

Harbourview Function Centre, Newcastle – Thursday 18th November 2004
Attendees: 30

DISCUSSION GROUP OUTCOMES

Group One (Shay)

Positives / Values

- Good overall planning
- Proposed development such as airport catalyst for environment groups to collect environment information
- Bird diversity
- Crabs and benthic fauna and other marine life
- Tomago aquifer is one of the major aquifers in NSW and should be preserved accordingly
- Proposed opening of floodgates at Hexham will provide habitat for endemic waders and migratory waders
- Fish habitat and breeding ground
- Shore bird habitat
- Shellfish productivity
- Jobs from oyster farming
- Water quality that protects oyster industry but also environment (good environmental indicator)
- Good estuarine health acts a nutrient sink for aquatic life
- Whole of government initiative - "oyster industry sustainable aquaculture strategy" (Department of Primary Industries - Fisheries) will:
 - * protect water quality in oyster farming areas
 - * undergo public consultation
 - * be incorporated into SEPP62
- Oyster leases provide feral proof bird habitat
- NSW food authority manages NSW shellfish and monitors water quality for shell fish industry
- Relocation of ski competition to Lake Macquarie to prevent environmental impacts

Negatives / Issues

- Disposal of waste/sewage effluent into estuary from any residential development
- Restricted public access to foreshore land from residential and commercial developments
- No integrated/whole of estuary planning. No consideration of cumulative impacts. No review of accuracy of Environmental Impact Statements
- Ballast water – introduction of exotic flora and fauna. Most significant threat to Hunter River
- Environmental offsets by industrial developments in the estuary are superficial, therefore resulting in an overall loss of habitat, no additional habitat
- Disturbance to waders in natural roosting sites by fisherman and kayakers
- Habitat loss
- Number of waders have been decreasing due to:
 - * Loss of shoreline;
 - * Growth of mangroves – due to hydrology changes;

- * Increased tidal range from dredging; and
- * Continuing threat of industrial development at Kooragang.
- Kooragang dykes identified for industrial development in Port Environs Study (KBR 2003)
- SEPP 74 - Newcastle Port and Employment Lands still exists and is a threat to habitat
- Residential development allowed without environmental constraints, with possible impacts on aquifers.
- Wave activity from skiing impacting on banks

Opportunities / Strategies

- Use brownfield sites for industrial development
- Prevent cattle grazing on banks of estuary
- Educate public on impact of disturbance on roosting birds, eg kayakers and fisherman
- Tie in with oyster strategy (DPI fisheries)
- Better control of stormwater carried debris to prevent impacts on wildlife or ocean beaches
- Releasing tidal gates at Hexham Swamp
- Opening gates at Tomago Salt Marshes
- Ameliorate sea level rise
- Protect Kooragang dyke area as habitat and foraging for waders
- Controlling residential development in aquifers recharge areas
- Managing waste/effluent release. Prevent release into estuary
- Water sensitive urban design and runoff control especially residential development
- Educate people of Newcastle/Hunter on value of Hunter River – biodiversity, international significance
- Need controls on shipping and ballast water.
- Create new habitat rather than setting aside existing habitat as offsets
- Create and maintain development buffer zones

Group Two (Michelle)

Positives / Values

- Valuable resource – fisheries perspective, habitat (economic values of environment resource)
- Hexham & Tomago Wetlands – most important along NSW coast
- Ironbark Creek tidal gate opening

Negatives / Issues

- Delay in action (Oceanwatch have developed a chronology of community involvement and government responses which illustrates this)
- Dumping in SEPP 14 wetlands – Hexham Swamp, pre gate and post gate agreement with Hunter Catchment Management Trust and Newcastle City Council
- Ambiguous responsibilities of government departments, Councils and Authorities means no action
- Risk of plan not being implemented
- Urban development throughout the catchment
- Community are losing interest due to past inaction
- Pressures from Sydney population growth
- Water quality is an issue sourced from upper catchment – riparian & mining industry issue
- Illegal discharge despite salinity trading scheme
- Lack of community knowledge about importance of wetland
- Green Corridor not protected
- SEPP 74 a threat to conservation

Opportunities / Strategies

- Link in with Catchment Management Authority for State Government funding
- Publicity about excess development
- Implement Healthy Rivers commission recommendations
- Environmental impact assessment of gates and other flood mitigation infrastructure
- 'Fish everywhere' project in North Coast example- Farmers working together with government agencies to open floodgates
- Change criteria for 'State significant development'
- RAMSAR, CAMBA, JAMBA, Nature Reserve sites should be State significant
- Need to integrate the estuary plan with the metropolitan strategy (being developed by DIPNR head office)
- Department of Environment and Heritage has a national responsibility for protecting the estuary under CAMBA & JAMBA
- Importance of maintaining wetlands from a biodiversity perspective
- Education
- Use this project to get support from Department of Environment and Heritage
- Releases from dams too cold, should be taken from the top layers to reduce environment impact
- Focusing on tasks that could give tangible difference
- At a recent Marine and Coastal Committee (MACC) meeting with attendance from ocean fishers, estuary fishers and shellfish farmers and indigenous groups it was agreed that the single biggest issue is wetland rehabilitation – this is a very important message for this study
- Protection of the green corridor

Group Three (Phil)

Positives / Values

- Representative habitat and biodiversity
- The wetlands centre's educational value
- Kooragang Wetlands Rehabilitation Project
- Tourism/eco-tourism
- Good prawns/oysters/fish for commercial and recreational fishing
- Demise of polluting industries
- Hexham gates opening
- Hunter economy
- Long term memory and history of estuary (especially Walsh Island & other islands)
- Walsh Point for park and remnant pines (good view of city) and memorial of original workers
- Key trees identified in LEPs
- Passion of community to do positive actions
- Opportunities to clean up contamination sites
- Fish (big fish) coming back to river (e.g. jew fish)
- Historic seawall made from ship ballast
- Greening plan for Stockton
- Operating port providing more employment than on-land footprint
- Environmentally conscious industries

Negatives / Issues

- Lack of understanding about North Channel
- Pollution in South Channel makes sediment too contaminated to dispose
- Community perception of river as dirty
- Not enough information to spur public concern and action
- Closing of mosquito creek to flush between Newcastle South Arm and North Arm
- Using green field sites instead of brown field sites for development
- River is just a channel for discharge of polluted water, especially South arm
- Public contempt of industry and degree of pollution – have paid human and environment cost for development in the past
- Contaminated land, especially Kooragang Island
- Regional Land Management Corporation (RLMC) sterilised land
- Reduced public awareness of upper river
- Can't eat wild oysters
- Need to know more about erosion at Stockton associated seawall
- Mangrove invasion of saltmarsh
- Bank in front of Delta EMD and Onesteel – just dumped, needs replanting
- Ash Island habitats too accessible for vehicles into nature reserve.

Opportunities / Strategies

- Learn from the past to help manage the future
- Documentation of stories and history of previous workers

- Culverts under rail embankment to reopen Mosquito Creek
- Clean up Kooragang Island to rationalise opportunity for non-greenfield sites
- Avoid any more contamination of the river
- Jetty on north arm, at Tomago and at Ash Island
- Link Tomago House to rehabilitation sites and not surround by development
- Boat Harbour at Stockton needs beautification and public access
- Better information to residents
- Plantings along rockwalls in south arm
- Prevent SEPP 74 transport corridor
- Raise floodgates to allow tides to enter
- Residential and commercial development needs to prevent contamination
- BHP site redevelopment should utilise the working, dredged port
- Education to improve decision making
- Identify sites of Aboriginal heritage
- Protect arts & culture