to restore equilibrium in shoreline profiles. Dredging can also modify natural conditions and interfere with ocean and estuarine currents and the movement of sand on and off beaches.

The value of Sydney's beaches extending beyond LGA boundaries has been well-documented. Arguably, the resultant challenges and responsibilities faced by councils in maintaining public access and beach amenity go beyond their jurisdiction. Large volumes of sand generally need to be sourced on an ongoing basis and are costly in terms of logistics and resourcing to procure.

There are a variety of sources of sand including land-based or from within the sediment compartment. Our Councils have tried to access sand from road tunnelling projects but have hit barriers with State Government. There are also large sources of sand offshore but these are too costly for individual Councils to obtain and approvals processes are complex and onerous. Currently, there is a stalemate with no exploration licence being granted to access off-shore sand and significant barriers being placed on tunnel sand sources.

Establish a whole of government approach to breakdown the significant impediments to Councils who play a critical role in maintaining our beloved beaches. State Government needs to expedite the process for which sand can be accessed, create a more standardized way of approaching sand management and establish more equitable cost-sharing arrangements between Councils and the State Government.

We urge the State Government to recognize the limitations of councils to respond to the ongoing challenges of maintaining public access and beach amenity for Sydney's iconic coastal and estuarine beaches. The opportunities for making sand available for councils need proper planning and lead times to identify sand sources, investigate the feasibility and costs of processing and stockpiling, undertake approvals processes and align the availability of sand with the intermittent and ongoing needs of councils for beach nourishment. Agencies also need to work better together to find long term solutions to protect beaches and ensure sand replenishment is longer lasting.





## 5. Create a Sydney Marine Park

In 2012, an independent scientific audit into marine parks in NSW [2] identified a conservation gap in the Hawkesbury Shelf marine bioregion which encompasses the Sydney region. The current NSW Government committed to enhancing the protection of marine biodiversity in this gap and proposed a Sydney marine park in consultation with the NSW community. The consultation period closed in 2018 yet no decision has been made.

The SCCG strongly supports the establishment of more marine sanctuaries in the Sydney region and a strengthening of those already existing. It also advocates for the planning of this network to be done in accordance with our International obligations which require us to adopt comprehensiveness, adequacy and representativeness (CAR) principles. The International Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) has recommended 10% of each country's marine ecological regions (i.e. habitat types) be conserved in marine protected areas, whilst recommendations in the scientific literature generally fall in the range of 20% to 40% of the ocean's environment in no-take areas. Planning for a marine park network should also involve a proactive approach in engaging stakeholders from the outset, so that stakeholder concerns are considered and there is strong stakeholder support from the initial planning stages.

The Commonwealth has recently proposed to *"protecting 30% of our waters by 2030 at least"* [3]. Expanding our marine sanctuaries is critical for species protection in a changing climate. The resilience of our marine life is critical if we are to continue to see the ecological, social and economic benefits it provides.

A marine park in the Sydney region will improve the protection for marine biodiversity, ensure resilience in a changing climate and better realise the tourism potential of marine sanctuaries.

Of the marine protected areas that currently exist in the Sydney region, they are small and the rules allow extraction of marine life. Those that do prohibit fishing however, have been shown to have extensive marine biodiversity in comparison to areas of similar habitats. More resourcing is also needed for compliance related to recreational fishing and the illegal taking of marine/intertidal species within intertidal protected areas and existing aquatic reserves. Unfortunately, these sanctuaries are at risk of being 'loved to death' as they are one of the few places for people to snorkel close to the shore and see an abundance of sea life. It is also disheartening that no management plan has ever been finalised for these marine protected areas in the Sydney region leading to a lack of oversight and coordinated management for their long-term future.

[2] Report of the Independent Scientific Audit of Marine Parks in New South Wales

[3] Coalition government did 'nothing' to turn environment around: Plibersek - NT News

