

# **Benefits of integrated management in the coastal zone: Department of Lands and local government**

## **Introduction**

The NSW coastal zone is characterised by its immense social, environmental and economical value. It is where the majority of the state's residents choose to live and work and is a major focus for significant commercial and industrial activity such as fishing, aquaculture, shipping and transportation, coastal agriculture, mining, manufacturing and tourism.

The complexities of the coastal zone create a number of challenges for government especially in relation to the provision of housing, infrastructure, employment, goods and public/professional services, tourism and recreation and stewardship of the natural environment.

Under the *Crown Lands Act 1989*, the Land and Property Management Authority (LPMA) is responsible for almost half of the coastal land in NSW. Local government also plays a significant role in the coastal zone and among other things has a major role in the management of the Crown estate through the Crown reserve trust system and under the NSW planning framework.

The management of the Crown estate located along the coast has its challenges. There are past legacies and contemporary issues emerging from pressures related to population growth, changing demographics, demands for infrastructure and the growing threat of sea level rise.

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate, through a number of case studies the scope of initiatives where the LPMA and local government are achieving positive outcomes in the coastal zone through an integrated management approach.

## **Introducing the Land and Property Management Authority**

On 27 July 2009 the NSW Department of Lands was amalgamated with the Office of the State Property Authority to form the NSW Land and Property Management Authority (LPMA). A number of other departmental branches have also been transferred to the LPMA. These include the Hunter Development Corporation, The Office of Biofuels and the Lake Illawarra Authority.

The LPMA Crown Lands' Division (Crown Lands) works with business, local government and communities to help them grow and prosper through the provision of Crown land for economic development, housing, infrastructure, tourism, recreation and conservation. The LPMA is responsible for the sustainable management of more than 43.7 million hectares of Crown land – about half of NSW's total area. The Crown land estate encompasses the dry land and the submerged land of the State's waterways 5.5 km out to sea and includes the ocean floor, most coastal estuaries, many large riverbeds and some coastal wetlands

## **LPMA's role in the coastal zone**

The LPMA is responsible for the administration of the *Crown Lands Act 1989*, and is the 'owner' of all Crown land in NSW, which includes a significant proportion of the coastal zone. The *Crown Lands Act 1989*, governs the planning, management and use of Crown land in NSW, including provisions to reserve or dedicate lands for a prescribed purpose and for leasing and licensing.

Since 2006 all Crown lands across NSW that were not reserved or held under tenure have been progressively brought into the Crown Reserve System with the objective of ensuring the LPMA has procedures and systems in place to support the effective stewardship of all Crown Land. This process has included the creation of a number of new reservations, many of which cover existing reserves and include the:

- Submerged Lands Reservations
- Regional Crown Reserves
- State Park Reservations
- National Surfing Reserves

Under the Crown Lands Act, local government can be appointed to care for, control and manage Crown reserves. The types of uses and activities that can occur on Crown reserves are broadly defined by a "gazetted" public purpose, the provisions of any environmental planning instrument and by any additional purposes adopted in a plan of management. Plans of management document the framework for managing a land resource and are prepared in consultation with local government and the community.

The LPMA also has obligations under a range of other state legislation that must be considered in the administration and management of Crown land. Foremost in this context is the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act, 1979* (EP & A Act) and the various environmental planning instruments that sit under this Act.

Under the EP & A Act, local government has a pivotal role and a number of important functions in terms of setting the planning context and standards at the local level, the approval of developments and compliance.

In addition to its statutory obligations under the Crown Lands Act, the LPMA is a major stakeholder alongside local government in the development and delivery of Coastal Zone Management Plans, Coastal and Estuary Management Plans and the development of policy on coastal issues such as climate change.

The LPMA is also responsible for the state's maritime infrastructure at the 25 coastal harbours and the 21 river entrances, located in regional coastal NSW. The LPMA is also the lead agency for coordinating dredging in NSW and undertakes dredging on a strategic management basis within the entrances to the trained rivers and coastal harbours.

## **Integrated management in the coastal zone – LPMA perspective**

Integrated management is referred to in the Coastal Zone Inquiry (RAC, 1993) as the making of decisions and the adoption of policies that are not taken in isolation but in their widest context and must be consistent with the true and natural setting in which the

problems they address are found. Government not only has to work together but must make decisions together.

The basic philosophy of integrated management as referred by RAC (1993) is supported and is fundamental to the LPMA's approach to the management of issues in the coastal zone. While the primary purpose of this paper is to demonstrate the benefits of integrated management with local government the LPMA's approach also extends to other government authorities.

### ***LPMA and local government – common issues in the coastal zone***

There are a number of commonsense reasons for the LPMA and local government to work and make decisions together. These include:

- land use and waterway/estuarine planning
- access planning and management
- management of facilities and amenity
- asset management
- sustainable management of natural resources (biodiversity and water quality)
- protection of significant cultural heritage places
- emergency response
- interaction with natural systems
- management of risks and threats, both long and short term
- management of cumulative impacts

### ***Benefits of integrated management in the coastal zone***

There can be wide ranging benefits from adopting an integrated management approach. Experience to date, suggests that once organisations commence with this approach it creates momentum, which in turn can lead to more improved benefits. Some of the benefits that have been achieved to date by the LPMA and local government include:

- Sharing of resources, knowledge and technical expertise.
- Expansion of networks,
- Broadening of understanding of coastal issues especially from a state-wide perspective.
- understanding of roles and responsibilities
- less duplication of effort
- Strengthened relationships built on trust and respect
- increased recognition of the LPMA's role as a land manager.
- alignment of strategies/actions with community expectations – reduced confusion and greater security
- delivery of on-ground works that may not have been achieved (benefits from economies of scale).
- Leverage and access to funding opportunities that previously were ineligible
- Reduction in cumulative impacts

Nevertheless, there is always scope where improvements could be made and these include:

- communication within and between levels of government
- greater consistency on common and cross local government boundary issues
- utilisation of existing and potential revenue streams to assist management of natural areas
- trust and respect between organisations

## **Case studies**

The following case studies provide an outline of the type and range of opportunities that have been taken up by the LPMA and local government to implement an integrated management approach on coastal zone issues.

### ***National surfing reserves***

Australia and NSW in particular is blessed with some of the best and most consistent surf breaks in the world. Surfing in Australia provides an opportunity to interact with our oceans, to have fun and relieve stress, to improve health, and to take in some of the beauties of our coastal environment. Few of our surf breaks have been seriously affected to date by pollution or development.

The emergence of surfing as a recreational past time, professional sport and major sporting and tourism industry has driven government to evaluate its relationship with the surfing community and the importance of our surfing assets.

Surfers have voiced concern at coastal management decisions by local and state governments for years. They have been advocates for intrinsic values and attributes of the coast such as water quality and coastal amenity that most Australians appreciate. However surfers have lacked a united position in negotiation with government.

The LPMA and the local councils at Ballina, Clarence Valley, Kempsey, Newcastle, Sutherland and Warringah Shires have worked closely with surfers and local community groups to ensure some of the States iconic surf breaks are protected in perpetuity.

National Surfing Reserves (NSRs) has provided a mechanism for state and local government to engage with surfers. Local Steering Committees have been formed in the identification and creation of reserves. Those committees have included local and state government representatives, surfers and industry groups, indigenous communities and sporting organisations. In each case a strong bond has been forged with local surfers and a greater comprehension of the values and interests of surfers has been gained by government.

Reservation of land to protect values has been a pillar of conservation and recreation in the management of public land in Australia. The LPMA has been setting land aside for public recreation and conservation purposes since the 1890's. Most of our coastline, including beaches and foreshores, in NSW has remained public land as a result.

NSRs recognise and protect our iconic surf breaks. The NSRs are legally protected under the Crown Lands Act 1989, which maintains their values and opens opportunities for future custodianship by local communities.

NSRs provide an avenue for engagement and information (coastal observers) and custodianship and trigger informal advocacy such as Associations. They inspire respect from locals and visitors to share, respect and preserve these iconic surfing locations.

### ***Port Stephens foreshore management plan***

The LPMA is working closely with Port Stephens Council in estuary management matters to ensure the management of the estuary and its foreshores areas complement the conservation status of the Port Stephens Great Lakes Marine Park and to ensure that tourism, recreation and economic development opportunities are maximised for the benefit of residents and visitors to the area.

Over the last few years Port Stephens Council has been developing the Port Stephens Foreshore Management Plan with a range of stakeholders. The LPMA has contributed in a significant review of this document to ensure that best management practices, consistent with government objectives, can be applied on a wholistic basis.

Since the implementation of the Foreshore Management Plan the benefits of an integrated approach have been observed through improved planning, compliance and management of foreshore occupations such as waterfront structures (jetty and boat ramp licences) and significant environmental improvements made by the local oyster industry to their land based operations.

The LPMA also has a business partnership arrangement with Port Stephens Council for the Nelson Bay Revitalisation Project and the Corlette / Shoal Bay Waterfront Masterplan Project. Both of these projects are jointly funded by the LPMA & council and have achieved better integration of state/local government planning and management roles to allow for an injection of private investment opportunities to fund public domain and foreshore revitalisation.

Overall the partnerships between the LPMA and Port Stephens Council is allowing better strategic outcomes that benefit government, the community and visitors to the area.

***Wyong Shire Council – investment of income generated from coastal Crown caravan parks into estuary foreshore management and iconic Crown Reserves at Norah Head Lighthouse and Pioneer Dairy, Tuggerah Lakes.***

Wyong Shire Council manages, on behalf of the LPMA, several coastal Crown reserve caravan parks within the Wyong shire. Surplus revenue generated by the caravan parks is being invested back into local public reserves due to a partnership and planning arrangement between council and the LPMA.

Through the partnership, funding has been allocated to the iconic Central Coast Crown reserves which includes the Norah Head Lighthouse Reserve and Pioneer Dairy Reserve at Tuggerah. In addition, funding has also been allocated to estuary management and foreshore reserve improvements. Details of the benefits are as follows.

The Norah Head Lighthouse Reserve is a historic reserve at Norah Head with significant heritage, tourism and coastal environmental protection values. The reserve includes a caretaker cottage and two cottages suited to overnight tourism accommodation. The Trust has obtained over a quarter of a million dollars over the last two years to upgrade car parking, provide water and sewerage infrastructure and improve the amenity of the reserve.

The Pioneer Dairy Reserve is also a historic reserve with heritage, recreation and conservation values situated on the Wyong River floodplains which drain into Tuggerah Lakes. Funding has been used to renovate a heritage building on site and provide opportunity for increased revenue generation through commercial facilities. Assisted by this close interagency cooperation, the Reserve Trust has also recently secured a federal grant of a million dollars to invest in reserve improvements.

The LPMA works closely with Wyong Shire Council and the other stakeholders on the Tuggerah Lakes Estuary Management Committee and its technical implementation working groups. This partnership has generated \$1.7 million dollars in funding which has been allocated to foreshore reserve improvements over a five year period and includes foreshore stabilisation of Tuggerah Lakes; environmental rehabilitation and saltmarsh regeneration projects; improvements and upgrades to recreational infrastructure including playgrounds and cycle ways; improved foreshore access and upgrades to boat ramps; beach nourishment programs.

The LPMA and Wyong Shire Council are also in the early stages of preparing joint management strategies for the Wyong River and Ourimbah Creeks to address foreshore development pressures with jetties, boat ramps, reclamation and restoration of riparian vegetation.

The above examples readily demonstrate the benefits of integrated planning and the formation of strong partnerships through the delivery of projects that are based on sound planning, sustainable development principles and the sharing of knowledge and resources

### ***Coastal Zone Management Planning on the South Coast***

#### *Brief outline of CZMP process*

Coastal landscapes are dynamic environments where marine aquatic processes interface with terrestrial processes. Coastal communities are familiar with the systematic changing of the coastline in their local area at short time scales. This is the scale of the tidal cycle and frequently experienced wave climate (wave height, period and direction) that result in

daily to monthly or annual patterns of sand distribution on the beach, dunes and offshore bars.

Many communities have also experienced the impact of occasional extreme events on the coastline. For instance, the 1974 and 1978 storms that affected the NSW coastline resulted in well documented severe erosion of the beach and dunes at Shoalhaven Heads, Currarong, Callala Beach and Collingwood Beach in the Shoalhaven LGA as well as overtopping of the Princes Highway at Ulladulla. A number of Shoalhaven village communities have also experienced slow long term loss of beach or frontal dune landforms over a period of decades.

Recent research (Church et al 2006) has confirmed that relative sea level on the east coast has risen around 20cm over the last century. The adopted benchmarks are for a rise relative to 1990 mean sea levels of 40 cm by 2050 and 90 cm by 2100 benchmarks. Accompanying this predicted sea level rise are medium to long term climate changes such as rainfall intensity and seasonality, ocean temperature and changes to the frequency of major storm events.

#### *LPMA interest and responsibilities in CZMP process*

Under the *Coastal Protection Act* (1989), *NSW Coastal Policy* (1992), *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act* (1979) and the *Crown Lands Act* (1989) LPMA has responsibility for managing the values of its coastline assets in a sustainable manner.

#### *Benefits from LPMA involvement with Coastal Zone Management Planning*

Coastal Zone Management Plans deal predominantly with Crown Land. The beds of all the estuaries and the seabed out to a distance of three nautical miles are Crown Land. In addition much of the open coast and estuary foreshores are Crown land.

In all likelihood management options being identified in Coastal Zone Management Plans will involve works or management strategies for Crown Land.

As a result, it is clear that Lands should be involved in the development of Coastal Zone Management Plans in order to deliver on its responsibilities for Crown Land Management.

#### *The way forward – general*

Support to the planning process is provided through relevant regional offices. LPMA representatives on Committees have a good understanding of land management and land administration issues that are likely to arise in the planning process (and an appreciation of LPMA strategic position on these matters), together with an understanding of the most relevant coastal process issues.

LPMA staff access specialist skills that are available within the department and consult with these staff if they identify major concerns in relation to coastal process issues.

Regional Directors and other senior regional staff are made aware of key planning initiatives and include these matters in strategic discussions with senior Council staff.

Director Coastal and Estuary Infrastructure exercise a coordinating role over the Department's involvement in these processes on a statewide basis.

### ***Myall lakes river system***

The Myall Lakes system can be described as a large 'retention basin' capturing flows from the Myall River and then slowly releasing these flows into the Port Stephens estuary. Dissipation of waters from the lake to the ocean is slow due to the constriction of the lower Myall River which is long (22km) and narrow.

Following significant rain events in the catchment during 2007 and 2008, higher than normal amounts of fresh water flowed down the river and pushed salt water down the lower Myall River. This situation prevailed over the 2008 winter and continued well into the summer. In addition, lower than average winter air temperatures resulted in cold water temperatures in the Myall Lakes.

The naturally occurring freshwater flows, low salinity and cold water conditions led to fish dying and an increase in turbidity and suspended matter in the lower Myall River.

Around the same time (early September 2008) attention focused on shoaling at the mouth of the Myall River in an area known as the "short cut" which was seen by some community members to be a contributing factor to the water quality issue. The "short cut" channel lies on the eastern side of Corrie Island, which splits the Myall River at its entrance into Port Stephens. The western channel is larger and is the marked navigation channel.

Headlines such as "sick river" "toxic blend of pollution, low salinity" and "toxic cocktail of salinity and pollution" were splashed across newspapers and local residents formed the Myall River Action Group (MRAG). Regardless of scientific evidence that showed events in the Myall River as natural phenomenon and normal conditions would return, MRAG continued with a campaign calling on government to undertake remedial dredging.

### ***Response by government***

As the campaign grew, MRAG raised a raft of additional issues which crossed a range of government portfolios. Reporting by the media was largely focussed on the issues raised by the residents and MRAG and despite the scientific evidence portrayal of the government's response was not favourable.

In response, the LPMA convened a meeting of relevant government agencies and local government. The outcomes of the meeting included:

- the sharing of background information on the issues raised by MRAG and the development of a stronger understanding of the river system including water quality, ecosystem health, navigation and coastal and estuarine processes.
- confirmation that water quality issues in the Myall River system were not related to the entrance conditions and that dredging was not required to assist water quality.

- agreement of a whole of government strategy to address issues on a consistent basis.

### *Outcome*

As suggested by government, water quality in the Myall River system returned to normal and state/local government are working cooperatively on investigations to gain a far greater understanding of the hydrodynamic processes at river entrance.

The approach taken by state and local government on the Myall River is a good example where an integrated management approach on a coastal zone issue has developed networks, opened communications lines, developed greater trust and respect, shared resources, knowledge and technical expertise, broadened the understanding of coastal issues and clarified roles and responsibilities and avoided significant duplication of effort

### ***Tweed mosquito control***

The Mosquito and Arbovirus Research Committee (MARC) has identified the Tweed River as a priority area for mosquito habitat control. The mangrove systems of the Tweed River and in particular those around Terranora Broadwater contain significant habitat for the egg and larval stages of the *Aedes vigilax* mosquito. The *Aedes vigilax* mosquito is a primary vector for Ross River and Barmah Forest viruses.

The study site covers an area of 12Ha immediately adjacent to existing settlement and future residential release areas at Terranora and Bilambil. The site has a demonstrated mosquito problem with eggshell densities (as counts of eggshells per cc of substrate) in the order of 2.67 in places. A count above 0.66 eggshells/cc is indicative of mosquito densities that are problematic and requiring control.

Traditional methods of control involve chemical spray treatment. These approaches are costly and resource intensive. The LPMA, Tweed Shire Council, and Industry and Investment NSW have been working closely with Griffith University to develop strategies for the biological control of mosquito populations at the site. The Tweed mosquito control project aims to research and design low impact habitat modification methods for mosquito control, using a site of Crown land as a trial. If successful the project methods will realise savings for local and state government from the costly control of mosquitoes and the treatment of their effects on humans.

Preliminary stages of the project involve baseline site mapping, elevation and habitat surveys, hydrological modelling, mosquito sampling and fish passage and recruitment. Stage 2 will include plans for habitat modification; Stage 3 involves implementation works and Stage 4 monitoring. It is expected Stage 3 works will be complete by December 2010.

### ***Lake Macquarie City Council and Gosford City Council – heritage assessments and plans of management for foreshore heritage cottages at Little Pelican and Dark Corner, Patonga***

Complex planning and management issues have been experienced over many years at two similar Crown land foreshore sites with heritage cottages in Gosford and Lake Macquarie Council areas. Both sites are on prime foreshore land at Little Pelican, Swansea on Lake Macquarie and at Dark Corner, Patonga on Brisbane Water and have aboriginal and European cultural heritage significance including aboriginal middens and longstanding settlements that comprise small, discreet holiday cottage communities.

The challenges for the LPMA and councils include planning for and managing cultural and built heritage, social impacts associated with family attachment to the holiday cottages; sensitive wetlands and environmental values, potential threat from sea level rise; maximising public interest and benefits on foreshore Crown reserves and addressing building safety/standards and infrastructure requirements for the future.

Given that both the LPMA and the councils have significant interests in each of the sites and their similar nature and management issues a three way partnership was agreed by the councils and the LPMA. The partnership arrangement has allowed for both funding and in-kind resources to be shared and a broader pool of expertise to be utilised for both projects. The partnership arrangement has also allowed for the projects to run simultaneously so that heritage assessments, conservation management plans and plans of management could be undertaken together with significant cost savings made through the employment of a single consultant guided by the Project Steering Panel.

Through undertaking these projects with Council, a closer familiarisation has been maintained by each agency. This has allowed for realistic and workable management strategies to be developed which are considerate of the community interests.

### ***Key fish habitat trial project***

A significant amount of Key Fish Habitat (KFH) in the Clarence Valley local government areas is bordered by Crown land. This Crown land is often held under licence for grazing. Crown land under tenure does not commonly qualify for the numerous incentive funding options available through the Natural Resource Management initiatives. Although efforts from the LPMA have attempted to improve management of sensitive areas within Crown land such as riparian corridors and waterways, there is a genuine requirement to develop capacity with licensees to implement best management practices.

Sites inspected during the course of this project included areas known to be habitat for threatened species such as the eastern freshwater cod listed as 'endangered' under both the (Commonwealth) Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 and the (NSW) Fisheries Management Act 1994. The sites also include areas protected by State Environmental Planning Policy No. 14 - Coastal Wetlands, Marine Park 'Sanctuary Zones' and six nationally significant wetlands.

Crown land licensed for grazing and bordering KFH was observed to require management intervention, or improved management in 23 of the 27 sites. Of particular concern is the condition of riparian areas in the Clarence Valley local government area which have been neglected and exposed to unrestricted stock access. A vast majority of the holders, whose licensed land was inspected, are not complying with the conditions of their licence, particularly noxious weed control. Two sites were identified where occupation of Crown land was unauthorised and grazing at these sites is having a detrimental impact to KFH. By far the most common threat to KFH arising from Crown grazing licenses is unrestricted stock access to water bodies and invasive terrestrial weeds in riparian zones.

## ***Seven Mile Beach Reserve Restoration Project - Protection Of Endangered Ecological Communities***

### *Location of project area*

The project area is located to the south of the Crooked River; Gerroa is part of a Crown reserve 83972 which is under the trust management of Kiama Municipal Council. The site is bordered by the beach to the east, Seven Mile National Park to the south and Gerroa Road to the west. The length of the site is approximately 1.8kms and the width varies from 100m to 400m. The project area is approximately 34ha with all of it vegetated except for the old Gerroa tip site at the southern end.

### *Native vegetation*

The native vegetation consists of typical dune and coastal zone along the east coast of NSW. The vegetation ranges from incipient dunes of grasses and low shrubs, foredunes of tall shrubs to hind dunes of Open Eucalypt Forest, Open Banksia Woodland with Littoral Rainforest elements. The Littoral Rainforest is listed as an Endangered Ecological Community (EEC)

The project is designed to maintain and restore the significant biodiversity values of Seven Mile Beach, including key Endangered Ecological Communities Coastal Sands Shrub/Fern Forest with Littoral Rainforest understorey & Coastal Sands Forest with Littoral Rainforest understorey, while maintaining environmentally sustainable use of the reserve for public recreation.

### *Weed Species*

The overall site conditions was rated as medium with 9ha (30% of site) rated medium to very dense weed infestation. Approximately 21ha (70%) of the site is sparse to medium weed infestations with the weed density increasing from south to north and from east to west. A total of 23 weed species were recorded on the island. The predominant weed is Asparagus Fern with other high priority weeds such as Bitou Bush, Lantana, Madeira Vine, Cape Ivy and Turkey Rhubarb.

### *Project Objectives*

- To restore the biodiversity and integrity of EEC's present on Seven Mile Beach Reserve.
- To improve the value of Seven Mile Beach Reserve as key habitat for flora and fauna species.

- Protection of the assets and ecological function of the estuary's aquatic and riparian habitat along the foreshore as per the Crooked River Estuary Management Plan.
- The restoration of degraded foreshore areas as per the Crooked River Estuary Management Plan.
- To improve environmental health and management of the reserve as part of Crown Land's Regional Reserve Strategy.
- To complement the management of the nearby Seven Mile Beach National Park as it relates to noxious weed invasion and habitat destruction.
- To empower the local community to assist in maintaining the high environmental values of Seven Mile Beach Reserve, nearby wetlands and surrounding waters.
- To ensure long term care and management over Seven Mile Beach reserve in conjunction with nearby EEC's in the reserve and in Seven Mile Beach National Park.

*Benefits from LPMA involvement with Seven Mile Beach Reserve restoration project*

Partnership between Kiama Council and LPMA enables:

- the pooling of resources and expertise to tackle highly complex and expensive environmental problems that are beyond the capacity of LPMA and local government given limits to funding and resources;
- greater community engagement and satisfaction;
- improved engagement for Council with state and federal agencies including the Catchment Management Authorities and the federal government;
- funding applications which are of a higher quality and thus more competitive in an increasingly competitive funding environment;
- improved working relationship between state and local government;
- improved environmental, social and economic outcomes for the community.

***NSW waterways program***

The LPMA is the lead agency for coordinating dredging in NSW. The LPMA will also undertake dredging on a strategic management basis where boating access is likely to be influenced by the accumulation of marine sands within the entrances to trained rivers and coastal harbours. The management approach adopted by the LPMA (Ling, 2007) has been developed to ensure any available funds are applied in a strategic manner to achieve multiple outcomes for the benefit of all people of NSW.

Notwithstanding the importance of the trained river entrances there are significant areas of these larger waterways and other smaller waterways along the coast, which are used for a wide range of boating activities. Many of these waterways provide access to adjoining Crown land including reserves, some under the trust management of councils, and a network of State Parks.

The issue of deterioration of boating access in many of these waterways has been the subject of ongoing representations from councils, boating groups and community organisations, especially concerning access for recreational vessels.

In light of these representations, a major enhancement of funding under the NSW Government's Waterways Program was announced in 2008 for dredging projects that would make significant improvement to the navigability of the waterway, with a focus on recreational boating needs. All coastal councils in NSW were invited to participate on a dollar for dollar basis and be assessed on a state-wide priority basis as part of a 2 stage process commencing with expression of interests and leading to detailed proposals.

At the end of the assessment process, 6 Councils were offered and accepted funding assistance for 8 dredging projects. The projects are expected to be completed within the 2009/2010 financial year.

The main benefits of the Waterways Program include the alignment of strategies/actions with community expectations and the delivery of on-ground works that otherwise may not have been achieved. In addition new networks have been created which has lead to the sharing of resources and improved trust and respect

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