

Hunter Estuary Management Plan

VISION, CONSIDERATIONS AND OBJECTIVES

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Hunter Coast and Estuary Management Committee



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BACKGROUND

An Estuary Management Plan is being developed for the Hunter River Estuary in accordance with the NSW Estuary Management Policy and NSW Coastal Policy. These policies aim to achieve effective management of the state's coast and estuaries through a series of actions and initiatives underpinned by the principles of Ecologically Sustainable Development. The policies also recognised the issue of climate change and aim to incorporate aspects such as sea level rise into future management plans.

The Hunter River Estuary Management Plan will be a strategic natural resources planning and management document aimed at securing long-term sustainability of the estuary, taking into account the estuary's ecological, social and economic values and uses. It is recognised that the Plan needs to strike a reasonable and effective balance between competing values to achieve the stated goal.

Community and stakeholder consultation has been carried out to help identify a range of estuary values and issues. The values represent those features of the estuary that are good and worthy of conservation and/or recognition. The issues represent problems with the estuary that need to be resolved in the future.

The values and issues associated with the Hunter River Estuary have been documented in an 'Issues Paper' (Parsons Brinckerhoff, 2006). Many issues have evolved through poor estuary and land management practices in the past, while others relate to the likely impact of catchment development in the future.

THIS DOCUMENT

This document presents the vision, considerations and objectives that will be used in developing management strategies and recommended actions for the Hunter Estuary Management Plan. It will form part of the Estuary Management Study and Management Plan.

A **vision** statement has been prepared by the Hunter Coast and Estuary Management Committee to promulgate the overall intent of future management of the estuary.

The **considerations** are a series of statements about the significance and values of the estuary. These considerations have been accommodated in the development of all management objectives, and will be further referenced when developing management strategies and options in the near future.

The **objectives** define the specific aims of the Plan, essentially defining the "goal posts" for which future management of the estuary should be targeted towards. The objectives have been prioritised (ranked from most important to least important) by representatives of the Hunter Coast and Estuary Management Committee in consultation with key estuary users. Prioritisation of the objectives will be used when defining works programs for future management actions – the most important objectives will be the first to be addressed by proposed management strategies.

A suite of future management **strategies** will be developed to address these objectives. The strategies will undergo a detailed multi-criteria assessment to determine which ones will give the best result for the estuary. The assessment will consider the:

- Effectiveness of the strategy in addressing the specific management issues;
- Acceptance of the strategy by the community and stakeholders;

- Number of specific objectives addressed by each individual management strategy;
- Priority of the objectives addressed by the strategy;
- Cost of the strategy; and
- Integration with other relevant strategic planning frameworks.

Only the preferred strategies will be detailed in the final Estuary Management Plan, enabling Councils and other agencies to concentrate their efforts on actions that will truly benefit the Hunter River Estuary and lead to a more sustainable and valued environment in the future, while also accommodating economic and social needs.

VISION

The community, industry and government working together towards a productive, economically viable and ecologically sustainable Hunter River estuary, recognising social, cultural and environmental values.

CONSIDERATIONS

Economic

- The deep water access and port-side activities of the Port of Newcastle act as a significant driver for local, regional, state and national economies.
- Agriculture around the Hunter Estuary contributes to local and regional economies.
- Fishing (commercial and recreational) and aquaculture within the Hunter Estuary contribute to the regional and local economies.
- The Hunter River Flood Mitigation Scheme has been developed to minimise damage, economic losses and risks to life during times of flood.
- The lower Hunter Estuary is considered a key attraction for tourists and recreational users to the area, with associated economic benefits.
- Wetlands within the Hunter Estuary provide habitat for prawns and fish, and thus are important to regional and local economics.
- Estuary and wetland rehabilitation works contribute to the local economy.

Social

- The Hunter River Estuary, wetlands and environs are of cultural significance to Aboriginal People.
- Newcastle and surrounds were one of the first sites of European settlement and the Hunter Estuary study area includes a unique variety of historical structures and sites of significance.
- The estuary is a significant landscape feature that determines the identity of regional communities and contributes to the amenity of the region.
- The Hunter Estuary is a focus for recreational activities in the region, including fishing, boating, water skiing, bird watching, swimming, cycling, sightseeing and walking.
- It is important to the local community that they continue to be consulted and involved in management and protection of the Hunter Estuary.

Ecological

- The Hunter River Estuary and wetlands are of international significance, being listed under the Ramsar wetland convention, and utilised by 38 of the 66 migratory species protected by the Japan-Australia Migratory Bird Agreement (JAMBA) and China-Australia Migratory Bird Agreement (CAMBA).

- The Hunter River Estuary and wetlands is also of state and national significance, being utilised by a range of species protected under the NSW *Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995* and the Commonwealth *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.
- The Hunter River Estuary encompasses a diversity of habitats, including several Endangered Ecological Communities listed under the NSW *Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995*, as well as habitats critical to migratory birds.
- Estuarine vegetation communities of the Hunter River Estuary play an important role in providing wildlife corridors of a landscape scale.
- Wetland rehabilitation works around the Hunter (such as Kooragang, Shortland and Hexham Projects) are widely regarded and have produced notable positive results.

OBJECTIVES

Recognising the economic, social & ecological considerations described above, management objectives for the Hunter River estuary are, *in priority order*:

1. To protect and enhance estuarine biodiversity, particularly Endangered Ecological Communities (as listed under the *NSW Threatened Species and Conservation Act 1995*) and other key habitats
2. To increase appropriate native riparian vegetation along the Hunter River Estuary
3. To prevent catchment and point source pollutants from compromising social, environmental and economic values of the Hunter River Estuary
4. To optimise management of flood mitigation works and other flow control structures to enhance environmental values without compromising intended function
5. To prevent further bank erosion throughout the Hunter River Estuary and remediate existing erosion sites, where appropriate.
6. To provide opportunity for effective and inclusive stakeholder involvement in the management of the Hunter River Estuary environment.
7. To acquire knowledge relevant to environmental management about the Hunter River Estuary, on a priority basis
8. To achieve consistency and integration between the Hunter Estuary Management Plan and other strategic environmental planning and Natural Resource Management instruments and programs
9. To adopt catchment wide development assessment practices that considers and addresses cumulative impacts on the Hunter River Estuary
10. To ascertain the impacts of past works and activities on the tidal hydraulics of the Hunter River Estuary
11. To encourage development that maintains and enhances landscape values and ecological functions of the Hunter River Estuary
12. To prevent mobilisation of contaminated sediment and groundwater contamination from impacting on environmental processes within the Hunter River Estuary

13. To reduce the catchment sediment load to the Hunter River Estuary
14. To fulfil all requirements of international environmental management treaties and relevant conservation legislation in regard to the Hunter River Estuary
15. To prevent environmental weeds and pests from compromising the social, ecological and economic values of the Hunter River Estuary
16. To facilitate the adaptation of estuarine communities to projected climate change
17. To adopt a consistent approach to foreshore land rehabilitation and conservation along the Hunter River Estuary
18. To minimise environmental consequences of changes to flow and salinity regimes from upstream activities
19. To reduce the environmental impacts of the accumulation and migration of recent sediments within the Hunter River Estuary
20. To prevent further exposure of Potential Acid Sulfate Soils and to reduce the impacts of Actual Acid Sulfate Soils around the Hunter River Estuary
21. To increase appropriate public access and amenity to the Hunter River Estuary and wetlands, recognising sensitive habitats.
22. To enhance the scenic quality of the Hunter River Estuary
23. To facilitate appropriate reuse of sediment dredged from the Port of Newcastle
24. To minimise the environmental impacts of commercial sand and gravel extraction on the Hunter River Estuary

REFERENCES

Parsons Brinckerhoff (2006) "**Hunter Estuary Issues Paper**" Prepared for the Hunter Coast and Estuary Management Committee by Parsons Brinckerhoff and WBM Oceanics Australia, May 2006.