

**Submission  
No 71**



13 May 2005

Mr Kevin Green MP, Chair  
The Committee Manager  
Standing Committee on Public Works  
Parliament House  
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Dear Mr Green,

**RE: INFRASTRUCTURE PROVISION IN COASTAL GROWTH AREAS**

The Planning Institute of Australia (PIA) NSW Division welcomes the establishment of the Inquiry into Infrastructure Provision in Coastal Growth Areas, being undertaken by the New South Wales Standing Committee on Public Works.

PIA is the peak professional body representing urban and regional planners in Australia.

Please find enclosed PIA NSW's submission to the Inquiry. This submission provides a collaborative response to the above matters, based on input from PIA NSW members.

We trust that the inquiry will give due consideration to the points we have raised.

PIA NSW would be pleased to explain or expand upon the issues we have identified in our submission at the hearing to be held later in July. I can be contacted via the PIA NSW office on 02 9280 2121 or mobile 0418 695 431.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Monique Roser'.

Monique Roser  
President  
PIA NSW Division

## **Submission to the NSW Standing Committee on Public Works Inquiry into Infrastructure Provision in Coastal Growth Areas May 2005**

The Planning Institute of Australia (PIA) New South Wales Division is the peak professional body representing urban and regional planners in Australia. The following submission is lodged on behalf of the NSW Division of the PIA.

It is understood that the Committee will inquire into and report on issues relating to the provision of infrastructure in coastal growth areas (excluding the metropolitan coastal areas of Sydney, Newcastle and Wollongong).

As stated in the call for submissions, the inquiry will examine:

1. Key coastal population growth and urban consolidation trends in NSW;
2. Short and long term needs of coastal communities for basic infrastructure (such as roads, power, water and sewerage) and human services infrastructure (such as hospitals, schools, aged care centres, sporting facilities);
3. Coordination of commonwealth, state, local government strategies to deliver sustainable coastal growth and supporting infrastructure;
4. Best practice methods to plan, manage and provide infrastructure to coastal growth areas; and
5. Management of social, environmental and economic considerations associated with infrastructure provision in coastal growth areas.

This submission provides a collaborative response to the above matters, based on input from PIA NSW members.

### **1. Key coastal population growth and urban consolidation trends in NSW**

There has been an increase in 'non-metropolitan' residential populations. In particular, population migration is highly localised and focused towards coastal zones. Burnley and Murphy (2004) attribute this to the ability of the populations to maximise their residential amenity. That is, those considering moving away from metropolitan areas consider the move to the coast more often than a move inland in search of a higher quality of life.

There is a pressing need for the examination of the current and projected population of coastal growth areas.

Projected and actual age-cohort based migration statistics are required to determine infrastructure demand. The population making the 'seachange' to coastal areas is not restricted to the 'grey' population and includes younger families as well, where there is a higher expectation for services and infrastructure provision.

### **2. Short and long term needs of coastal communities for basic infrastructure (such as roads, power, water and sewage) and human services infrastructure (such as hospitals, schools, aged care centres, sporting facilities)**

The population of some coastal areas has quadrupled over the past 20 years and expenditure on infrastructure has not matched this population growth. This has put a strain on existing community/social services/infrastructure. Services are lagging given the huge population growth.

In terms of basic infrastructure, public transport is central to the functioning of a community yet often overlooked. The lack of affordable and available transport is a significant problem as people are unable to access services.

Moreover, public transport is more critical to certain groups within a population than other groups. A lack of public transport impinges heavily upon the quality of life of certain groups such as young people and the elderly.

Many of the coastal areas that have experienced enormous unplanned growth are now suffering the effects in many ways, including overstretched roads and railways. Merely providing infrastructure that meets the growing needs of the growing population may not be the only required focus. Due to the current position of many coastal areas, some type of analysis of what is required to "catch-up" before future planning is undertaken is desperately needed.

Not only will there be a need for more functional infrastructure, such as roads, water and sewers, but increasingly there will be a need for social services, above and beyond hospitals, nursing homes, libraries and community halls, but also golf courses, boat storage and anchorages, horse and bike trails, and a host of other recreational type facilities.

### **3. Coordination of Commonwealth, State and Local government strategies to deliver sustainable growth and supporting infrastructure**

It would appear that the coastal regions have not been a priority for the State Government and therefore have suffered through a lack of focus.

At the State level, there needs to be a dedicated agency to coordinate action and planning in coastal areas. It is understood that this is why the NSW Coastal Council (since abolished) was established in the first place. No other agency has a single focus, and resources will always be diverted and diluted to other issues, away from coastal issues.

At the local level, many Councils along the coast are small and are struggling with the need to provide for significant population growth. The difficulty of attracting and retaining skilled staff in regional areas, especially planners, engineers and health and building surveyors, makes this planning even more difficult. The recent increases in property prices in coastal areas have also exacerbated the difficulty of attracting staff. A major impediment is the limited fund-raising capacity of many local Councils, and the demands of tourism that are not adequately recognized in many funding formulas, based on per capita definitions of "need."

To adequately measure the future and current requirements for infrastructure in the coastal areas of NSW, all three levels of government need to co-ordinate to develop a system whereby the current infrastructure is assessed and audited for many factors.

Factors which should be included are the:

- Location of current infrastructure;
- Condition of current infrastructure;
- Population serviced by this infrastructure;
- Threshold of population to be serviced by existing infrastructure; and
- Projected population thresholds which will see existing infrastructure be used at capacity.

### **4. Best practice methods to plan, manage and provide infrastructure to coastal growth areas**

#### **Infrastructure Auditing**

One approach to facilitate better planning outcomes for the future, is the auditing and mapping of current infrastructure to allow for a better understanding of the range of thresholds for infrastructure assessment and planning in Coastal areas.

We understand that DIPNR commenced an ambitious project into auditing coastal infrastructure. The objectives of the project were to audit existing infrastructure, then develop guidelines for infrastructure augmentation or construction with respect to population thresholds. DIPNR were aiming towards developing a system where the population were used as a means of assessing what type of infrastructure was required in a certain area, then a checklist was run to determine if this infrastructure was already in the area, or if construction of these services was required.

Our advice is that this project was abandoned. Useful information may be gleaned by the inquiry by examining the initial objective of this project, and why it was consequently abandoned.

There is great merit in undertaking an audit of coastal infrastructure and it is a great waste to commence such a project and then to abandon it mid-stream.

### **Strategic Planning**

DIPNR has commenced the Sydney Metropolitan Strategy for the greater metropolitan region, to guide growth and development for the region over the next 30 years. DIPNR recognise it is important to include coastal areas in the future planning processes, as these areas continue to yield high population growth figures in comparison to other areas of the State.

As populations increase in coastal areas, it is important that similar tools used for planning in the greater metropolitan region are also utilised for the burgeoning coastal areas. This needs to be done through auditing the existing and planned infrastructure and establishing the required thresholds for infrastructure planning into the future.

We understand that DIPNR have commenced strategic planning for the Far North Coast region, along with other regions not located on the coast. It is imperative that strategic planning occur for all coastal regions of NSW.

## **5. Management of social, environmental and economic considerations associated with infrastructure provision in coastal growth areas**

A concern of the PIA NSW is that population growth will place immense pressure on natural areas and natural resources particularly adjacent to the coast. It is crucial that when planning for the expansion of coastal communities, complementary plans are also made for the natural environment as total biogeographical systems, not merely as “constraints” or SLOAP (space left over after planning).

### **Coastal Policy**

Coastal Policy review is now overdue, as is the rest of the Coastal Package. The Coastal Policy dates from 1997, and was due for review as part of the \$11.7 million Coastal Package announced by the NSW Government in 2001. State Environmental Planning Policy (SEPP) No. 71 – Coastal Protection commenced on 1 November 2003. SEPP 71 gave statutory powers to the Coastal Council in 2002, but the Coastal Council was abolished in December 2003.

The statutory powers of the Coastal Council have been transferred to the Natural Resources Commission (NRC); a body that was established to set statewide standards and targets for Natural Resource Management performance for the Catchment Management Authorities (CMAs).

A universal concern of those interested in the coast of NSW is that the process that gave birth to both the CMAs and the NRC had little to no coastal focus. Both arose from bodies and processes focused on catchments, with the emphasis on inland NSW (broadscale land clearing), and arising from the previous Catchment Boards, which did not have funds to invest in coastal areas (this was handled under other programs). Consequently the previous Catchment Blueprints, now the basis for the Catchment Action Plans, paid little or no attention to coastal investment issues. The coast is in serious danger of missing out on a fair share of NRM investment, yet it is the main area of population pressure on those unique coastal resources.

The abandonment of PlanFIRST also diverted a lot of resources to planning exercises that have not borne fruit. This has had a big impact in some coastal areas, where previous planning work was well advanced; eg the north coast, where the Northern Rivers Regional Strategy had been very well advanced, and where some councils were following through with place-based planning.

### **Examples of positive projects developed up or down the coast**

Byron Shire Council has adopted and is implementing a Biodiversity Conservation Strategy and a Sustainable Agriculture Strategy as part of its commitment to sustainable economic development. These are being supported by a special rate variation of 2% for four years, raising approximately \$185,000 per annum.

## **6. Recommendations**

PIA NSW recommends the following:

1. An audit of existing and proposed infrastructure is undertaken involving the cooperation of the three levels of government.
2. Mapping of existing and proposed infrastructure.
3. Thresholds are established for infrastructure planning.
4. Actual and projected population statistics are used to determine infrastructure demand, acknowledging the shift in age-cohorts of migration to the coast.
5. Address infrastructure provision in areas where current infrastructure is currently severely lagging.
6. Focus on public transport provision.
7. Plan for an increase in demand of social services including recreational type facilities.
8. The natural environment be given importance when planning for coastal communities and not comprise an after-thought.
9. Establishment of a dedicated agency to coordinate action and planning in coastal areas.
10. A programme is developed to attract, and retain, skilled staff to regional Councils.