

Hunter Estuary Management Study and Plan - Community Workshop Notes

Port Stephens Council Admin Centre – Wednesday 17th November 2004

Attendees: 40

Questions Raised (open feedback session)

- Moving towards a planning consent that needs to be completed before using the river
- Put in the study why this study is happening now. Reports since 1970 state that planning needs to be done – nothings been happening. Governments record is to ignore its own policies. What power will the study have and where will this fit in?
- What area does the study and Plan cover?
- How does this fit plan tie into DIPNR Lower Hunter Regional Study?
- How 'naturally' ecologically sustainable do we want the river to be? How will options be weighed up with so many people's different values?
- RAMSAR implications

DISCUSSION GROUP OUTCOMES

Group One (Michelle)

Positives / Values

- Ramsar wetlands
- It's not a lost cause
- Intrinsic
- Recreation/tourism
- Value fishing industry
- New rockwalls are being designed to provide fishing habitat
- Good public access, pathways etc at Raymond Terrace

Negatives / Issues

- Very broad study – risk of not achieving anything on ground.
- Planning framework is complicated; who do you talk to when you have a specific issue with the estuary?
- Urban Development pressures for Maitland and North Raymond Terrace
- Any remaining high land is being developed
- Population growth will lead to increased boat ownership
- Windeyers Creek – STP discharges 5,000,000 L/d
- Noxious weeds
- This is a long term study – what about problems that need fixing now?
- Williams River bank erosion due to wake boarding (increased rate of erosion)
- Lack of riparian vegetation
- European Carp increasing bank erosion
- Water supply for population growth

- Levee banks, higher volume of sediment pushing down estuary and floodplains not replenished.
(Often protecting marginal farmland)
- Stock accessing river banks adding to erosion
- Seaham weir should be removed. Only pump from here during floods
- Salinity trading scheme
- Mine discharges impacting on irrigation opportunities.
- River never flushes fresh due to the salinity trading scheme. As soon as a decent volume of freshwater starts flushing through, excess saline water being stored by mine operators is released.
- Loss of farming land to bank erosion processes
- Why should community pay the cost for bank erosion caused by boats – it's simpler to stop boats.
- Implementation of bank erosion mitigation measures limited due to liability concerns
- Frustration with 'ANOTHER STUDY'
- There is a delay in stopping bank eroding boats in the Williams river due to a lack of scientific research on wave impacts on bank erosion.

Opportunities / Strategies

- Weed management with cooperation between each of the councils
- Restricting wake boarding in Williams (and rest of) river
- Ban wake boarding until GHD (monitoring of bank erosion) study is completed
- Coordinated revegetation/possibly short term engineering works to stop erosion
- Boat users contributing to erosion control
- Bank erosion strategies combined with community access points – increase public value of river
- Extend bike track along river
- Designate areas for powerful boats that have adequate rock protection
- Working with CMA to have erosion covered in the Catchment Action Plans being developed to build on existing Blueprints.
- More public access along river, including additional facilities in areas that are already accessible.

Group Two (Phil)

Positives / Values

- Good area for skiing – need to make sure it is sustainable, all types of skiing
- Community interested in fixing problems
- Bird life, especially migrating waders – variety of habitats available (remove mangroves to accommodate where necessary)
- Some landholders are allowing rehabilitation works for bank erosion on their land and are willing to contribute to these
- River presents well to visitors, providing business for locals and region
- Has sustained fishing industry

Negatives / Issues

- Irresponsible water uses – wake size is dangerous for other users
- Landowners not prepared to fix problems
- Watering cattle in river
- Harm to banks needing a change in user behavior
- Cattle eating phragmites and destabilising the banks
- Seaham Weir cut flow from river changes the hydrology, increases bank erosion and loss of tidal prism
- Floods build up sediment in river
- River works have impacts elsewhere
- Not policing for excessive wake (last 6 yrs)
- Over loading of boats – additional sacks of water used to increase water displacement and subsequent wake
- No opportunity to rehabilitate banks with continued usage and wash
- Congestion on the water and boat ramps
- Undermining of banks in the area known as the 'the pines' which is halfway between Raymond Terrace and Seaham weir. In this area undercutting of up to one metre is evident
- Wind generated wave erosion
- Lack of fish in river
- Pollution from boats
- Unsealed road runoff
- Seaham wetland – used to be tidal, now dry mostly (ASS issue), drain filled in.
- Lack of riverside facilities

Opportunities / Strategies

- Better education
- Don't want zoning restrictions
- Better policing of regulations: waterway handbook
- Annual fees for boat users to fund bank rehabilitation: similar to having fees to use a National Park. This would stop the area being used by one off day trippers who are not interested in contributing to future protection of the banks.
- Regulate size of boats – need policing
- Ecological sustainability is paramount to all users – people & environment

- Speed/idle restrictions elsewhere has resulted in concentrations of activity and impacts

Group Three (Shay)

Positives / Values

- Recreational uses (boating, fishing)
- Levees and floodgates reducing flow of sediment to the floodplain
- Commercial prawn fishing and fin fish for eating
- Public river and estuary views and access
- River tourism (access up the river)
- Rich social history
- Active community groups
- High biodiversity – despite all the pressures
- Aesthetics – the river is beautiful
- Ramsar listed location – management obligations

Negatives / Issues

- Sedimentation
- Fragmentation of the estuary
- Loss of river delta islands
- Climate Change – increased flooding & severe storm events
- Closed Hexham & Tomago floodgates – negative impact on fish nursery & shorebird habitat
- Loss of navigability and tourism
- Willow tree debris impacting on recreational river uses
- Unsafe to swim due to contaminated runoff – antibiotics, viruses, dioxins, pesticides, hormones, chicken farm discharges
- Blue-green algae (phosphates)
- Bank destabilisation - including from boat wash & skiing
- Acid sulphate soil impact on water quality
- Privatisation of views & access (eg residential, industrial, commercial development on foreshore) eg Honeysuckle
- Seaham weir – blocking flow up the Williams and redirecting re-vegetation areas. Also adding salt water to Hunter River.
- Lost sense of open space due to development on the foreshore
- Decline in water quality (oil, salt, pesticide, herbicide, fertiliser).
- Negative impacts on biodiversity
- Dam discharges on prawns (cold discharges)
- Diseased (cancer) fish – pesticides (concentration of pesticides contaminated water with levees, floodgates and drains – lack of freshwater flushing)
- Salt impacts from coal mining and power generation
- Industrial discharge
- Litter (visual, fauna impacts) – cigarette butts
- Cost of dredging
- Higher risk of flooding due to blockages in flow (eg bridge piers)

Opportunities / Strategies

- Recycle dredged sediment (rather than dumping offshore) – bioremediate and treat
- Hexham swamp rehabilitation
- Kooragang Wetlands rehabilitation
- Green corridor protection
- Establish a 'Lower Hunter Estuary National Park'
- Industrial hemp crop trials for bio remediation of heavy metals
- Monitor biodiversity
- Energy dissipation systems for boat wash/waves (e.g. floating)
- Dredge billabongs to hold more water
- Community support for moratorium on estuary developments until protection plans delivered.
- Marketing – tourism experiences, "You are here" series of maps
- Interpretative (Aboriginal) second signage "Conquer" of river
- Reforestation of upper catchment to absorb runoff
- Pulsing of cold water discharges from dam to prevent large discharges
- Ongoing monitoring of water quality
- Timed release of contaminated water from behind weirs (saline, oils, pesticides etc.)
- Soil testing at floodgates for contaminants to understand the impacts of the water. Prioritise testing at most sensitive areas
- Replant vegetation to absorb contaminants and reduce erosion
- Control use of fertiliser and pesticides and herbicides to reduce runoff
- Education regarding litter
- Install gross pollutant traps (GPT)
- Maintenance of drains
- Control stormwater runoff with water sensitive urban design (W.S.U.D.) & treatment

Group Four (Karen)

Positives / Values

- Social lifestyle: beautiful scenery
- Value of healthy environment promotes community and social values/health. Destroying river values, destroying social/community fabric
- Honeysuckle making community aware of the estuary and values

Negatives / Issues

- Key ecological issues are recognised and there remains inaction
- Government not implementing their own adopted strategies
- Positive values of the estuary not recognised/publicised
- Shallow estuary seen as deep water port
- Pressure on the river due to emergence of subdivisions (increased pollution and runoff)
- Destruction of estuary from piece-meal development not looking at the cumulative impact.
- Destruction of small area of estuary because of BHP
- 'Global Warming' a very important issue that needs to be addressed.

Opportunities / Strategies

- Consider whole catchment as an integrated system
- Need to look at a balance between ecology and economic approaches. 'Developers are not going away.'
- Prevent gradual reduction and decay of conservation areas
- Plan to state not only what needs to be done, but 'how' it is to be done
- Development of a regional control plan
- Obligation to RAMSAR – international treaties to consider total catchment area
- Federal/state/local legislation for 'ecological sustainable development'.
- Implement Healthy Rivers Commission findings
- Introduction of the green corridor 'support and implementation'
- Re-introduce salt water environment to wetlands
- Education on the values of the estuary – targeting younger generations and wider community
- Single overriding authority to protect and police the estuary
- Plan should include proposed and future development 'holistic' approach. For example as stated in 'healthy rivers'
- Promote 'eco tourism' for estuary as they have in Japan