



TOTAL ENVIRONMENT CENTRE INC

The Committee Manager
Standing Committee on Public Works
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

26 May 2005

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: NSW Standing Committee on Public Works Inquiry into Infrastructure Provision in Coastal Areas

The Nature Conservation Council of NSW (NCC) and the Total Environment Centre (TEC) would like to take this opportunity to make a submission on the NSW Standing Committees Inquiry into Infrastructure Provision in Coastal Growth Areas.

The coastal zone is a dynamic interface of land and water supporting high levels of biodiversity as well as being a key area for urban development and economic activity. The differing demands for each of these equally important land uses has resulted in significant conflict in recent years. This conflict in land use management issues has resulted in largely uninhibited urban development which has had significant environmental impact on this sensitive ecosystem.

The provision of adequate infrastructure in this area is essential for trade, transportation, community development and tourism. Effective planning policies underlain by ecologically sustainable development principles and complemented by appropriate infrastructure that conserves energy and water resources, will ensure that development occurs in a sustainable manner and protects the significant natural values of coastal areas.

In making this submission, NCC and TEC request the Standing Committee on Public Works consider the failure of past land use management practices and strategies in coastal NSW, with a view to ensuring the mistakes of the past are not perpetuated by the provision of new infrastructure.

The following is a combined response from NCC and TEC to the the key areas under investigation in this Inquiry, with specific regard to the terms of reference provided. Should you wish to discuss this matter further please contact Daniela Gambotto at NCC on 9279 2466 or Fran Kelly at TEC on 9929 5680.

Regards,

Cate Faehrmann
Director
Nature Conservation Council

Jeff Angel
Director
Total Environment Centre

THE NEW SOUTH WALES LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS – INFRASTRUCTURE PROVISION IN COASTAL GROWTH AREAS

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

NCC and TEC are particularly concerned with the impacts of increasing population and coastal development on the sensitive ecosystems of the NSW coastline. Urban growth, and the necessary infrastructure provision to accompany this, must be well planned and conducted in an integrated manner, with serious consideration for the likely impacts of growth and resource use on the environment. In particular we are concerned with the following:

- Clearing of large areas of remnant habitat for urban development and its associated infrastructure requirements is a common sight along the NSW coastline in recent years. The destruction of this habitat is having a detrimental impact on local environments and ruining local amenity. This situation is set to only get worse as population pressures increase in coastal growth areas. It is essential that the government take the lead on this significant issue in terms of mapping ecological communities and introduction of strong legislation that will protect existing areas of high conservation value. Strict guidelines must be implemented to ensure development is designed to minimise negative environmental impacts that may occur off site. Environmental constraints should determine population levels.
- Urban consolidation provides a sustainable solution to curbing urban sprawl, however, consideration must be given to the added pressures that urban consolidation will have on existing infrastructure. Basic infrastructure (water, sewerage, public transport and waste collection) must be firmly in place or funds already allocated for future investment in areas where substantial growth is predicted. The carrying capacity of basic services must be adequate and reviewed regularly to ensure that they are able to accommodate projected population figures.
- Consolidation and infill within the communal footprint will in some cases be a sustainable solution for a period of time. Obviously however the consolidation cannot continue indefinitely. Government will soon be forced to actively consider a development or population cap before the sustainability crisis is met.
- The provision of human services infrastructure is equally important in coastal areas, and is particularly important given the significant migration of retirees to these communities. The ageing population is possibly the single greatest challenge in planning for development in coastal areas over the next 30 years.
- Urban development often results in an increase in the amount of hard surfaces in built up areas. This will have implications in terms of increased urban runoff which will ultimately impact on nearby waterways. The minimisation of vegetation removal must be enforced, and other such mitigation strategies (stormwater detention basins, swales, adequate piping, etc.) implemented to lessen impacts in terms of sedimentation of local aquatic systems and the potential for erosion.
- Local planning controls that permit huge houses on small blocks of land require serious review. Such housing development uses exhaustive amounts of natural resources to construct and power. Urban development that is of a reasonable bulk

foundation of an integrated land use and transport planning policy in growth areas.

Power

- There is a need to reduce reliance on coal as a source of energy. This can easily be achieved through encouraging use of renewable energy sources. NCC and TEC strongly support the introduction of BASIX as a means of reducing energy consumption and therefore the need to provide expensive infrastructure to service an energy hungry population. Demand management for the existing urban fabric will also be crucial. As such proposals for new power supply infrastructure must undergo rigorous demand management alternative analysis first.

Sewerage

- The carrying capacity of existing sewerage systems is often neglected in the urban development process. This has resulted in polluting of nearby waterways in a number of instances. This is not only an environmental concern, but also an issue of public health. The long term growth projections must take into consideration the carrying capacity of sewerage facilities, including re-use infrastructure.
- NCC and TEC support the introduction of 'supply-treat-reuse' solutions in high growth areas as opposed to the construction of more sewerage treatment plants. This must be complemented by on going monitoring and evaluation of the systems effectiveness and performance. The potential for higher density developments to recycle and reuse grey water would minimise the impacts of an increasing population in coastal growth areas.

Water

- Given the significant reductions in rainfall expected over the Australian continent, the supply of fresh water to coastal communities is an issue that requires careful planning. NCC and TEC strongly support the installation of rainwater tanks, grey water systems and the use of modern technology to address the issue of water consumption and reuse in coastal areas.

Aged care facilities

- The growing demand for aged care housing in coastal areas presents a massive challenge in terms of infrastructure provision. Governments must ensure that the appropriate infrastructure is in place to support the needs of this sector of the population. However, it is important to note that aged care facilities and its associated infrastructure should be planned with careful consideration for sensitive coastal environments. There is particular concern for the ability of the Seniors Living SEPP to override existing legislation for coastal protection.

Potential impacts of Climate Change

- Strategic planning for coastal growth areas must consider the potential impacts that climate change will have on these communities. This includes the possible rise in sea levels that will have implications for infrastructure provision and coastal erosion in these areas.

3. Coordination of commonwealth, state and local government strategies to deliver sustainable coastal growth and supporting infrastructure

NCC and TEC strongly concur with coordination of federal, state and local strategies to ensure the provision of infrastructure occurs in a timely, efficient and environmentally sustainable manner. Inter-departmental coordination within each of these tiers of

concerns on the following issues:

Environmental

- The provision of necessary infrastructure in coastal growth areas should not be at the expense of significant environmental values in coastal areas. Integrated strategic planning that takes into consideration the predicted demographics of the area and infrastructure required is critical.
- The impacts of Acid Sulphate Soils on infrastructure is a serious concern. Mapping at an early stage in the process will allow mitigation of likely impacts on important infrastructure in coastal areas.

Social

- Protecting the local amenity of coastal towns is a key consideration in terms of infrastructure provision in coastal areas. There are often significant natural and cultural values associated with the identity of these areas, and these must be taken into consideration in the urban development process.
- Of particular concern to NCC and TEC are the Indigenous values that are often ignored or overridden for the sake of growth. The new Interim Guidelines for protecting Aboriginal objects and places and community consultation must be given attention in the provision of infrastructure.
- The government must not ignore its responsibility to provide adequate basic infrastructure in coastal growth areas. It is not acceptable that developers be solely relied upon to provide a service.

Economic

- The importance of tourism on the local economy must not be ignored. Development for tourism facilities should be strongly based on the principles of eco-tourism such that the requirement for expensive infrastructure is minimised (as per the NSW Tourism Masterplan).
- Port growth which is critical to local and regional economic development, must ensure that adequate infrastructure is in place for the effective operation of the port. The provision of infrastructure (particularly freight related infrastructure) must have consideration for the likely impacts on local environment and physical amenity. Plans to handle pollution emergencies from spills into the marine environment must also be prepared.

Recommendations

The provision of infrastructure in coastal growth areas has to date been inadequate and is subsequently resulting in unsustainable development patterns. Given the large number of people living in these areas, and even the modest population increases predicted, it is critical that the Standing Committee on Public Works give serious consideration to the following recommendations from the NCC and TEC:

1. Mapping and legislative protection for areas of high biodiversity conservation value in coastal areas. Mapping of environmental values and constraints used as a determinant of population growth levels.
2. Urban consolidation as a means of curbing urban sprawl is supported, but must be complemented by appropriate policies to ensure good urban design and provision of appropriate infrastructure, as well as allocation of funds for future infrastructure investment.
3. Review of existing infrastructure provisions in coastal areas to assess their carrying capacity and plan for future urban growth.