

The Coast as seen from the East

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Frustration and aspirations are common feelings of coastal managers and planners. We are forever hopeful that better solutions will be found to problems created by the “tyrannies of vastness, history and small decisions”. Australia, like most western societies, has pockets of coastline under intense pressure from population growth, and past practices involving sub-divisions, drainage, rock revetments, land clearing etc. All require attention as we struggle to protect environmental values that we cherish about *our* coast. Yet conflicts and tensions persist. Within bureaucracies, community groups, scientists, politicians and commercial interests there exist a plethora of values all seeking to influence decision-makers, including appeal tribunals. Whilst these differences might prevent what would otherwise be a dull conforming society from emerging, they still create a need for clear policy, legislative and administrative frameworks to overcome the sectoralism, influence-peddling, ad hoc systems which have existed in CZM in Australia and elsewhere for many decades.

CZM reform is underway in most western societies. It is driven by the need to understand the values of natural coastal ecosystems and landscapes. Concepts such as “sand rights” and wetland protection have emerged signifying a penchant for retaining or enhancing those characteristics of the coast which underpin its beauty and function. *Global Change science* is helping to drive this improved understanding as our knowledge-base is shown to be sadly deficient when faced with uncertainties of changes to climate, ocean currents and sea level. The introduction of principles of *sustainability* (or ESD as we prefer to call it in Australia), provides a much needed paradigm to confront the conflicting pressures of environmentalism and developmentalism. The search for “common ground” between these extremes is vital if a dynamic, vibrant economy and a stable society is to coexist with a biodiverse, healthy and aesthetically pleasing environment. Reaching more integrated decisions, as argued by many who wave the banner of *ICZM*, is another facet of the reform process. *ICZM* runs in conflict to the traditional model of public administration based on sectoral responsibilities of discrete agencies like DPI, CALM, EPA, etc. Yet nature knows no such divisions. Coordinating, harmonising or integrating entities like Coastal Councils are faced with the challenge to bring such divisions together in order to achieve outcomes which are acceptable to decision-makers and the community. Finally, the increasing yet often divisive *role of community groups* is another driver in CZM reforms. Participation in the political process is only one aspect of community activity. The on-ground works and capacity building achieved by Coastcare, and support for local and regional planning in partnership with government (eg Southern Shores Management Group) are other significant manifestations of community involvement in CZM. Despite cases of overload and other frustrations, the aspirations of many in the community to continue to “make a difference” to *their coast* will continue.

The NSW experience in CZM over the past decade provides many lessons to other states both in terms of problems solved and not solved. Bipartisan support has been critical at a political level in the evolution of coastal policy and in securing a role for an advisory Coastal Council which has the confidence of key stakeholders. The 1997 Coastal Policy grew out of reforms initiated by a previous government. The Policy and supporting legislation is based on ESD principles. In the words of the

Premier and the Minister for Urban Affairs and Planning in the Foreword to the Policy:

“The objective of the policy is to protect and conserve the coast for *future generations.*”

This focus on future amenity and other values is critical as it can assist in focussing planning and management decisions beyond the demands of those seeking instant answers and satisfactions. The Coastal Policy contains 9 goals all of which have the same value. They are:

1. Protecting, rehabilitating and improving the natural environment of the coastal zone.
2. Recognising and accommodating the natural processes of the coastal zone.
3. Protecting and enhancing the aesthetic qualities of the coastal zone.
4. Protecting and conserving the cultural heritage of the coastal zone.
5. Providing for ecologically sustainable development and use of resources.
6. Providing for ecologically sustainable human settlement in the coastal zone.
7. Providing for appropriate public access and use.
8. Providing information to enable effective management for the coastal zone.
9. Providing for integrated planning and management for the coastal zone.

Each goal is underpinned by a set of objectives from which flow strategic actions. Agency and local council work plans are embedded into these actions; there are 138 strategic actions in the Policy each possessing assigned responsibility to an agency or agencies, local councils, or community groups (eg Coastcare). Local councils exercise more responsibilities in total than any state agency despite limitations on resources. These responsibilities reflect the strong role given to councils in planning (see EP&A Act 1979) and management (see Local Government Act 1993), and the relatively high proportion of the coast in private ownership or managed in trust by councils (see Crown Lands Act 1989). As a statutory body, the Coastal Council is required to report annually to the NSW Parliament through the Minister for Urban Affairs and Planning on how agencies and councils are performing with respect to the Coastal Policy. The Policy applies to a 1km strip of coast behind beaches and around estuaries, lakes and lagoons and extends offshore 3km. From 2002 on the Policy will cover the Greater Metropolitan Region of Sydney.

The Coastal Policy is supported by statutory directions (eg s117 EP&A Act), Regulations in the EP&A Act (cl.92(1)(a)), various sections in the Coastal Protection Act (1979 amended 1998) and indemnification provisions in the Local Government Act (1993, s.733). It is also made operational through the Coastal Council's role in reviewing new and existing local environmental plans (LEPs) created by councils following protocols authorised by the Director-General of the Department of Urban Affairs and Planning. In 2000-2001 fiscal year it reviewed 63 LEPs. Essentially its role as an advisory body enables it to seek input through submissions, seminars, community meetings, workshops and in mediation meetings from all stakeholders. The Council is composed of a mixture of nominees from Ministers of 12 agencies, 3 local council nominees, and representatives of the Royal Australian Planning Institute, conservation and industry. A member of the Legislative Assembly is also on the Council representing the NSW State Parliament. Coastal Council is now in a position to report directly to a Cabinet Coastal Management Sub-Committee chaired by the Deputy Premier and consisting of 7 ministers. A recent report on beach management prepared by the Coastal Council on request from the Minister for Land and Water Conservation went to this Sub-Committee leading to legislative and policy changes.

The 1997 Coastal Policy requires consideration by agency and council public entities, but it is not mandatory. Frustrations with its implementation have recently led the Carr Government to release its "Coastal Package" (26 June 2001). This package is designed to enhance the delivery of policy objectives. It consists of a number of components involving expenditure of \$11.7 million over 3 years. It is with great anticipation that the Coastal Council will move into the future knowing that the Government is committed to continued reform including reviewing zonings which are incompatible with the Policy; introducing emergency plans for beach management during storms; assisting councils better monitor, and inform communities on the state of recreational water quality; and providing a much clearer role for Aboriginal communities in coastal management. Further information on both the Policy and the Package can be obtained on Council's web-site www.coastalcouncil.nsw.gov.au.

What we are doing in NSW is confronting our frustrations in coastal planning and management in a very direct and strategic way. We recognise that no system is perfect, but for any jurisdiction it must be tailored to circumstances, whether they be political, legal, public, administrative or financial. Increasing community interests and aspirations must be met if the Australian coast is to retain its environmental values. No stakeholder group can afford to relax; champions must emerge to push the envelope to embrace the true meaning of the word *Esperance*: to have hope with confidence, to have faith in the future.