MEDIA RELEASES

19 December 2008

Cr Joan van Lieshout
Mayor
Tweed Shire Council
PO Box 816
Murwillumbah NSW 2484

Dear Mayor van Lieshout,

On behalf of the National Sea Change Taskforce I would like to invite the Tweed Shire Council to become a member of the National Sea Change Taskforce.

For the information of your Council I have provided a brief outline of the role of the Taskforce in this letter and have attached a media release issued following the inaugural meeting of the Australian Council of Local Government held in Canberra on 18 November 2008.

As indicated in the enclosed media release the Taskforce has consistently advocated the need for additional resources to help coastal councils and their communities cope with the demands of rapid population growth. We believe this advocacy was a major contributing factor to the community infrastructure program announced by the Federal Government on 18 November.

The National Sea Change Taskforce was established in 2004 to support the interests of coastal councils and their communities. Since being established it has placed the key issues facing coastal councils, including population growth and the significant shortfall in infrastructure for their communities, on the national political agenda. We have also commissioned groundbreaking research, which is influencing the development of coastal policy at state and Federal government level.

Australia's coastal councils are attempting to deal with the social, environmental and economic effects of rapid growth. This growth has been particularly strong over the past decade and is expected to continue for many years to come. Coastal LGAs are also facing the challenge of how to address the needs of ageing populations and how to prepare for the impact of climate change while minimising the associated exposure to legal liability.

Coastal councils do not have the resources necessary to meet these demands. It is for that reason we believe it is critical for Australia's coastal LGAs to act collectively and to conduct a strong advocacy campaign aimed at gaining the resources necessary to meet the needs of our communities.
In the period leading up last year’s Federal election, the Taskforce conducted a vigorous advocacy campaign which led to the development of the ‘Caring for Our Coasts’ plan, which was announced by the ALP prior to the election. This plan commits the Rudd Government to ‘provide national leadership and work with local communities to address the challenges of coastal growth and climate change’. The Plan stated 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.

Minister for Infrastructure, Anthony Albanese MP, has since that time advised the Taskforce that: ‘I am aware that the Sea Change phenomenon has resulted in rapid population growth for coastal communities and created difficulties in the provision of local government infrastructure. To address this issue the Australian Government will be implementing a number of initiatives and has committed to involve and consult with local government in this process’. One of those initiatives was the infrastructure announcement outlined in the attached media release.

I invite you to consider the benefits of becoming a member of the Taskforce and joining our national effort to deal with the challenges facing our coastal communities. Annual subscription fees are based on the resident population of member councils.

We will be happy to provide any additional information you may require. Please contact our office by telephone on either 02 9904 0311 or 02 9908 2401 or by email to: info@seachangetaskforce.org.au. Further information is also available at our web site: www.seachangetaskforce.org.au.

Yours sincerely,

Barry Sammels
Chair and Mayor of the City of Rockingham

Fergus Thomson
NSW Executive member and
Mayor Eurobodalla Shire Council

Janet Hayes
NSW Executive member and
Councillor Kempsey Shire Council
COASTAL COUNCILS WELCOME $300M COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRAM

18 November 2008: The National Sea Change Taskforce has welcomed the $300 million community infrastructure program announced today by the Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and Minister for Infrastructure, Anthony Albanese.

Barry Sammels, the Chair of the Taskforce and Mayor of the City of Rockingham in Western Australia, said the program was a welcome start to the process of helping coastal councils to meet the demand for community infrastructure such as cultural, sporting, recreation and other community facilities.

"We particularly welcome the fact that this funding will be made available directly to local councils for projects to be started straight away," he said. "This will be an important boost to local economic development and job creation in Australia's coastal areas."

"There has been a huge migration of population to Australia's coastal communities over the past decade. The latest figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics show there are now 6.26 million people living in non-metro coastal areas, which represent 82% of the nation's entire regional population.

"An extra 1.27 million people moved to non-metro coastal areas in the ten years from 1997 to 2007 but the resources did not move with them, which means these communities have a major backlog of local infrastructure projects."

Barry Sammels said Australia's coastal councils looked forward to a direct partnership with the Federal Government. "Over the past few years we have strongly advocated the need for additional resources to help these communities cope with the demands of rapid population growth," he said. "It is encouraging to see that the Federal Government has responded to these calls for assistance.

"We welcome the statement by the Prime Minister that the program will extend beyond the current financial year to help meet the continuing growth in demand in the nation's coastal areas."

Barry Sammels said the National Sea Change Taskforce will seek clarification on the proposal to make an additional growth fund component available to councils with a minimum population of 30,000.

"A number of coastal councils with small populations have experienced some of the highest growth rates in the country," he said.

Further information:
Alan Stokes: 0411 592 269

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 and communities experiencing the effects of rapid population and tourism growth. It currently represents coastal local government authorities in all Australian states. Web www.seachangetaskforce.org.au
REPORT TO MEMBERS

13 January 2009
SUMMARY

The National Sea Change Taskforce was formed to represent the interests of coastal councils. Since being established the organisation has made substantial progress towards its objectives, including 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 Federal Government that it 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 to address the social, environmental and economic impact of growth on the Australian coast and its communities. This paper led to the release of the ALP’s Caring for Our Coasts Plan and the House of Representatives Standing Committee Inquiry into coastal management issues including the impact of population growth.

- Following strong representations to senior members of the Rudd Government, the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government, Anthony Albanese MP, informed the Taskforce that: ‘I am aware that the Sea Change phenomenon has resulted in rapid population growth for coastal communities and created difficulties in the provision of local government infrastructure. To address this issue the Australian Government will be implementing a number of initiatives and has committed to involve and consult with local government in this process’.

- 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 $300 million Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Program to help local councils build and improve community infrastructure.

- Commissioned groundbreaking research that identified the key priorities facing coastal councils and the best practice planning models required to address them. These research findings are being used by coastal planners and managers at local, State and Federal government level throughout Australia. The findings were a prime reference, for example, for development of the new Victorian Coastal Strategy.

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

- Developed the National Sea Change Sustainability Charter as a step towards development of a 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 Charter was adopted by Taskforce members at a Special General Meeting in April 2006. (Attached as Appendix 1)

- A NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into the Provision of Infrastructure in High Growth Coastal Areas was initiated in direct response to representations by the Taskforce. The final report of the Inquiry acknowledged that the ‘sea change’ phenomenon is a serious issue that needs to be addressed effectively.
INTRODUCTION

This report has been prepared for the information of members of the National Sea Change Taskforce, in particular for newly elected Mayors and members of council in NSW and Victoria following local government elections held in those states. It sets out recent activities of the Taskforce and the progress achieved towards the objectives of the organisation.

THE ROLE OF 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 and to play a leadership role in assisting LGAs to deal with issues such as population growth and the demands of tourism. The objectives of the organisation are to:

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

One of the initial priorities of the organisation was to raise awareness of the impacts of coastal population growth among elected representatives at local, state and Federal level, media outlets and the broader community. The aim was to communicate the message that coastal councils are struggling to cope with the pressures of population growth and tourism and do not have the resources required to keep pace with demand for community infrastructure and services. As a result of an intensive awareness campaign by the Taskforce, which has resulted in thousands of media articles, the term ‘sea change’ has become the accepted national expression for the large-scale movement of population to the coast. There is also national awareness of the social, environmental and economic impact that rapid growth is having on coastal LGAs and their communities.

Another key objective of the organisation was to commission research to identify key issues facing coastal councils in Australia. It was recognised at an early stage that an advocacy campaign could only be successful if it was supported by solid and credible research. Individual research projects commissioned by the Taskforce are outlined later in this report.

Advocacy at state and federal government level has also been a priority. The Taskforce has made representations to politicians, state and Federal government officials, planners and members of the wider community and has used the findings of the sea change research to document the key issues facing coastal communities, such as the limited capacity of coastal communities to meet increasing demand for infrastructure and services. Coastal growth and its impact on coastal communities has since been addressed in several policy initiatives by both the former coalition government and the Rudd Government, as indicated elsewhere in this report.

Recent activities undertaken by the Taskforce are outlined as follows.
POLICY

In the period leading up to the 2007 Federal election the Taskforce prepared a coastal policy discussion paper, which set out a number of policy initiatives that were presented to senior Ministers and Shadow ministers at a Federal level. The policy discussion paper was aimed at ensuring that the necessary policy elements were in place to support the long-term sustainability of Local Government Authorities in coastal areas.

Key elements in the discussion paper, which was developed with input from elected representatives and senior officers of member councils, included the following:

- A Coastal Community Infrastructure Fund tied to adoption of policy
- Climate change risk analysis and adaptation response
- Best Practice Regional Planning for coastal areas including determination of urban footprints
- A review of governance and institutional arrangements for the coastal zone
- Effective partnership between coastal local government authorities, NRM bodies, CMAs and science through a proposed Australian Coastal Alliance
- A consistent national approach to equitable developer contributions
- Policy response to ageing coastal communities
- Recognition of the Impact of non-resident populations in coastal areas

The coastal policy discussion paper subsequently led to the Howard Government announcing a policy initiative called the Growing Regions Plan, which was aimed at helping communities in sea change areas to meet the costs associated with growth. The Taskforce discussion paper also led to the development of the ‘Caring for Our Coasts’ plan, announced by the ALP prior to the November Federal election. This plan committed the Rudd Government to ‘provide national leadership and work with local communities to address the challenges of coastal growth and climate change’. The Plan stated 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.

One of the initiatives to give effect to this commitment was the announcement of a Parliamentary Inquiry to be conducted by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Climate Change, Water, Environment and Arts. The inquiry, which is currently underway, will make recommendations on issues including the environmental impacts of coastal population growth, mechanisms to promote sustainable use of coastal resources, and strategies to deal with climate change adaptation.

ADVOCACY

Advocacy at State and Federal government level has been a priority since the organisation was established. The Taskforce has made representations to key politicians and government officials and has used the findings of the ‘sea change’ research reports to document the key issues facing coastal communities. The advocacy program included promoting the interests of coastal LGAs and communities with senior members of the current Federal Government, including the Federal Treasurer, The Hon Wayne Swan MP, Infrastructure Minister Anthony Albanese MP and Climate Change Minister, Senator Penny Wong, Parliamentary Secretary for
Infrastructure, Gary Gray and members of the Standing Committee on Climate Change, Water, Environment and Arts.

As a result of these representations the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government, The Hon Anthony Albanese MP, informed the Taskforce that: ‘I am aware that the Sea Change phenomenon has resulted in rapid population growth for coastal communities and created difficulties in the provision of local government infrastructure. To address this issue the Australian Government will be implementing a number of initiatives and has committed to involve and consult with local government in this process’.

One of the initiatives subsequently announced on the day of the Federal Budget by Infrastructure Minister Anthony Albanese was a new Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Program, which was planned to be introduced in 2009-10. The Taskforce was subsequently invited to make input into a Parliamentary inquiry which was set up to develop details of the new funding program. The inquiry was conducted by the Standing Committee on Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government. The Taskforce made input into the development of the program and made representations to inquiry hearings.

As a result of the global financial crisis, the Federal Government brought the announcement of the Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Program forward to November 2008. The new program, which closely reflects the proposal for a Community Infrastructure Fund outlined in the Taskforce policy framework, is designed to fund major community infrastructure investments in regional communities.

In 2008 the Taskforce was also invited to take part in the development of the COAG Climate Change Action Plan. The Taskforce worked with the COAG Climate Change Adaptation Sub Group and other key stakeholders to develop recommendations for a climate change adaptation action plan which have since been presented to COAG.

RESEARCH

The Taskforce has commissioned three stages of research to identify the key issues facing coastal councils in Australia and to identify best practice models for responding to these challenges. The findings of these 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.

The first stage of the research program was undertaken by the Planning Research Centre at The University of Sydney. It found coastal councils need urgent help to address the challenges associated with coastal growth and recommended a national planning framework to lead coastal policy and to establish strategic responses to population growth in coastal regions. The research found that rapid development in coastal areas posed a threat to sensitive coastal environments and had profound social implications but was not translating into long-term economic gains despite continuing population growth.

The second phase of research, titled Best Practice Models of Local & Regional Planning for Sea Change Communities, was released in 2006. This report documented the range of governance, environmental, community, economic and infrastructure challenges affecting sea change councils and identified best practice in addressing these issues. For example, it identified that the Integrated Coastal Zone
Management Strategy for the European Union not only addressed environmental issues, it also addressed social and cultural problems in the coastal zone, including weakening social “fabric”, marginalisation of disadvantaged groups, and unemployment. The best practice models identified in the second stage of research have influenced the development of coastal planning strategies in several Australian states.

The third phase of research, titled Planning for Climate Change: Leading Practice Principles and Models for Sea Change Communities in Coastal Australia, was released in July 2008. It identified best practice measures for responding to the potential impact of climate change on coastal communities and is currently being used as a prime reference source by government bodies including COAG, the Department of Climate Change and Australian State Governments.

Each of these research reports can be accessed at the Taskforce web site: www.seachangetaskforce.org.au

MAJOR EVENTS

Since its establishment, the Taskforce has staged a number of conferences and forums on the key issues facing coastal councils and their communities. These have included:

SEA CHANGE 2006

The SEA CHANGE 2006 conference, held at Port Douglas in April 2006, was the first conference to be organised by the National Sea Change Taskforce. It brought together 165 delegates representing key stakeholders with an interest and involvement in the management of Australia’s coastline, including representatives of the local government, research, property development and NGO sectors. It was also attended by several State and Australian Government Ministers and MPs.

Feedback from delegates was extremely positive, with many expressing the view that the event helped to expand knowledge of the key issues facing coastal communities and the measures necessary to address them. Issues raised at the conference attracted considerable attention and generated approximately 90 news items on radio, television and in the print media. This demonstrates the high level of public interest and concern in relation to this matter. Keynote speakers at the conference addressed priority issues concerning Australia’s coastal areas, including:

- Current biophysical, planning and tourism research activities
- The effects of coastal growth on sea change communities
- Increasing demand for infrastructure and services
- Governance issues relating to the coastal zone
- The need for a sustainable approach to coastal tourism

SEA CHANGE 2007

The SEA CHANGE 2007 Conference was held on the Sunshine Coast from 20-22 August 2007. The conference theme was “Setting the Coastal Priorities”. The event explored policy initiatives and strategies to address the environmental, social and economic impact of rapid growth and development on coastal Australia.
Delegates heard presentations from Ministers and Shadow Ministers on their coastal policies leading up to the 2007 election. Topics covered in plenary sessions included community infrastructure and services, preparing for climate change, building a sea change knowledge community, planning for population growth and economic drivers in sea change communities. Concurrent sessions included regional case studies and workshops on affordable housing, sense of place, productive use of rural land and ageing in coastal communities.

**Coastal Management Forum 2008**

The Coastal Management Forum, held in Brisbane in July 2008, provided valuable insights into the key issues facing coastal decision-makers, planners and managers including an update on the latest demographic data and advances in knowledge of the potential impact of climate change on coastal communities. It also explored policy initiatives and strategies to address the environmental, social and economic impact of the sea change phenomenon.

The Coastal Management Forum was planned to update coastal councils on the key challenges they are currently facing and to provide a comprehensive briefing for the newly-amalgamated coastal councils in Queensland. The event featured the release of the research report commissioned by the Taskforce to identify the best planning models for coastal LGAs preparing for the impact of climate change. The event was attended by a number of key representatives of the Queensland State Government and the Federal Government.

**Australian Coastal Councils Conference 2009**

The next event to be presented by the Taskforce is COAST 2009 - the Australian Coastal Councils Conference. This is to be held at Mandurah, in Western Australia on 3 and 4 March 2009. The conference will be followed by an optional two-day field tour of the rapidly developing south-west coastal region of Western Australia, including Bunbury, Busselton, Dunsborough and Margaret River.

The conference is aimed at briefing coastal councils, government agencies and other relevant organizations on the current challenges facing Australia’s coastal settlements. These challenges include rapid population growth, the need for sustainable economic development and the impacts of climate change. Topics to be addressed during the event include:

- West Australia’s coastal strategy
- Scientific update on climate change
- Climate change impacts on coastal infrastructure
- Coastal emergency management planning
- Community infrastructure initiatives in coastal areas
- Legal risks related to climate change for coastal planning authorities

The Taskforce also plans to use the event as a forum to launch the Australian Coastal Alliance as an information and communication interface between coastal councils, State and Federal Governments, research organisations and other relevant stakeholders. (See Appendix 2 for Vision and Mission Statement of the Alliance)
THE WAY FORWARD

In reviewing the activities of the organisation, in particular the events of the past year, the Taskforce believes that member councils can now look forward to the future of their communities with a greater sense of hope than has previously been possible.

The advocacy campaign conducted by the Taskforce has led to a number of Federal Government processes that are aimed at developing policy initiatives to address the pressures facing coastal councils and their residents.

Community infrastructure funding remains one of the most important priorities for the Taskforce. The Government’s Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Program will provide a measure of economic stimulus to coastal communities, but more is required. Other important issues facing coastal communities include the impact of ageing populations and the need for a coordinated approach to deal with climate change. There are a range of initiatives currently in development that will help coastal councils to prepare for the impact of climate change. The Taskforce has made significant input into these initiatives and will continue to do so.

As indicated in this report, the National Sea Change Taskforce has made substantial progress in relation to these issues but the organisation needs to continue to lobby and advocate at a Federal government level to ensure the needs of coastal communities are met. The Taskforce is the only organisation in a position to adequately represent this constituency on a national basis.

It has taken considerable effort since the organisation was established to raise national awareness of the impact of population growth and tourism demand on coastal communities. As a result of these efforts the issue has been firmly placed on the national political agenda and the Federal Government has now given a commitment to play a leadership role in addressing the needs of coastal communities.

In closing it is worth noting that the Taskforce has achieved a great deal for a body that has been operating for such a relatively short time. In addition it is felt that members receive excellent value in return for their subscription fees, considering that the entire cost of funding the Taskforce, for all members, is less than the annual contribution some individual councils make to other local government organisations. Despite these modest costs, the National Sea Change Taskforce is recognised by all political parties, at State and Federal level, as a reputable and influential organisation that has achieved much in its brief period of activity.
APPENDIX 1

THE SEA CHANGE SUSTAINABILITY CHARTER

The Sea Change Sustainability Charter was an important step towards development of a 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 Charter was adopted at a Special General Meeting of Members held at Port Douglas in April 2006. It seeks the commitment of local, State, Territory and Australian governments to a set of guiding principles aimed at achieving a collaborative national response to ‘sea change’ growth. It also identifies the relevant strategies and best practice for implementing these principles.

Guiding Principles

- develop innovative and best practice strategic planning at regional and local levels
- preserve local character and sense of place
- provide for the timely provision of resources to meet the needs of high growth communities for infrastructure and services
- integrate coastal management and conservation objectives with economic development
- support community wellbeing
- ensure community ownership and participation in key planning decisions affecting the coast

Strategies

Commitment of all spheres of government

Secure the commitment of Local, State, Territory and Federal governments to a collaborative national approach to managing sea change growth.

Include a specific reference to communities affected by rapid growth, including sea change communities in relevant State, Territory and Federal Government portfolios and in the terms of reference of the Local Government and Planning Ministers’ Council.

Focus on sustainability

Develop a strategic Charter covering coastal management and protection, environmental conservation, land use planning and community well being.

Link regional planning for coastal areas to the timely provision of resources to enable councils to meet the current and future needs of high growth communities for infrastructure and services.

Promote tourism strategies which are supported by planning controls that only permit developments that are consistent with existing settlement scale or the desired future character of local communities.
Protect the character of existing communities through a focus on place making and quality urban design.

Coordinate strategies to manage the impact of climate change.

**Inclusive governance structures**

Develop systems of governance for coastal areas that integrate social, environmental and economic considerations at local and regional level.

Develop strategies to gain community participation in key planning decisions.

Develop strategies to establish a national strategic infrastructure funding program.

**Coordinated approach**

Establish a national body to coordinate and integrate coastal research including planning, social science, economics, governance and ecosystems research.

**Best practice**

**Governance**

- Integrate social, economic, and environmental considerations at local and regional levels;
- Provide for cross agency and cross government collaboration;
- Engage the community and private sectors; and,
- Apply the principle of “subsidiarity” – so that higher levels of government should not take responsibility for matters able to be addressed by lower levels of government, but rather, should fully support and enable lower levels of government, particularly local government, to adopt these roles.

**Community wellbeing**

- Protect and enhance the unique character and sense of place of coastal and hinterland settlements and surrounding landscapes;
- Build social cohesion; and
- Maintain social equity and diversity

**Economy and tourism**

- Adopt a regional approach to development, collaborating with other local government areas,
- Foster economic development policies that result in widespread benefits for local and regional residents and businesses
- Attempt to address the needs of the most disadvantaged groups in the community by connecting them to meaningful training and employment opportunities;
- Encourage industries that cater to external markets or compete for a share of local markets that would otherwise be targeted by an external competitor;
- Actively protect and enhance the quality of life of the region to attract educated and skilled workers, entrepreneurs and business leaders,
- Seek industries that offer high wages and highly skilled positions, to improve the employment opportunities of low skilled and under employed residents;
- Develop tourism strategies that build explicitly on local assets, character and resources,
- Adopt tourism strategies and ventures that disperse visitor spending across the local area

**Environment**

- Recognise fundamental ecological limits by minimising impacts on natural systems;
- Limit the use of non-renewable resources and the production of waste;
- Explicitly prevent further urban exposure to coastal hazards, including potential sea level rise;
- Reduce existing exposure to coastal hazards, or select hazard mitigation strategies that limit environmental disturbance;
- Minimize potential land use conflict between conservation and human activity; and;
- Reflect and promote indigenous input to coastal planning and management decisions.

**Infrastructure**

- Determine infrastructure needs through appropriate research and needs assessment;
- Prioritise environmental protection, rehabilitation, and sustainable patterns of resource use and management in infrastructure investment decisions;
- Determine infrastructure investment decisions in the context of local or regional planning Charters, and support desired future settlement patterns and environmental capacity;
- All levels of government involved in infrastructure provision must collaboratively plan for the type, location, funding and timing of new infrastructure, consistent with local or regional planning Charters, and in consultation with local communities.
- Infrastructure charges and development levies should recognise the real cost of infrastructure provision;
- Public-private partnerships in infrastructure funding and provision are desirable where the infrastructure decision remains consistent with broader community aspirations reflected in the local or regional planning Charter.
- Community facilities should be designed for flexibility and multi-purpose uses and;
- Community consultation and research should inform the assessment of infrastructure

**Implementing the Charter**

It is proposed that an Australian Coastal Council be established as an inter-jurisdictional advisory group to advise on and assist in implementation of the strategy.

The Council would include representatives of State, Territory and the Australian governments, key stakeholders including the National Sea Change Taskforce and the Australian Local Government Association and representatives of the principal organisations involved in research related to the coastal zone and coastal communities.
APPENDIX 2

AUSTRALIAN COASTAL ALLIANCE

The Sea Change Sustainability Charter proposed the establishment of an inter-jurisdictional advisory group to advise on and assist in implementation of the strategies indicated in the Charter.

An interim working group representing the National Sea Change Taskforce, NRM groups, CSIRO, the Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies at the Australian National University and Griffith University considered the formation of such a group. The group recommended that a National Coastal Alliance be established to provide for cross agency collaboration and more effective interface between organizations with a common interest in the sustainability of the coastal environment and communities. The group proposed the following Vision and Mission statement for the Alliance:

VISION

To be the national information and communication interface between local government authorities, NRM groups and research organisations.

MISSION

The National Coastal Alliance will bring together stakeholders with a common interest in achieving sustainability of Australia’s coastal zone through:

- acquisition of information and dissemination of knowledge required to achieve the sustainable use and management of coastal Australia;
- advising on the research needs of end-users, including communities, decision-makers and policy-makers responsible for coastal planning and management;
- seeking the adoption of knowledge through education, training and extension to provide managers, planners and other stakeholders with the information needed to respond appropriately to issues that pose a risk to the coastal environment, such as climate change;
- facilitating the use of multi-disciplinary, integrated science and the adoption of planning and management tools to achieve the environmental, social and economic sustainability of Australia’s coastal zone;
- working collaboratively with relevant government agencies, researchers, non-government organisations, communities and industry to achieve these objectives.
- providing a primary point of contact by which partnerships and collaborations can be achieved between local and regional stakeholders and national and international agencies and research organisations.
REPORT

Australian Coastal Councils Conference

Held at Mandurah, WA on 3 and 4 March 2009

12 March 2008

NOTE:

Presentations from the Australian Coastal Councils Conference will shortly be added to the National Sea Change Taskforce web site at www.seachangetaskforce.org.au
SPONSORS

The National Sea Change Taskforce would like to gratefully acknowledge the support received from our sponsors:

Australian Government
Department of Climate Change

Australian Government
Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government
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SUMMARY

The Australian Coastal Councils Conference was convened by the National Sea Change Taskforce and the City of Mandurah to provide an update on key issues affecting coastal councils. It was held at the Mandurah Performing Arts Centre, in Western Australia, on 3 and 4 March 2009.

Australia’s coastal councils face significant challenges in dealing with the impact of rapid population growth and the potential impact of climate change. The conference provided coastal planners, managers and decision makers with insights into the key issues facing the nation’s coastal communities. The conference also provided an update on the latest demographic data and advances in knowledge of the potential impact of climate change on coastal communities and explored policy initiatives and strategies to address the environmental, social and economic impact of the sea change phenomenon.

The conference was organised by the National Sea Change Taskforce with major input from the Australian Department of Climate Change, the Australian Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government and the West Australian Department for Planning and Infrastructure. The event featured the launch of the initial phase of the Australian Coastal Alliance, which is being established as an interface between coastal planners and managers and members of the research community with a focus on coastal research. The conference also provided an opportunity to identify coastal research priorities and the key issues to be included in a submission to a House of Representatives Standing Committee Inquiry on the effects of the global financial crisis on regional communities. Key presenters at the conference included:

- The Hon Gary Gray AO MP, Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Development and Northern Australia
- Andrew Beatty – partner and environmental lawyer, Baker & McKenzie
- Lalage Cherry - Assistant Director, Coastal Adaptation, Australian Government Department of Climate Change
- Andrew Howe - Senior Demographer, Australian Bureau of Statistics
- Eric Lumsden, Director General, West Australian Department for Planning and Infrastructure
- Dr Kathy McInnes - CSIRO’s Climate Adaptation Flagship.
- Mark Newman – CEO, City of Mandurah
- Paul Rosair - Director Major Regional Projects, WA Department of Local Government and Regional Development
PROGRAM OVERVIEW - AUSTRALIAN COASTAL COUNCILS CONFERENCE

The Coastal Councils Conference included the following sessions:

TUESDAY 3 MARCH

Welcome: Barry Sammels, Chair, National Sea Change Taskforce

Opening: The Hon Gary Gray AO MP, Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Development and Northern Australia

Mandurah and the South West: An overview of the issues facing councils at Mandurah and in the South West region

Western Australia’s Royalties to Regions Infrastructure Plan: Presentations by Paul Rosair, Director Major Regional Projects, WA Department of Local Government and Regional Development

Climate Change Current Update: Presentation and questions with Dr Kathleen McInnes, CSIRO Climate Adaptation Flagship and Lalage Cherry, Assistant Director, Coastal Adaptation, Australian Government Department of Climate Change

Coastal Planning and Management: Presentations and facilitated panel discussion on current planning discussions and future research with Prof David Wood, WA Coastal Planning and Coordination Council, Dr Bill De La Mare, CSIRO Wealth from Oceans Flagship, Prof Tim Smith, Sustainability Research Group, University of the Sunshine Coast, and Libby Mears, Victorian Coastal Council

Launch of Australian Coastal Alliance: Barry Sammels, Chair – National Sea Change Taskforce.

Economic and Tourism Benefits of Coastal Trails: Charles Johnson, Executive Planner Special Projects, WA Department for Planning and Infrastructure


Concurrent Sessions – Field tour of Mandurah region and Coastal Management Research Priorities

WEDNESDAY 4 MARCH

WA Regional Development Initiatives: Eric Lumsden, Director General, West Australian Department for Planning and Infrastructure

Planning for Population Change – Presentations and questions with Andrew Howe, Senior Demographer, Australian Bureau of Statistics

Economic Strategies for Australia’s Coastal Regions: Facilitate forum discussions to consider options for stimulating local economies in coastal areas, with members of the Taskforce CEO Working Group
Coastal Emergency Response Planning: Russell Stevens, Director Research and Liaison, Dire and Emergency Services Authority of Western Australia

Community – Preparing for Ageing Populations: Mary-Lou Corcoran, Mayor, City of Victor Harbor South Australia

Current Coastal Priorities: Break out session followed by group reports and facilitated discussion.
TUESDAY 3 MARCH

WELCOME

Barry Sammels, the Chair of the Taskforce and Mayor of the City of Rockingham in Western Australia, welcomed delegates and said the conference was an important event for our member councils and for everyone with a stake in the future of the Australian coast and its communities. He said that it brought together representatives of coastal councils in every Australian state, policy makers at a State and Federal level, researchers who are focused on the coastal zone, and representatives of State and Federal government agencies and representatives of the private sector.

One of the most important things about the conference is the opportunity it provides for individuals and agencies with an interest in the sustainability of the Australian coast to work together to develop strategies that will address the challenges facing our coastal communities and the coastal environment. Those challenges are complex and difficult. Coastal councils are simultaneously attempting to deal with the effects of rapid population growth and high levels of tourism. Over the past ten years there has been a lack of resources to meet the growing demand for local infrastructure and services. Coastal councils are at the forefront of having to find ways to address the needs of ageing populations. They also face the challenge of how to prepare for the impact of climate change while at the same time minimising their potential exposure to legal liability.

These are complex issues and inevitably they will require cooperation between all three spheres of government. The local government sector cannot deal with them in isolation. Preparing for the impact of climate change, with associated rising sea levels and more severe extreme weather events, for example, is beyond the capability of a single local government authority. It requires a collaborative and coordinated effort on the part of each sphere of government to devise an effective response.

Then, of course, we have the effects of the global financial crisis on the Australian economy and the local communities that we represent. Coastal communities are at particular risk from the effects of the economic downturn. Their economies are heavily dependent on the tourism, property and construction sectors. Each of these sectors has been impacted by the financial crisis with flow-on effects for local economic activity. Finding effective responses to the effects of this economic downturn is a matter of urgency. And that is why we have set aside time at this conference specifically to assess the effects of the economic downturn and to exchange views on how to deal with them.

It is appropriate at this point to acknowledge the measures the Rudd Government has initiated to address the issues facing the Australian local government sector, including coastal councils. We welcome the Federal Government’s $300 million Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Program, announced last November, and the additional $500 million allocated as part of the recent economic stimulus package for strategic infrastructure projects. This program will be an important boost to local economic development and job creation in Australia’s coastal areas.

We also welcome the establishment of the Australian Council of Local Government as a means of achieving a more collaborative national approach between the local government sector and the Federal Government.
We also welcome the opportunity to be represented on the Council Steering Committee. The Steering Committee is made up of 22 local government representatives and the Taskforce is well-represented on this body. As Chair of the Taskforce I have been appointed specifically to represent members of this organisation. Three other representatives of Taskforce member councils have been appointed to the Committee. They are Mary-Lou Corcoran, the Taskforce Treasurer and Mayor of the City of Victor Harbor, Val Schier, the Mayor of Cairns Regional Council and Allan Sutherland, the Mayor of the Moreton Bay Regional Council in Queensland.

These appointments provide coastal communities with a strong voice on the Steering Committee and give us an outstanding opportunity to work with the Federal Government and other local government bodies to help solve the challenges facing our communities. To have this new forum at which local councils can enter into direct dialogue with the Australian Government on issues of national significance is a major step forward for the local government sector.

Turning his attention to the conference and program of speakers Barry Sammels said delegates would have the opportunity to consider the range of issues affecting coastal communities around Australia as well as some of the specific issues affecting coastal areas here in Western Australia.

The conference gives us the opportunity to share information and experiences about dealing with the issues affecting our communities. It gives us the chance to be brought up to date on the work being undertaken to prepare for the impact of climate change. And it will provide us with the opportunity to be updated on the latest demographic trends in coastal Australia.

We have a strong program of expert speakers on issues such as the legal implications of planning for climate change, the need for adequate coastal emergency response planning, and the steps being taken by one coastal council to respond to the ageing of its community. We have also set time aside for future strategy development.

He said that individually, none of us can know all the answers to the major challenges facing our communities. But collectively, I believe, we have the knowledge, the skills and the resources to develop effective strategies to deal with the issues we face. We are therefore setting out to advance our knowledge of the priority issues facing our communities, and we aim to advance our advocacy and research agenda and to do this with the input of our member councils and other representatives present at this event.

Barry Sammels acknowledged the strong support received from the organisations sponsoring this conference. Without their help and encouragement it would not have been possible to present the program of speakers that we have organised. He specifically acknowledged:

- The Australian Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government
- The Australian Government’s Department of Climate Change
- The City of Mandurah

He also acknowledged the support and extensive input into the program by the West Australian Department for Planning and Infrastructure.
OFFICIAL OPENING – THE HON. GARY GRAY AO MP

The Honourable Gary Gray AO MP is the Federal Member for the seat of Brand and is the Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Development and Northern Australia.

During his speech he said the coastline means much to Australians. They love to live on the coast. It defines our character and provides us with a more moderate and temperate place to live. He said we are rightly proud of our communities and the beautiful coastline. That is what unites everyone here today, more than the fact you live near or have an interest in our coastline, you all have a passion for and a commitment to ensuring:

- that we protect coastal communities;
- that our coasts are utilised well;
- that our coasts are there for future generations; and
- that our coastal communities are sustainable and resourced to face the challenges of the future.

That is why the conference is so important. We need to address the many complex and challenging issues facing Australia’s coastal communities and the coastal environment and we need to plan for the sustainability of this valuable national resource.

One of the biggest and most obvious challenges is continuing population growth. Growth can be a major benefit to a community. You only need to go to ghost towns in Western Australia’s hinterland to see what happens without growth and communal momentum. But growth at the pace and scale that has occurred along the Australian coast over the past few decades brings particular complications, stresses and mistakes. The migration to the coast has reached historic proportions. And our large and significant population is growing much faster than the rest of Australia.

What growth has meant over the past half a century is that many of the sleepy coastal townships and fishing villages that existed 60 years ago have been subsumed within rapidly expanding urban areas. Mandurah and Rockingham are examples of this. The population of Mandurah is over 60,000 compared to just a few thousand 20 years ago. Similarly, Rockingham has a population of over 90,000 compared to less than 25,000 when I was visiting the beaches here in the early 1980s. Within 5 years Rockingham will have a population of 100,000. Mandurah will achieve this within 15 years. Both Mandurah and Rockingham are growing rapidly - with all the good and bad that growth brings. And this phenomenal growth it is not over.

The demographers estimate that a further one million people will start moving to the coast from next year, 2010, as the 'baby boomer' generation continues to retire. That is in addition to the people who are already moving to coastal areas largely for lifestyle reasons.

I have been impressed by the research done by the National Sea Change Taskforce - congratulations Alan, Barry and the team - into what rapid growth has done to coastal communities and the coastal environment. The findings of your research will be alarming to anyone who is concerned about the sustainability of our coastal zones.
What the research indicates is that all around Australia we are seeing the increasing urbanization of the coast. Suburban development is stretching north and south of cities such as Perth and the capital and major cities on the east coast. It is also spreading to the east and west of Melbourne and Adelaide on our southern coastline, the Shoalhaven, Cairns, all experience these changes.

Coastal communities are attempting to deal with extraordinary growth pressures with limited resources so they are facing great difficulty in keeping pace with demand for infrastructure and services. The Sea Change Taskforce has stated that there is a need for a collaborative national approach to managing coastal growth and protecting the fragile coastal environment. The Rudd Government could not agree more.

It is for that reason that the Australian Government has committed to providing national leadership and working with local communities to address the challenges of coastal growth and to bring a new focus to other challenges facing coastal Australia. One of the first steps towards implementing this policy commitment is the establishment of a parliamentary inquiry into environmental pressures, including climate change, on coastal communities. This inquiry is being conducted by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Climate Change, Water, Environment and Arts - with the Deputy Chair being Western Australian MP Dr Mal Washer- and it has particular regard to:

- existing policies and programs related to coastal zone management, taking in the catchment-coast-ocean continuum;
- the environmental impacts of coastal population growth and mechanisms to promote sustainable use of coastal resources;
- the impact of our changing climate on coastal areas and strategies to deal with climate change adaptation; and
- mechanisms to promote sustainable coastal communities governance and institutional arrangements for the coastal zone.

The committee is currently holding public hearings across the country up until May and it is expected to report back to Parliament in late June or early August. The committee will be in Perth on 7 April and will be visiting Mandurah and Busselton as part of their investigations. This is just one of the steps being taken by the Rudd Government and the Parliament to identify, deal with and establish understanding of the particular issues that face the coast.

Another important announcement was made on 18 November 2008 in response to the emerging global financial crisis. In an effort to boost local economies, the Rudd Government announced a $300 million Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Program (RLCIP), with $250 million allocated proportionally to every council around Australia and an additional $50 million for strategic infrastructure projects. In February this year, in a move aimed at further boosting local economic activity, the Australian Government announced an additional $500 million over two years to expand the Strategic Projects section of the Program. This part of the program was set up to fund local government community infrastructure projects such as town halls, libraries, community centres and sport centres.

Also in February, aware that the effects of the economic downturn were having significant impact in regional areas, Minister Albanese requested the House of
Representatives Committee on Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government to conduct an inquiry to examine and report on the impact of the global financial crisis on regional Australia. The Minister stated that the Committee will report on the impact of the financial crisis on regional Australia and the role of the Commonwealth Government in ensuring that regional Australia is equipped to respond. Particular focus will be given to:

- the encouragement of economic development and employment; and
- the development of sustainable essential services and social infrastructure designed to enhance the liveability of regional Australia.

The effects of the financial crisis are being felt right across the nation, however regional areas tend to feel the impacts of economic downturns more acutely. Regional communities do not have the same capacity to absorb job losses and economic declines as the capital cities do. I know this is an issue that will be discussed at this conference.

The other initiative that occurred in February was the inaugural meeting of the Steering Committee of the Australian Council of Local Government. As you know, the Minister appointed my good friend Mayor Barry Sammels, the chair of the National Sea Change Taskforce, to the Steering Committee specifically to represent coastal communities around Australia.

Each of these measures is of particular relevance to coastal councils and their communities and they clearly demonstrate the Government's commitment to establishing a new partnership with the local government sector and to playing a national leadership role in addressing the issues facing coastal communities.

I have travelled the country since becoming the Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Development and Northern Australia and I am always amazed at the diversity I find every place I go. The challenges facing a rural town in Western New South Wales are different to the issues in rural towns in Far North Queensland and different again to problems in coastal communities here in Western Australia. One thing that I find common to successful regional and rural communities is the grumpy sense of self-reliance - a spirit of get up and go! Mandurah and Rockingham are great examples of places that have that sense of self-reliance - even though many people have moved here in recent times. You notice it when you see the effort people put in to local sporting clubs like the Pirates Rugby team, the Mandurah City Soccer Club or the Peel Thunder AFL team. You see it when over $200,000 is raised here in Mandurah for Cancer WA's 2008 Relay for Life - or when a school raises thousands for Victorian bushfire victims. You are exposed to it when so many people turn out to support the Seniors Expo, the Mandurah Crab Fest, and the Little Nippers Children's Festival. Harnessing community pride and energy is what Mandurah has done well and I congratulate Mayor Paddi Creevey for her hard work to make Mandurah what it is.

In conclusion, the Government acknowledges that Australia's coastal communities are facing some very complex and challenging issues. These issues cannot be solved overnight and they can not be killed off with a silver bullet. The initiatives I have mentioned today include immediate injections of resources to improve infrastructure and services in regional communities. They also include longer-term measures that will look at the best way to develop regional Australia and importantly coastal Australia.
I would like to acknowledge the instrumental role that the National Sea Change Taskforce has played in researching and identifying these issues and raising awareness of them at national, state and local level. Our challenge for the future is to make our coastal communities smart - great places to live with clever transport links, jobs and amenity.

MANDURAH AND THE SOUTH WEST

Mark Newman

Mark Newman, the CEO of the City of Mandurah, provided delegates with an orientation on the local area. He provided a history of the beginning prior to the 1800s later European settlement. The Mandurah Roads Board had been established in 1949 and this eventually led to the establishment of the City of Mandurah in 1990.

Mandurah experienced ‘hyper’ growth from the mid 1970s to the mid 2000s, with a 30 year average growth rate of 6.5%. The population had increased by approximately 10,000 people every five years from 1986 to 2006. The population was projected to grow to approximately 98,000 by 2021 and more than 115,000 by 2031.

As a popular destination for retirees Mandurah’s population had a higher than average proportion of older residents, compared to the State and National averages. The City also had a high proportion of low-income residents and large income disparities between the ‘haves’ and the ‘have nots’. There have been substantial improvements in recent years, particularly in the area of youth unemployment. There are concerns, however, that the area could experience high levels of unemployment now that the boom is over. Levels of education have improved in the City, but the numbers completing secondary and tertiary education are still behind State and National averages. The percentage of residents with a tertiary qualification has increased from 19.2% in 1996 to 26.5% in 2006.

Mark Newman told delegates that the economic downturn has had a detrimental impact on the City’s revenues. This had been partially caused by a slowdown in the resources sector and partly by a correction in property prices resulting from the end of the housing boom in Western Australia. The City’s revenues have declined and impacts were expected to be significant in 2009-10. There had been a sharp decline in the number of lots sold in the City, which were well down on a peak of 327 lots sold in the September 2005 quarter. In terms of total metropolitan land sales, Mandurah sales represented 13% of total metropolitan region sales in 2005-06, but had sharply declined in 2007. Dwelling Approvals peaked in 2003-04 which completions following on in subsequent years, before beginning in fall in 2004-05. He noted that unit approvals had increased as a percentage of total dwelling approvals, which reflected the City’s policy of encouraging a diversity of housing types and increased densities in the inner Mandurah area. A significant decline in dwelling constructions was forecast in 2009 and this was already being experienced. Average household size is expected to decrease from 2.39% per house in 2006 to 2.32% in 2031.

The City had been actively involved in the Cities for Climate Protection Program since 1999 and had been working to reduce the community’s greenhouse emissions. The City had already implemented measures to adapt to the impact of climate change, including providing setback and height allowances for rising sea levels, floods and erosion. The City had also adopted a best practice approach to development, including creation of extended foreshore reserve areas, native vegetation retention, diversity of housing type and density and mixed
use development. Climate change vulnerability assessment reports had been carried out in 2007-08 to determine measures required by developers to respond to potential climate change impacts. Mark Newman indicated that the WA Royalties for Regions Program and the Federal Government Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Program were helping to address the current shortfall in community infrastructure. He told delegates that the City had adopted a triple bottom line approach to strategic planning, financial planning, partnerships, organisational culture and values and community engagement.

David Smith

David Smith, the Mayor of the City of Bunbury, provided an overview of the greater South West Region of Western Australia, which consists of two regions: the Peel Region, which includes the City of Mandurah and the Shires of Boddington, Murray and Waroona, and the South West Region, which consists of 12 municipalities including Augusta-Margaret River, Boyup Brook, Bridgetown, Bunbury, Busselton, Capel, Collie, Dardanup, Donnybrook Balingup, Manjimup and Nannup. The South West region covers an area of some 24,000 sq kms and has a combined population of 140,000. Bunbury is the regional capital, and the greater Bunbury region has a population of some 80,000, making it Western Australia’s second city. Growth along the coast within the region is still continuing and property prices are still increasing. The Inland municipalities are not doing so well, however.

David Smith said the South West region has a diversified economy, which includes mining, construction, maintenance and repair work associated with the resources sector, transport, meat processing and agriculture. The region was not being noticeably affected by the global economic crisis, which David Smith believed was mainly attributable to the diversified nature of the economy. There are several major projects underway in the greater Bunbury area, including a $1.6 billion expansion to the Worsley Alumina plant, a new desalination plant at Binningup, a new silicon production plant for Simcoa, and the Bunbury by-pass project, worth $200 million. These projects are making a significant contribution to local economic activity.

WESTERN AUSTRALIA’S ROYALTIES TO REGIONS PLAN

Paul Rosair, the Director of Major Regional Projects, WA Department of Local Government and Regional Development, provided an outline of the Royalties for Regions fund, which was launched by the incoming State Government following the election held in 2008.

Royalties for Regions is a Western Australian Government funding program that will see the equivalent of 25 per cent of the State’s annual revenue from mining and resources royalties reinvested in regional communities each year. The money is in addition to regular Budget programs and in 2008-09 will be equal to about $675 million.

CLIMATE CHANGE CURRENT UPDATE

Dr Kathy McInnes - CSIRO’s Climate Adaptation Flagship

Dr McInnes told delegates that coastal councils and their communities are exposed to the full impact of climate change, including sea level rise, more frequent and severe weather events, changes in rainfall patterns and changes in ocean currents. She provided an outline of the current state of knowledge of climate change and the impact it is likely to have on Australia. Her presentation covered the evidence for climate change, scientific projections for the 21st
century potential impacts, and the steps available for responding to climate change. She pointed out that the Earth’s climate has always been variable, with ice ages occurring intervals of approximately 100,000 years. Sea level had increased by 120 metres since the last glacial maximum.

Dr McInnes observed that over the past 200 years, concentrations of greenhouse gases have continued to increase, and as a result the Earth has progressively warmed. The increases in temperatures since 1790 were mostly due to greenhouse gases. Over the past 100 years, global average surface temperatures have increased by 0.7°C, with most of the observed warming over the last 50 years being attributable to human activities. She reported that 13 of the past 14 years were the warmest on record since 1880. Dr McInnes said that emission scenarios and temperatures projections were currently tracking at the very high end of estimates. She told delegates there are two points of action: mitigation (addressing the cause) and adaptation (planned response to the changes). She observed that:

- Climate change is real and currently underway
- Most of the warming of the past 50 years is due to human activity
- Climate change will continue in the 21st Century
- Warmer and drier conditions are expected, with more extreme weather events
- Significant impacts are likely, but impact studies have not been well funded
- Planning will require anticipating change and wide dialogue on how to manage change

Lalage Cherry - Assistant Director, Coastal Adaptation Team, Department of Climate Change

As indicated by the previous speaker, the impact of climate change will create a major challenge to the future management of the coastal environment and settlements along the coast. This is a particular challenge for Australia, with such a large proportion of our population living in the coastal zone. It’s not surprising, therefore, that both the Council of Australian Governments and the Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council have identified the coast as a priority focus for climate change adaptation.

A number of initiatives are currently addressing this issue, including a ‘first pass’ National Coastal Vulnerability Assessment, being conducted by the Department of Climate Change, in association with State and Territory Governments. The assessment is aimed at -

- identifying the risks to the coastal zone from climate change (including the implications of sea-level rise);
- providing decision makers with a better understanding of the potential risks; and
- identifying priority areas for research.

COASTAL PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT

Delegates were told that the impact of climate change is just one of the issues that need to be addressed in order to manage the coastal zone for a sustainable future. As the Taskforce has frequently pointed out in its research reports, Australia’s coastal communities are defined by the quality of their natural environment. The natural landscapes and biodiversity of the coastal zone are among the major attractions that draw so many new residents and visitors to the coast.
This strong appeal of the coastal environment, however, and the continuing growth in population and visitor numbers, poses a threat to the long-term sustainability of the coastal zone. A panel of expert speakers provided an outline of the research necessary to protect the quality of our coastal ecosystems, and the Chair of the Victorian Coastal Council provided an outline of the new Victorian Coastal Strategy. The panel members were:

**Professor David Wood** is Pro Vice-Chancellor of the Faculty of Humanities at Curtin University of Technology. David holds senior positions on the West Australian Government's peak planning boards including Chair of the State’s Coastal Planning and Coordination Council, Deputy Chair of the Ningaloo Sustainable Development Committee and Commissioner of the Western Australian Planning Commission. His primary research interests are coastal and tourism planning. David works extensively on Sustainable Tourism Cooperative Research Centre projects and is leading a project in the CSIRO Wealth from Oceans Ningaloo Cluster. He presented an overview of West Australia’s approach to coastal planning and the research work that he believes is needed to fill the gaps in our current state of knowledge.

**Professor Tim Smith** is Professor of Sustainability Science and the Director of the Sustainability Research Centre at the University of the Sunshine Coast. His Centre includes over 30 researchers working on issues relating to building sustainable regions. Professor Smith has worked at several universities and before joining USC was a senior research scientist with CSIRO. He has also led research programs in national cooperative research centres, including being the theme leader for Citizen Science for the Coastal CRC. His research focus is on transforming society towards sustainability, particularly within the contexts of climate change and coastal management.

**Dr Bill de la Mare** is Theme Leader, Marine Nation, CSIRO Marine and Atmospheric Research. Dr De La Mare discussed the concept of uncertainty and the role it played in planning for climate change. He made the point that no-one knew with any certainty just what impact climate change will have on temperature or sea level, but that did not mean it was prudent to wait for more certain scientific information. Policy makers are always going to be faced with uncertainty. The only sensible way forward was to adopt the precautionary principle to minimise risk.

**Cr Libby Mears** is Mayor of the Surf Coast Shire Council, on the western coastline of Victoria. The Surf Coast is one of the fastest growing regional municipalities in Australia, with an average annual growth rate of more than 3% over the past 15 years. In addition to her local government role, Libby Mears is also Chair of the Victorian Coastal Council, and a state representative on the executive committee of the National Sea Change Taskforce.

Cr Mears provided delegates with an outline of the Victorian Coastal Strategy 2008, which is the third iteration of the Victorian Coastal Strategy. The 2008 Strategy sets a long-term vision for the future of the coast and provides policies and actions to guide decisions about coastal management over the next five years. The strategy adopts an integrated approach that addresses three key issues:

- Climate change which will result in impacts on the coast, including rising sea levels;
- Rapid population growth in coastal areas; and
- The health of the unique and valued marine environment.
LAUNCH OF AUSTRALIAN COASTAL ALLIANCE

The Executive Director National Sea Change Taskforce, Alan Stokes, said the Taskforce was announcing an initiative aimed at addressing a few of the issues facing councils and government agencies with coastal planning responsibilities and the Australian research community. The initiative was aimed at bridging the gap between the needs of coastal planners and managers and the research organisations, such as CSIRO and the universities which conduct relevant research in this area. He introduced the Taskforce Chair, Barry Sammels, to launch the initial phase of the Australian Coastal Alliance.

Barry Sammels told delegates that what the Taskforce was aiming to achieve with the Australian Coastal Alliance was to focus future research efforts on the priority information needs of coastal councils and other government agencies involved in coastal planning and management. It is also aimed at reducing the amount of duplication in research effort and gaining the most value from research expenditure.

He said the Alliance is not intended to be an advocacy body. It is intended to provide a forum for exchange about research needs. In time it could also become an effective reference group for state and Federal government agencies engaged in coastal policy development. The discussions and consultation about the role of the Alliance to date has resulted in the development of a draft vision and mission statement for the new body. The vision is -

To be the national information and communication interface between local government authorities, NRM groups and research organisations.

The draft mission statement indicates that -

The Australian Coastal Alliance will bring together stakeholders with a common interest in achieving sustainability of Australia’s coastal zone through:

- acquisition of information and dissemination of knowledge required to achieve the sustainable use and management of coastal Australia;
- advising on the research needs of end-users, including communities, decision-makers and policy-makers responsible for coastal planning and management;

For those of you who are interested in seeing the full vision and mission statement you’ll find them included in the papers in the conference folder.

Barry Sammels announced the composition of the initial steering committee, which will guide the further development of the Alliance, as follows:

- Dr Bill De La Mare, is the theme leader, Marine Nation with CSIRO Marine and Atmospheric Research
- Neil Lazarow represents the Australian Coastal Society on the committee
- Nick Montague is Manager - Environment & Planning with the Local Government Association of Queensland, representing ALGA and the State local government associations
Professor Tim Smith is Director of the Regional Sustainability Research Group at the University of the Sunshine Coast

Alan Stokes, is representing the National Sea Change Taskforce

Professor David Wood is Pro Vice Chancellor, Faculty of Humanities at Curtin University of Technology, Australia

A representative of the natural resource management and catchment management authorities

This steering committee will have the task of directing the initial stage of development of the Alliance - identifying members of its on-going steering committee, further amplifying the body’s role and function, deciding on its administration, its mode of operation and its resource needs. In closing, Barry Sammels said the development of the Australian Coastal Alliance provided a good example of how the outcomes of the Taskforce events are translated into practical action.

ECONOMIC AND TOURISM BENEFITS OF COASTAL TRAILS

Delegates were told the economic and tourism benefits of coastal walking tracks and other trails could be significant. They heard there is a bill currently before the House of Lords in the UK, which provides for the creation of a walkable route around the English coastline. The Marine and Coastal Access Bill was first proposed in April last year. The bill covers a broad range of marine issues, including

- A proposal to set up a new Marine Management Organisation under which many of the existing areas of marine regulation would be centralised and coordinated
- And, of relevance to this session, it proposes the creation of a walkable route around the entire English coast.

The proposal to establish the coastal walking route has been strongly supported by organisations such as the Ramblers, which believe that such a project would have major benefits for the fragile local economies in coastal Britain, and would also have significant ongoing benefits for tourism. A report commissioned by the Ramblers has found that opening the country’s coast to walkers will boost the nation’s economy by an estimated £128m ($270m). The report estimates that building a walking path along the whole length of the country’s coast would create more than 11,300 jobs. The Ramblers chief executive, said the group’s vision is for a coastal trail that brings economic and ecological prosperity to coastal areas – currently suffering badly in the recession. The Ramblers report states that investment in the project would improve walking opportunities, provide better wildlife protection on the coast, and would rejuvenate struggling coastal businesses. At the moment it’s claimed you can only walk along the coast for an hour on average before being confronted by an obstruction that would force you to turn back or head inland.

Delegates heard a presentation on the economic and tourist benefits of coastal trails from Charles Johnson, the Executive Planner, Special Projects with the West Australian Department for Planning and Infrastructure. He is also one of the local government CEOs who first initiated the establishment of the National Sea Change Taskforce, in 2004.
Charles Johnson said there were many different types of walking trails, and they can be of local, regional and state or national significance. He identified several coastal walks in Australia, including the Great Ocean Walk on the western coastline of Victoria, the Cape Naturaliste to Cape Leeuwin track in Western Australia and the Bibbulman Track, also in Western Australia. He said the Bibbulman Track was 963km long and took hikers an average of 50 days to complete. It is estimated that in 2004 the Track generated $14M in tourism and $7M in outdoor equipment expenditure. Average expenditure of track users in 2003 was $72 a day and expenditure could be as high as $737 for four days.

Apart from the economic benefits for local communities, there was investment in construction works associated with the tracks. He said that from 1987-2007 $9 million was invested in trail construction in Western Australia. Other indirect benefits included health rewards for users, community engagement and development involving volunteers, better levels of cooperation between local governments and increased awareness of ecological issues.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS - PLANNING FOR CLIMATE CHANGE

Delegates heard that Australia's coastal councils are facing a legal dilemma relating to planning decisions in potentially vulnerable coastal areas. The dilemma is that in considering a development application in a coastal area that may be vulnerable to inundation or severe events, such as a storm surge, how much weight should be attached to the potential impact of climate change and associated increase in sea levels?

In Victoria last year, the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal found in relation to a proposed development on the Gippsland coast that potential sea level rises due to climate change are ‘relevant matters for a council to take into account’ despite there being no explicit duty to do so. Meanwhile, the South Australian Supreme Court last year upheld a decision by the District Council of Yorke Peninsula to refuse a subdivision at Marion Bay on the grounds that the developer had not adequately addressed the effect of coastal retreat due to climate change.

Andrew Beatty is a partner specialising in environment law in the Sydney office of law firm Baker & McKenzie. He is also a member of the Australian board of Earthwatch and the International Conservation Union’s Commission on Environmental Law. He told delegates that the legal responsibilities of LGAs included the following:

- discharge statutory functions under enabling legislation
- comply with other, applicable statutes (Federal and State)
- observe common law duties (avoid negligence, act reasonably and afford procedural fairness)
- negligence elements (duty, breach of duty, injury, proximate cause) and defences (contributory negligence)

Andrew Beatty outlined the legal risks for LGAs, which include:

- may be sued in negligence for giving wrong advice; if land is incorrectly (re)zoned; or if development erroneously permitted
- may be sued for compensation by landowners who had an expectation that sites could be developed (or developed in a particular way)
- may be involved in lengthy and expensive planning appeals by unhappy proponents

He also presented a checklist of practical legal issues for LGAs to consider:
- are you aware of the issue?
- do you have access to the latest information (eg, CSIRO)
- do you have any relevant policies in place?
- are you already reviewing current policies?
- have you considered drafting new policies?
- what guidance has your State government or LG Association given you?
- can you satisfy any preconditions for relying on statutory immunity

CONCURRENT SESSIONS

Delegates elected either to go on a field tour of the Mandurah area led by Mayor Paddy Creevey and CEO Mark Newman or they attended a session aimed at identifying coastal management research priorities.

Coastal Management Research Priorities

This workshop session was facilitated by Professor Tim Smith and Dr Laura Stocker. The group of delegates broke up into four sub groups to address the following topics:

- Identification of environmental assets, risks and adaptive mgmt including:
  - Climate adaptation for foreshore areas – detailed assessment
  - Likely impact of rising sea levels on adjacent lake systems
  - Methodologies for valuing env'l assets
- Impact of climate change on commercial fishing
- Social and psychological barriers to change/motivational factors involved with change PLUS Engagement tools with communities – social, env'l & economic
- Better legislative framework across all councils to climate change

Each of the groups was asked to consider the following issues:

- Priorities research issues
- What can LGAs do to partner with others? Who to partner with? What councils can do to achieve research priorities?

GROUP REPORTS

Barriers to Change and Community Engagement Tools

This is about the barriers to change and the enablers of change as well as the research and development of practical tools for community work in affected communities. The questions that need to be considered are as follows:

- What are the key elements of the change and adaptation process for individuals and communities to accept climate change and address it positively?
- How can I manage the change process?
- What is the level of community and council knowledge?
- What is the level of community and council concern?
- What is the level of willingness to change at the individual and population level?
- How can these three levels be raised – constructively without panicking people?
- What are the transition pathways and tools needed to achieve a climate change adapted future?
What does a positive change process look like?
What are the key elements of a multi-strategy approach e.g. generic media campaign; education; regional initiatives regarding energy, waste management, water management; individual behavioural change; regulatory approach?

Impact of Climate Change on Commercial fishing, recreational use of waterways
- Requires comprehensive research on the impact of water temperature change to sustainability of commercial and recreational fishing
- Develop partnerships with all relevant authorities to identify research already underway to assess the effects of climate change on viability of fish species
- Advocate all levels of government to allocate funding to undertake the research and policy development necessary to mitigate effects of climate change
- To monitor and rate the quality of all waterways along the coast with assistance of Queensland’s Healthy Waterways Partnership
- Develop collaborative partnerships to facilitate communication and community engagement in relation to climate change issues
- Provide Local Government Authorities with resources to educate the community on the long term challenges associated with climate change.
- Improve the interface between research and policy
- More research required on the potential for commercial and recreational fishermen to share resources

Natural biophysical assets
Discussion points:
- Environmental assets – develop methods to find out what people value in terms of social, environmental and economic terms
- Framework for a method to define environmental values and link them to
- Start with a small group of champions to establish and develop core partnerships
- Once partnership gets traction momentum would start

Research priority:
- Develop methods to find out what people value (socio-economic, cultural, ecosystem services) and a method to then value biophysical assets – to connect values to natural capital and assets
- Develop core champions and a core partnership then opportunities will arise

Better legislative framework in relation to climate change
The group felt that current system is stymieing local government. The challenge is to overcome the system. The onus is on local government to respond to climate change but local government is fragmented and not resourced to do it. There is a need for a coordinated level of response and a need to instil the necessity to respond to uncertainties. There is a need for State guidelines that require developers to address critical points concerning climate change. Developers want certainty too.

The research focus:
- Find solutions to overcome the obstacles.
- Undertake literature research in the same way as other disciplines do, such as medicine. This would be aimed at identifying best practice to inform development of a new legislative framework.
• Identify best practice and ideas that can be used to inform a new legislative framework (to enable clarity and certainty in respect to LG responsibility) – LG doesn’t have the expertise to do the research
• Define what is “good governance” in regard to climate change for LG
• What is needed to indemnify LG?
• How to share the risk – no one can bear the whole risk – no one LG left exposed – agreed approach among all levels of government that creates a defendable position

Mechanisms:
• Coordination to overcome the inequities between larger well resourced councils and smaller ones to access research – similar to the Sydney study approach
• Regional approach – jointly councils communicate and contribute

End goals:
• BCA with zones and model that fits with the National Coastal Vulnerability Study
• Integrated coastal zone management framework
• Reduced inequity in funding models
• Governance framework that provides consistency of decision-making

WEDNESDAY – 4 MARCH 2009

WEST AUSTRALIAN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES

Delegates heard that Western Australia is a very large state with land area of more than 2.5 million sq km and a coastline with a total length of 12,889 km, which is nearly half of Australia’s total length of coastline. The person with responsibility for meeting the planning and infrastructure needs of the state is Eric Lumsden, the Director General of the West Australian Department for Planning and Infrastructure (DPI). Before taking up this position in 2007 he had extensive experience in the local government sector, having been CEO of the City of Melville and prior to that the CEO at the City of Swan. He was formerly a Commissioner of the City of South Perth and was Chair of the Eastern Metropolitan Regional Councils CEO Group.

Eric Lumsden outlined the state’s approach to planning and infrastructure. He told delegates that the major challenges for the DPI were growth management, climate change, infrastructure and social impacts. The key current issues for the DPI were the population born in the South West of the state, the largest impact of sea change impacts would be in the area south of Mandurah, which was also the area most likely to be affected by climate change. The increased frequency and severity of storm surges in these coastal areas is a matter of great concern. He said there is a need for baseline modelling to better understand climate change risks in the coastal zone, and to secure coastal water resources.

Eric Lumsden said there is an emerging national action program, to develop nationally consistent strategic planning approaches and tools for coastal development. The program includes: national benchmarks for key variables for climate change scenarios to inform planning decisions; national guidelines on a risk-based approach for estuaries and foreshores; and a national position paper on liability and responsibilities as a result of climate change impacts. There is a requirement for research and monitoring to support decision-
making and evaluate the effectiveness of policies and programs. This should include: identify key information gaps and incorporate into vulnerability assessments and monitoring programs; develop better understanding of socio-economic dimensions and resilience to climate change impacts; and building on existing national initiatives and protocols.

He said there is a need to strengthen co-ordination of government action at a national, state and local government level and across sectors. This should include: a review of implementation of the 2006 NRM Ministerial Council national approach to Intergovernmental Coastal Zone Management; develop a national approach to coastal policy; facilitate greater co-ordination between NRM and COAG processes; and strengthen regionally-based integrated planning processes. He said adaptation responses should include: improve understanding of vulnerabilities and resilience of existing infrastructure and settlements; enhance knowledge of potential risks when planning infrastructure and settlement patterns to ensure new coastal development and infrastructure is not placed in vulnerable areas; emphasise that the outlook is not all doom, with potential opportunities for innovative developments.

Eric Lumsden said there were six main adaptation responses, as follows:

1. Increasing risk awareness and being prepared
2. Increasing capacity of existing measures
3. Spatial planning
4. Strengthening defences
5. Managed retreat from vulnerable areas
6. Strengthening and/or moving seaward with coastal protection measures

PLANNING FOR POPULATION CHANGE

Delegates heard that one of the factors driving the changes currently occurring in Australia’s coastal communities is demographic change. Coastal areas have consistently experienced higher rates of growth than the national average. As we have pointed out elsewhere, the population in non-metro coastal areas increased by more than 1.25 million people over the decade from 1997 to 2007, and the residents of these areas currently represent more than 80% of Australia’s entire regional population. But they have also been at the forefront of other demographic changes, such as the ageing of the Australian population.

Andrew Howe, the Senior Demographer with the Regional Population Unit of the Australian Bureau of Statistics outlined the demographic trends and changes taking place in coastal local government areas based on the ABS Estimated Resident Population data for the year ended 30 June 2007. He noted that growth rates in Western Australia were well above the national average. The rate of population growth in WA for people of all ages growth from 1996 to 2006 was 34.8%, compared to a growth rate of 12.4% for Australia as a whole over the same period. Similarly, the WA growth rate for people aged 65 and over from 1996 to 2006 was 60.4%, compared to a growth rate of 21.4% for Australia as a whole over the same period. The WA growth rate for people aged 85 and over for 1996 to 2006 was 90% compared to a growth rate of 59% for Australia as a whole over the same period. He indicated these age groups would continue to increase at a faster rate for the next 19 years.

Andrew Howe also told delegates that the total population in sea change areas would continue to increase at a faster rate than the nation as a whole over this same period. His presentation included demographic projections for specific local government areas in Western Australia, including Albany, Augusta-Margaret River, Bunbury, Esperance,
ECONOMIC STRATEGIES FOR AUSTRALIA’S COASTAL REGIONS

This was a facilitated forum and discussion Delegates heard that at the end of last year, the Taskforce had begun to receive reports from member councils in various states that they were already experiencing the effects of the economic downturn. These reports indicated that development activity in some coastal communities had virtually come to a halt with flow-on effects for local job markets. The outlook for the tourism sector was also under a cloud. With the local economies in many coastal areas so heavily dependent on these sectors, it appeared that coastal communities could be in for a tough time for the foreseeable future.

Over the Christmas-New Year Holiday period, however, many coastal councils reported a major increase in visitor numbers, apparently due to large numbers of people taking local holidays instead of going overseas because of the decline in value of the Australian dollar.

Having been alerted to what appeared to be a decline in local economic conditions, the Taskforce decided to conduct a survey of members to assess the impact of the financial crisis on coastal economies. The Taskforce CEO Working Group developed a questionnaire on the issue and this was distributed to members at the beginning of February. A large percentage of member councils filled out the questionnaire and returned them to the Taskforce, providing a unique insight into current economic conditions in coastal communities all around Australia.

Apart from feeding into the conference session, the survey results will also provide input into the inquiry into the impact of the global financial crisis on regional Australia, which is being conducted by the House of Representatives Committee on Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government.

Alan Stokes provided delegates with an interim report on the trends emerging from the survey results as follows:

Unemployment

- High unemployment rates are a common feature in many coastal areas and appear to be increasing at the moment
- For example, the unemployment rate at Great Lakes (NSW) is 10.1% - more than twice the national average. In March 2004 it was 11.4%. At Kempsey the unemployment rate is 9.8%, which is expected to increase.
- Given the downturn in economic activity, the effect of skills shortages are not as critical
- The growing ageing population will increase demand for health and community services – a potential stimulus for employment in the future

Construction

- Construction is declining in many areas but continuing at a lower rate in others. In Ballina (NSW) local construction still is continuing at previous levels but this is
attributed to a major by-pass project. In Onkaparinga the construction of a desalination plant will offset the general downturn in the sector.

- In Copper Coast (SA) almost 10% of employment in the area is construction related.
- Construction in Shoalhaven is suffering due to the economic slowdown and subcontractors have been particularly affected
- Kingborough – a current local government initiative is the redevelopment of the CBD and development of a regional sports centre. The council expects unemployment to decrease

Property and development

- The property market is flat, with declining sales volumes.
- DA trends are down. At Wyong DAs in Q4 in 2007 were 507. In Q4 2008 were 365, down by 30%. But in terms of value these halved.
- Shoalhaven also saw significant reduction in construction certificases and halving in value of Q4 trends
- Rockingham –value of DAs in Rockingham fell from $227 million in Q4 2007 to $88 million in Q4 2008
- Coffs Harbour – Q4 2007 there were 368 which fell to 302 for Q4 2008. However the value fell from $77 million to $31 million.
- Some areas increased development activity – Bega Valley experienced a slight increase in DA numbers with an increase in value Q4 2007 $23 million Q4 2008 $37 million

Tourism

- In general the trend in annual tourism numbers in recent years has been static or in decline.
- International tourism is down, with particular impacts on centres relying on this market segment
- Tourism is most important to coastal economies, eg. Great Lakes (NSW) tourism is the largest local industry and Gosford City Council reports that 1 in 7 local jobs is generated by tourism.
- Christmas New Year period saw an unexpected peak in domestic tourists – trend across all LGAs in survey. In Gosford one major resort experienced a record month. This is not isolated. The Christmas New Year Holiday period set tourism records in a number of coastal areas

PRIORITIES FOR THE FUTURE

- Maintaining services in a tight economic environment. LGAs are experiencing a decline in revenues from investments.
- Strategies to maintain jobs in local communities and to ensure business viability are critical
- Survey indicated importance of high speed and reliable broadband for business. In 2005 broadband download speed in Bass Coast was 78% of best practice. By 2006 this had dropped to 7%. This puts the shire at a significant disadvantage if it wants to attract new business. Shire needs fibre optic cable
Ensuring a viable and sustainable agricultural business is critical – the primary industry sector is in decline in many areas. Priorities to stimulate the sector include – diversification, intensive farming, value adding, export and tourism links.

Education and training to improve skill levels in local workforce is seen as a priority, especially in areas of high unemployment, which will help to address long-term skills shortages.

The Way Forward

- Changing the tourism product to meet a different type of demand, which may become more seasonal
- Working with others including State and Federal Governments to devise tourism strategies to further develop and stimulate domestic tourism.

REPORT ON ECONOMIC CONDITIONS IN QUEENSLAND COASTAL AREAS

Cr Debbie Blumel of Sunshine Coast Regional Council and a member of the Taskforce executive presented a report on economic conditions in Queensland member council areas. All but one of these member councils had submitted the completed questionnaire.

She told delegates that Queensland coastal communities are facing a common range of issues including: rapid population growth; impacts on the economy – competition for jobs, stress on economic resources; impacts on communities and lifestyle; degradation of environmental values; need for infrastructure including transport, social and recreation facilities, energy supply and water self sufficiency. All Queensland Sea Change communities are experiencing population growth eg. Gold Coast (4.5% between 1996 and 2006) and the Sunshine Coast (3.5% for same period). Tourism numbers have continued to increase in all coastal LGAs - Gold Coast (10.6 million in 2007), Sunshine Coast (3.2 million in 2007) and Whitsunday (740,000 in 2007). She reported that Queensland has experienced strong economic growth in manufacturing, construction, professional & business services, health & communications. Agricultural base is still significant in regional areas, however facing challenges. Cairns, Fraser Coast and the Whitsundays are strongly dependent on tourism.

The major current economic issues in Queensland coastal areas were listed as follows: responding to the global economic crisis –community adaptation and job creation; economic strategies and programs; creating economic diversity and sustainability – support diversity eg Gold Coast marine precinct; providing Infrastructure – transport, telecommunications, community facilities; responding to Community Impacts – unemployment, housing stress, community health issues; availability of Affordable Housing – cost increasing, limited public transport.

Debbie Blumel compared the conditions in Queensland coastal areas a year ago with conditions five years ago: Last year there was a relatively strong economy, with growth in professional & business services, health & communications. The effects of the Global Economic Crisis were starting to be felt with a slow down in retail, construction and tourism. Five years previously the economy was continuing to grow with strong increase in the value of the construction, tourism and hospitality sectors and Increasing impacts on agricultural sector. The current economic outlook was for increased impacts from the global economic crisis, particularly in retail, construction, manufacturing and tourism. There was also expected to be a downturn in rates revenue, fees and charges. There had been strong growth in DAs in past 5 years but a reduction in DAs over the last 12 months. This decline...
was expected to continue. There has also been a decline in the construction sector, with a major impact in coastal areas, in particular a reduction in the number of larger developments. This outlook required LGAs to respond with programs such as Community Adaptation.

Tourism was identified as a key sector of the Queensland economy, making a direct contribution of 4.5% ($8.8 billion) of the State’s total revenue in 2006-07. In 2008 70% of Queensland’s tourism revenue was generated from domestic tourism. Recent trends in tourism indicated there had been an increase in visitor numbers over the Christmas/New Year holiday period. In previous years there were lower tourist numbers but a higher proportion of overseas visitors. The outlook for the longer term was low growth in the sector with greater appeal to the domestic tourism market.

In terms of infrastructure needs, there was a need for additional funding for telecommunications. There was also unmet need for integrated transport, such as roads, public transport and boat ramps, and both upgrades for and new community facilities. There was also a need for infrastructure for new development areas, such as drainage. Funding programs such as the RLCIP and Federal Government grants, including the Better Regions Programs, had been of assistance, as had State government grants such as the Regional Centres Program for projects such as centre revitalisation.

Debbie Blumel told delegates the survey had identified priorities to stimulate economic activity as follows: development and implementation of economic strategies and policies; strategies to hold develop and assist industry sectors, such as marine, export and knowledge based industries; community adaptation programs to develop a coordinated approach to building community connections and resilience; providing infrastructure to service business and development and undertaking local capital works projects.

She told delegates the following strategies and programs were needed to stimulate economic activity: developing targeted economic plans to respond to global economic crisis; economic strategies and policies to stimulate innovative and creative activities; programs to provide business support and facilitation, including liaison, support and facilitation; innovative ways of reducing housing costs for workers; developing high speed broadband connections and integrated transport links; initiating local infrastructure projects. Further possible initiatives included: programs to assist the community to adapt and create jobs; lobby government and encourage development of further infrastructure projects; develop skills in Community Education/ and Development; and work in partnership with the Housing Affordability Task Force.

COASTAL EMERGENCY PLANNING

Delegates were told the recent catastrophic bushfires in Victoria had shown how important it is to have effective planning in place for emergency response to a major natural disaster. But how well prepared are Australia’s coastal areas for a natural disaster such as a tsunami or a major inundation associated with the more frequent and severe weather events we are told will occur as a result of climate change?

Russell Stevens is Director of Research and Liaison with Western Australia’s Fire and Emergency Services Authority (FESA). He has 25 years experience in emergency response and emergency management planning. Russell manages FESA’s research program which
includes tsunami modelling in selected coastal population centres and monitoring impacts of climate change on emergency management. He provided delegates with an overview of FESA and outlined emergency management principles. During the course of his address he also indicated why coastal communities are at particular risk.

He said the four interconnected elements of emergency management were prevention, preparedness, response and recovery. The key to planning effective emergency management was building community resilience by empowering the community and making sure residents understood the risks and prepared for them. He said recovery is more effective if the community has resilience. Russell Stevens said coastal communities were particularly vulnerable because they were exposed to extreme weather events, they had a high percentage of older people and they tended to have high numbers of visitors. A number of smaller communities were also at risk because they had only one way in and one way out.

He said that climate change will tend to increase temperature and make summers longer. There will be more days with maximum temperatures above 35 degrees and fewer colder days. Sea levels would rise and there would be increased likelihood of high intensity summer storms and more intense tropical cyclones. There were a number of uncertainties about the impacts of climate change, but whatever the degree of change there will be potential impacts on emergency management. Community planning is essential. Any plan that does not consider the impacts of climate change is not a plan for the future.

PREPARING FOR AGEING POPULATIONS

Delegates heard that the ageing of the Australian population is one of the most pressing issues facing our society over the next 10 to 20 years. It is a major cause of concern to policy makers at all levels of government, in particular the agencies responsible for planning services such as the public health system and the local government sector, as it takes on an expanding range of services for ageing communities.

It is an issue of particular concern to coastal councils and their communities. Older people have specific infrastructure and services needs, and these needs are projected to increase dramatically over the next 15 years or so.

The conference was addressed by Mary-Lou Corcoran, the Mayor of Victor Harbor on South Australia’s Fleurieu Peninsula, and a state representative for South Australia on the Taskforce executive. Victor Harbor has the highest median age of any local government area in Australia, and the highest proportion of people over the age of 65 of any LGA in the country.

Mary-Lou Corcoran pointed out that the Local Government Association of NSW and Shires Association of NSW had stated in a 2004 report that 13% of the Australian population at that time was aged over 65. For the City of Victor Harbor, however, the percentage of residents aged over 65 years of age in 2004 had already reached 31.2% - a figure which Australia as a whole is not expected to reach until beyond 2050. This places the community profile for Victor Harbor almost 40 years ahead of the national trend. She said the City had developed four levels of response to the ageing of its community:

- Collaborative Service Planning
  - Internal – multi-disciplinary teams
  - External - Southern Fleurieu Positive Ageing Taskforce
• Strategic
  ▪ Council’s Strategic Plan
  ▪ Urban Growth Management Strategy
• Planning Policy
  ▪ Residential (Hindmarsh Valley) DPA
• Planning Development Assessment
  ▪ Residential Accommodation for the Aged and people with disabilities

She said that internal multi-disciplinary teams bring together professions within the Council, including planners, social planners, building officers, engineers. They listen to and understand each other’s views, advice and opinions. Meanwhile, an external group of health and aged care service providers and local governments was established in 1999 to develop a 10 year strategic plan for ageing. This external group, called the Southern Fleurieu Positive Ageing Taskforce, conducted research into ageing, provided an advisory and coordinating role, facilitated planning across sectors, ensured that community infrastructure, resources and services kept pace with development.

The City of Victor Harbor Strategic Directions 2006-2009 details the actions Council will undertake to achieve vision. It sets out a response to two-fold pressures of significant population growth and a rapidly ageing community, informs short term operational plans and financial plans. Actions responding to ageing community are included in each of the City’s six broad strategic directions. Examples of actions responding to the needs of an ageing population included the following:

• Governance and Administration - Determine the implications of the State Government’s population policy. Identify Council’s response to the National Strategy for an Ageing Australia
• Environment and Open Space - Support the involvement of volunteers in the maintenance and development of reserves
• Assets and Infrastructure - Ensure that the planning, design and construction of infrastructure and open space considers the particular needs of an ageing community. Develop a pedestrian strategy that considers current and projected needs, including Electric Mobility Scooters (Gophers)
• Local Business and Investment - Improve understanding of the business and investment opportunities provided by an ageing population.
• Urban and Rural Character - Amend policies relating to the use of public footpaths and support the broad adoption of adaptable housing principles.
• Community - Review Council’s Disability Access Action Plan and provide social impacts advice for significant development proposals.

Mary-Lou Corcoran said the City’s Urban Growth Management Strategy (UGMS) 2008-2030 encouraged a diversity of population while targeting younger people to live & work in the area. It was also aimed at achieving the sustainable provision of physical infrastructure & community services and balancing the pressures of a high level of growth by safeguarding the environment, lifestyle & prosperity. She said Each UGMS Objective is supported by strategies and actions for implementation covering the following actions:

• Increase provision of affordable Housing
• Increase Housing Diversity
• Identify areas for future residential facilities
• Improve public transport services
• Encourage the development of a child and family friendly community
• Develop community meeting places
• Facilitate provision of health and community services
• Ensure safe neighbourhoods through good urban design
• Improve disability access
• Encourage a vibrant community culture
• Ensure easy access to information on local services and facilities
• Consider models for social inclusion projects
• Support a volunteer referral service for residents
• Ensure roads and pedestrian networks meet the needs of older people

The City of Victor Harbor Adaptable Housing Planning Policy recommends that housing for aged people be located so that residents could interact with other sections of community. (Not “gated” communities). Such housing should also be within walking distance to services or public transport and provide an interesting ‘outlook’. The policy also included the following recommendations:

• **Site** - Reasonably flat, free of steps to facilitate mobility aids
• **Car parking** - Undercover, parking space dimension of 6m x 3.8m, Easy access between car park and dwelling
• **Design** - Step-less entries, wider corridors and door way openings, adequate circulation space for wheelchair and walker users, design easily modified, Internal fittings

**COASTAL PRIORITIES**

The final session of the conference was aimed at identifying the priority issues to be raised in the Taskforce submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into the impact of the global financial crisis on regional communities being conducted by the House of Representatives Committee on Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government.

The delegates were told this inquiry was critical from the point of view of coastal communities. It provides an opportunity to strongly advocate for the support needed to assist coastal communities deal with the effects of the economic downturn. Given that the Taskforce has just completed a survey of economic conditions in coastal areas it is in an excellent position to make input into that inquiry. Delegates then identified two key issues to raise in the submission, and formed two groups to consider these issues, as follows:

- Strategies to stimulate local economies in coastal areas; and
- Strategies to stimulate tourism in coastal areas

**Economic Stimulus**

Allan Bawden, the CEO of Bass Coast Shire in Victoria, reported on behalf of the group that considered strategies to stimulate local economies, as follows:

- Councils have a number of key roles to play. They are large businesses in their own right and they are a large community employer, with the capability to bring businesses together.
- One of the issues to be faced by coastal councils is that the economic crisis will have the effect of reducing the LGA revenue base, which means they will have less revenue to pump into the local economy.
The Federal Government acknowledges the value of committing funding to local community projects. There were plenty of worthwhile projects that required funding. The sorts of local projects appropriate for funding included infrastructure, in particular green technology, water harvesting, state of the art Bed and Breakfast establishments and solar energy initiatives. Other potential projects included those related to adaptations to climate change, measures to address ageing populations, accessible shared pathways around the communities. Affordable housing was an important issue in the downturn. The first home buyers grants were helping to alleviate this issue. There was potential to develop new partnerships with the private sector to tackle the issue. With the current low interest rates, LGAs have low debt levels and are therefore in a good position to borrow. Discussion about constraints to stimulating local economies included availability of land supply for major developments, the time required to get through the planning approval process. There is a need for state and federal support to streamline planning processes. Local Government revenue equates to less than 3% of total taxation revenue, so there is a need for State and Federal assistance to undertake stimulus initiatives. Unemployment is growing. There is a need for Federal Government assistance to initiate effective job creation schemes. The group believed that the financial crisis could continue for more than one or two years.

Tourism strategies in Coastal Areas

Paul Anderson, the General Manager of Eurobodalla Shire Council (NSW), reported on behalf of the group that considered tourism strategies in coastal areas, as follows:

- Tourism is a key factor in stimulating local economies.
- There was wide agreement that we need to develop a strategy aimed at providing visitors with an enjoyable tourism experience. Assistance is required from state tourism authorities to promote coastal regions. This should not be restricted to iconic areas.
- Federal stimulus package is required to assist in providing infrastructure to meet visitor needs, including jetties, boardwalks, caravan parks, mobile home facilities, parking facilities, bike paths, boat ramps, picnic facilities, toilet facilities and shade shelters.
- Develop strategies that encourage people to extend their stay beyond one day.
- Redevelop caravan parks and tourism parks to meet family requirements.
- Assistance required State and Federal Governments to address long term infrastructure issues, including transport to access coastal areas. Eg. Mandurah’s bus program.
- There is a need to review census data to determine what the real numbers of visitors are in tourist areas.
- Review the Queensland tourism model to assess potential application elsewhere.
- Incentives are required for operators to develop package deals to attract more tourists.
- Develop strategies to encourage local hospitality businesses to operate on Sundays and public holidays to provide additional employment and raise service standards. Review policies to facilitate seven day trading in tourism areas.
• There is a need for engagement with Area Consultative Committees and Regional Development Boards to establish access to RDA funding.
• Review ‘work for the dole’ programs to increase capacity for construction of infrastructure.
• Promote alliances of LGAs to assist with the development and exchange of stimulus initiatives.
• Review guidelines for national parks and what is permissible within these areas.
• Explore development of regional branding programs to identify benefits of collectively managing sign posting and directional signage, in consultation with road authorities.
• Develop strategies to ensure the marine environment is properly managed, maintained and protected.

CONFERENCE CLOSE

The conference was brought to a close at the end of this session by Cr Patti Creevey, Mayor of the City of Mandurah. She thanked delegates for their attendance and the conference organisers for their efforts which she said had helped the event run smoothly. She commented that the event had been very interesting and an outstanding success.
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Source: ABS (2008), Regional Population Growth Cat. No. 3218.0