



Draft

COASTAL SUSTAINABILITY CHARTER

and

POLICY FRAMEWORK
FOR COASTAL AUSTRALIA

Discussion Paper

Towards a national policy framework that integrates the environmental, social and economic wellbeing of the Australian coastline and its communities with the timely funding and delivery of hard and soft infrastructure

May 2012

Introduction to this Draft

This draft Coastal Sustainability Charter and Policy Framework has been developed by the National Sea Change Taskforce as the basis for an advocacy campaign to be conducted during the period leading up to the next Federal election. It is a work in progress and will be further developed to incorporate comment and input from member councils of the Taskforce and other relevant stakeholders.

The Taskforce promotes the adoption of a national Policy Framework for Coastal Australia that integrates the environmental, social and economic wellbeing of the Australian coastline and its communities with the timely funding and delivery of hard and soft infrastructure. The proposed framework is aimed at achieving a coordinated national approach to managing coastal issues through the commitment of all three levels of government to work collaboratively to achieve the sustainability of coastal communities and the coastal environment.

To this end it is critical that the necessary policy elements are in place to support the long-term sustainability of local councils and their communities in coastal areas. For more than a decade these LGAs have been unable to access adequate funds and other resources required to meet the needs of their growing communities. By addressing the current shortfalls and inadequacies in their revenue base within a broader policy framework coastal LGAs will be able to plan for a sustainable future with far greater certainty than is currently possible and will be resourced to meet demand for community infrastructure and services.

Updating the Policy Framework

The process for preparing the coastal policy framework is similar to that followed in developing the *10-Point Plan for Coastal Australia* in the period leading up to the 2010 Federal Election. Workshops held at the Australian Coastal Councils Conference at Torquay in March 2011 reviewed the *10-Point Plan* and provided an opportunity for delegates, including representatives of Taskforce member councils, to provide input on current policy priorities. The revised policy framework was then distributed to Taskforce members a conference delegates for further feedback.

The updated policy framework was further reviewed and updated by delegates at the 2012 Australian Coastal Councils Conference held in Hobart in March 2012. This process is designed to provide an opportunity for extensive consultation with the aim of identifying and prioritising coastal policy issues. Following this development process the policy paper is to be finalised to form the basis of a policy agenda which will be pursued with all major parties during the period leading up to the next Federal election.

Previous policy papers have been successful in gaining policy commitments from both the Rudd Government in 2007 and the incoming Gillard Government in 2010. These commitments included the *Caring for our Coasts* policy in 2007, which led to the House of Representatives Parliamentary coastal inquiry and the appointment of the Coasts and Climate Change Council to provide advice on coastal issues to the Federal Government. Both Kevin Rudd and Julia Gillard gave commitments that their governments would play a national leadership role in relation to coastal planning and management.

COASTAL SUSTAINABILITY CHARTER

Australians feel a strong sense of affinity with the coast. We like to live as close as we can to the beach, spend our holidays there, swim, fish and relax there with family and friends. The coast is our most highly valued natural asset, and we want to make sure it stays that way for the benefit of future generations.

Up until now we have had the opportunity to enjoy one of the world's most pristine coastal environments almost anywhere along a shoreline that extends for some 36,000kms. But for how much longer can our coastal environment and coastal townships withstand the continuing pressures of suburbanisation?

For many years coastal communities have struggled to deal with a complex range of pressures. These include rapid population growth, the need to prepare for climate change impacts, such as rising sea levels, a shortage of services such as public transport, health and aged care, and the need to develop more sustainable local economies. These challenges are impacting on coastal communities in every state and placing at risk the high biodiversity and scenic values of the coastal zone.

The *Coastal Sustainability Charter* outlines a set of principles that are intended to guide appropriate policy responses to the challenges facing our coastal environment and communities. It is aimed at achieving the long-term sustainability of the Australian coastal zone for the future benefit of our children and grandchildren.

Guiding Principles

- Develop innovative and best practice statutory and strategic planning at state, regional and local levels to support the ecological sustainability of the coastal zone;
- Increase the capacity of coastal communities to respond to the impacts of climate change;
- Integrate coastal management and conservation objectives with economic development;
- Provide for the timely provision of resources to meet the needs of high growth communities for infrastructure and services;
- Support community wellbeing;
- Preserve local character and sense of place; and
- Ensure community engagement and participation in key planning decisions affecting the coast.

Revised Policy Framework

The National Sea Change Taskforce proposes that the Australian Government play a leadership role in developing a comprehensive national policy framework for coastal Australia. This would give effect to the commitment by the ALP prior to the 2007 election that it would *'work with state and territory governments, local councils and others to develop a coordinated, national approach to coastal policy.'* It would also give effect to the commitment by former Climate Change Minister, Senator Penny Wong, prior to the 2010 election that *'a Gillard Labor Government will provide the national leadership needed to help coastal communities to adapt and to plan their future growth and development.'* The Taskforce calls on the Federal Government to implement the policy framework by adopting the following plan:

1. Develop an Intergovernmental Agreement on the Coastal Zone, in cooperation with state, territory and local governments, as recommended in Recommendation 44 of the Parliamentary coastal inquiry report. The agreement should define the roles and responsibilities of the three tiers of government involved in coastal zone management and be overseen by a Coastal Zone Ministerial Council. Further, the Taskforce supports Recommendation 45 of the Parliamentary coastal inquiry that the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Coastal Zone forms the basis for a National Coastal Zone Policy and Strategy that sets out the principles, objectives and actions to be undertaken to address the challenges of integrated coastal zone management for Australia.
2. Develop a national growth management policy to better coordinate the planning and provision of infrastructure in regional and rural areas, including rapidly expanding coastal communities. The policy would involve the three spheres of government working collaboratively to more effectively meet growth in demand for economic, social, cultural and community infrastructure and services. One of the aims of the policy would be to prevent expanding populations being housed in areas that are vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Another aim would be to prevent the loss of productive agricultural land which is a major issue in many rapidly-growing coastal communities.
3. Promote the adoption in all jurisdictions of legislation to give similar effect to that provided by Section 733 of the NSW Local Government Act, which affords protection from legal liability for local councils where they provide advice or make a decision in good faith relating to coastal planning and the impact of climate change.
4. Ensure that the formulae for calculating Financial Assistance Grants and other relevant funding allocations takes account of the impact of non-resident populations in coastal areas in order to help coastal councils meet the demand for infrastructure and services associated with tourists, non-resident workers and part-time residents. Australian population data is based on the census which is conducted mid-week, in mid winter, at five yearly intervals and which therefore does not reflect the impact of non-permanent residents. This means coastal councils and their communities are disadvantaged under current funding arrangements.

5. Increase the adaptive capacity of local government to deal with the impacts of climate change through measures such as the Local Adaptation Pathways Program, as recommended in Recommendation 7 of the Parliamentary coastal inquiry report. Non-metro coastal communities also require specific funding for infrastructure management and maintenance in coastal areas vulnerable to climate change, as recommended in Recommendation 39 of the Parliamentary coastal inquiry.
6. Assist Australia's coastal councils to manage the threat posed by extreme weather events through specific emergency mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery arrangements. COAG has identified there is an 'urgent need for governments to re-examine Australia's arrangements for managing natural disasters and identify any further strategies aimed at building greater resilience'. COAG noted such efforts would be critical to Australia's ability to deal with the expected increase in the frequency and severity of natural disasters arising from extreme weather events.
7. Provide state and Federal government funding assistance to coastal councils to enable them to meet the continuing increase in demand for lifeguarding services. The increase in demand is largely driven by tourists and other non-residents in coastal areas.
8. Provide coastal councils with the resources necessary to meet the social, environmental and economic needs of coastal communities and to meet projected demand for regional facilities and services in high growth communities, noting there is a particular need to address the social and economic needs of ageing populations in coastal communities.
9. Initiate a collaborative national approach to address the shortage of affordable housing in coastal communities. This should include controls to retain existing low cost housing and a requirement for private developers to introduce affordable housing in residential developments.
10. Declare 2014 as *The Year of the Coast*. This would raise national awareness of the significant contribution coastal Australia makes to the nation's social, cultural, economic and environmental values. It would also provide an opportunity to raise awareness and support for the measures necessary to achieve the long-term sustainability of the coastal zone.

ABOUT THE NATIONAL SEA CHANGE TASKFORCE

The National Sea Change Taskforce was established in 2004 as a national body to represent the interests of coastal councils. It was initiated by a group of CEOs of coastal LGAs representing all Australian states and was subsequently established with an executive committee consisting of two elected representatives from each state. The objectives of the organisation are:

- To support and advance the interests of coastal councils and their constituencies;
- To provide national leadership in addressing the impact of the sea change phenomenon;
- To work collaboratively with local State and Federal Governments to develop a coordinated approach to managing population and tourism growth in coastal areas.

The Taskforce focused initially on the impact of population growth and tourism on non-metro coastal communities and the shortfall in resources for coastal LGAs to meet increasing demand for infrastructure and services.

In 2005 the Taskforce commissioned the first stage of an on-going research project which was conducted by the Planning Research Centre at The University of Sydney. The findings of this research identified the following priority issues facing sea change communities:

- Infrastructure and services
- Tourism and Economic development
- Environment
- Communities
- Governance

These issues subsequently formed the basis for development of the Sea Change Sustainability Charter in 2006, which forms the basis of the 2011 Coastal Sustainability Charter.

The second stage of the Taskforce research project identified best practice models of local and regional planning for sea change communities. The findings of this research have been adopted widely by State and local government planning authorities.

The most recent Taskforce research projects identify best practice measures for responding to the impact of climate change on coastal communities. This research report is being used as a prime reference source by government bodies including COAG, the Australian Government Department of Climate Change and a number of State Governments and coastal LGAs.

The findings of the Taskforce research reports have been widely used in the development of planning strategies by coastal councils and have also influenced the development of coastal policy at a State Government level. In Victoria, for example, the Taskforce research reports were prime reference sources for the development of the 2008 Victorian Coastal Strategy.

The research reports prepared for the Taskforce have identified the following key social, environmental and economic issues facing coastal communities in Australia:

Infrastructure – All coastal councils report a shortfall in infrastructure and lack the capacity to finance these shortfalls through existing sources, such as grants, rates and developer contributions. There is a clear need to expand and upgrade services and infrastructure so that they are comparable to those in metropolitan areas. Gaps include insufficient physical infrastructure for existing and future population and visitor needs, including roads, sewer, water services and public transport.

Environment and Heritage – Coastal environments are under significant pressure. Major environmental problems include habitat loss and fragmentation due to urban development and tourism, loss and degradation of coastal wetlands, change in hydrological systems and marine habitats, the introduction of exotic species, and erosion. Global climate change, particularly sea level rise, is likely to impact coastal environments in the near future.

Community Wellbeing – Many non-metropolitan coastal communities are characterised by high levels of unemployment, lower than average household incomes, greater levels of socio-economic disadvantage and higher numbers of seniors than other parts of Australia. Demand for new housing and holiday accommodation reduces affordable housing opportunities. There is a risk of social polarisation within many sea change communities.

Economy/Tourism – Increasing population growth and development activity in coastal areas is not translating to long term economic gains usually associated with population expansion. Many coastal communities are experiencing a decline in traditional resourced-based industries such as agriculture, fisheries and forestry. Coastal councils require assistance to manage this process of transition and its impact on environmental quality and character of their communities.

Governance – Sea change localities are subject to complicated, cross jurisdictional planning and management processes relating to coastal management and protection, natural resource management and heritage conservation, in addition to core land use planning and development responsibilities.

Government response - The research conducted by The University of Sydney reviewed Australian and State government policies, strategies and legislation relating to the planning and management of Australia's coastal areas and found that:

- Commonwealth, State and local policy and planning instruments addressing the sea change phenomenon focus on biophysical aspects, particularly environmental protection and to a lesser degree, settlement structure and urban design. Social issues, such as building community cohesion, catering to the needs of aging populations, or housing affordability, are not well addressed within the scope of current policy or planning instruments.
- Although some planning instruments aim to preserve agricultural land or to provide for tourism development, economic goals are not well-articulated or integrated within coastal policy and planning frameworks.
- Failure to integrate social and economic objectives and strategies within coastal policies and the land use plans applying to coastal areas reflects broader difficulties associated with achieving the spectrum of sustainability goals. Given the evidence of social and

economic disadvantage in sea change localities, and the likelihood that such disadvantage will continue without effective interventions, broadening coastal policy and planning processes to properly include social and economic dimensions is a priority.

- Effective regional planning is widely regarded by representatives of sea change communities to be critical to the management of growth and change in these areas. Many sea change communities report that existing regional plans lack weight, are not consistently applied, or are out of date.

Current Situation

The Taskforce has made significant progress in the areas of policy development, advocacy and research. Achievements by the organisation to date include the following:

- Placed the issue of coastal growth and its impact on councils and communities on the national political agenda through a vigorous media and advocacy campaign.
- Gained a commitment from the Rudd and Gillard Governments that they would provide national leadership on coastal management and that 'Labor will work with the National Sea Change Taskforce and other stakeholders in developing broad, national principles for coastal management, consistent with its commitment to sustainable development'.
- Developed a Policy Framework for Coastal Australia for the 2007 and 2010 Federal Elections. The 2007 paper led to the development of the *Growing Regions Plan* by the former Coalition Government and to the release of the ALP's *Caring for Our Coasts Plan*. It also led to the House of Representatives Standing Committee Inquiry into coastal management issues including the impact of population growth.
- The Taskforce proposed a Community Infrastructure Fund to assist councils in sea change areas to meet increasing demand for community infrastructure and to catch up with the significant backlog of demand for facilities. This proposal is considered one of the key factors that led to the Federal Government's announcement of the \$1b Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Program.
- The Taskforce commissioned groundbreaking research that identified the key priorities facing coastal councils and the best practice planning models required to address these issues, including climate change and sea level rise. These research findings are being used by coastal planners and managers at local, State and Federal government level throughout Australia.
- The Taskforce commissioned a research project through the University of Adelaide to develop a methodology for calculating the impact of non-resident populations, such as tourist and holiday home owners, on coastal communities.
- The Taskforce Chair and Deputy Chair were appointed to the Steering Committee of the Australian Council of Local Government, the peak body established as an interface between the Federal Government and the local government sector.