

# The COASTAL CONNECTION



## The time to act is now – Australian Coastal Report

The Federal House of Representatives Standing Committee on Climate Change, Water, Environment and the Arts released a very interesting inquiry report at the end of October called Managing our Coastal Zone in a Changing Climate: the time to act is now.

The report called for new governance arrangements for Australia's coastal zone and makes recommendations to improve management of climate change and environmental impacts on the coast.

The committee said it was an issue of national significance because some 80% of the Australian population live in the coastal zone and the concentration of Australia's population and infrastructure along the coast makes us very vulnerable to climate change impacts, including sea level rise.

The inquiry generated a high level of interest from communities around Australia. It received more than 100 written submissions and 180 exhibits. The committee also heard from more than 170 witnesses at 28 public hearings held around Australia. The report's 47 recommendations include:

- A call for national leadership
- A COAG Intergovernmental Agreement on the Coastal Zone which defines the roles and responsibilities of the three tiers of government involved in coastal zone management.
- Urgent inquiries into legal and insurance issues relating to climate change impacts on the coastal zone.
- Improved emergency management arrangements in the event of a climate change related coastal disaster.
- An awareness campaign to alert coastal communities to the key challenges facing the coastal zone.
- A comprehensive national assessment of coastal infrastructure vulnerability to sea level rise.
- Establishment of a National Coastal Zone database to improve access to information.



Lennox Head Business Excellence Awards winners with Don Page  
Photo courtesy of the Northern Star

## Lennox Head Business Excellence Awards

My thanks to the Lennox Head Chamber of Commerce for inviting me to their Lennox Head Business Excellence Awards.

A great night was enjoyed by all and I extend my heartfelt congratulations to Riley Burnett for winning the 2009 Business of the Year.

Other businesses recognised for their entrepreneurship included: Seven Mile Café, Vital Beauty, Life Works Pilates, IGA, Fitness Matters, Headland Beach Resort, and the Lennox Wave.

## New upgrades to Ballina TAFE

Work on the upgrade of facilities at the Ballina TAFE campus is well underway. Funding of \$3.3-million for the new facilities was announced in the June 2009 budget and included three new computer labs, and a fully equipped classroom and warehousing facility for students studying retail courses.

Welfare and general education teachers will also enjoy new classrooms, interview rooms and teacher accommodation while the Maritime faculty will see the addition of a new engineering workshop.

A new Nursing/Aged Care block was completed in 2009 and when this round of building work is officially completed Ballina TAFE will be one of the best-equipped campuses on the north coast.

This is very exciting for Ballina and surrounding districts.

## Health Cuts

Dissatisfaction with health services continues in NSW with nurses at far north coast hospitals recently taking part in rallies to protest against budget cuts across the North Coast Area Health Service.

The NSW Nurses Association said the budget cuts have resulted in the loss of hundreds of jobs for nurses and allied health workers and low levels of staff recruitment.

The Nurses Association said this had resulted in a reduction in community health services; overcrowding and increased waiting times in local Emergency departments; a reduction in hospital bed numbers across the region; and an increased need for patients to travel to gain essential treatment.

I support our nurses in their protests against the cutbacks. They do an incredible job in sometimes difficult and trying circumstances.

According to the New South Wales Government's own formula, we are under-funded in the NCAHS. We need at least \$60million per annum to give us parity with the State as a whole.

I urge the new Premier Kristina Keneally to put health at the top of her agenda or run the risk of the health system collapsing.

## Ocean Shores notches up 40 years

The Ocean Shores Country Club was full just before Christmas but not with people celebrating the festive season. We were instead marking the 40th anniversary of Ocean Shores as a community and place to live.

There were lots of familiar faces and lots of stories being told about characters and events in Ocean Shores over the past four decades.



## Climate Change

Whether you accept the science behind climate change or not there are practical initiatives we can do at a State and personal level, which will give us better environmental outcomes and help reduce greenhouse gas emissions.



### Practical things we can do at the State level include:

- Bio-carbon sequestration including soil carbon enrichment and plantation forestry
- Renewable energy sources including solar, wind, hydro and geothermal
- Greater use of natural gas in power generation
- Gross feed-in tariffs for solar panels making them more economically attractive
- Greater use of bio-fuels from non-agricultural land sources to decrease emissions

### At a personal level we can:

- Turn off all appliances on 'standby' at the power source;
- Install long life light bulbs
- Fit water saving shower heads
- Buy energy and water efficient appliances
- Recycle plastics, glass and paper products
- Compost organic kitchen waste
- Mulch gardens

## Alstonville bypass update

Work on the 6.2-kilometre Alstonville bypass continues with the project scheduled to be completed by December this year, weather permitting.

The \$102-million bypass will start at Sneath's Road Wollongbar and end near the Tropical Research Station east of Alstonville.

### Works being carried out at the moment include:

- Building earth mounds from stripped topsoil.
- Earthworks to the new road formation.
- Pavement gravel trials on the main alignment at the eastern end.
- Installing major drainage lines under the road embankments.
- Constructing the cattle underpass concrete slab between Wardell Road and Kays Lane.
- Constructing a side road detour on Wardell Road.
- Preliminary works to install noise wall barriers.
- Commencing bridge piling at Maguire's Creek arch and Wardell Road bridge.
- Commencing earth fill approach ramps for flyover at Kays Lane.
- Installing bridge piers at Kays Lane.
- Commencing bridge abutment works at Wardell Road.

If you would like more information about the construction of the Alstonville bypass please call 1800 074 588; email avbp@reedgroup.com.au or visit the display in the Kays Lane industrial estate.



Don Page with Linda Jones, one of the 3 lady jockeys inducted into the Iris Nielson Hall of Fame in late January.

## All Ships Reunion

It was great to see more than 200 people from around Australia at the recent All Ships Reunion in Ballina.

The event aims to reunite people who served on any ship and it is regarded as the biggest reunion of its kind in NSW and possibly in Australia.



## Ballina Bypass update

The Ballina Bypass is progressing very well with the section between Ross Lane and Cumbalum due to open at the end of this year. Most of the work will focus on the northern end of the project this year, which will include blasting to remove hard rock. The southern section (between the Bruxner Highway and the Cumbalum interchange) is currently undergoing soil settlement. Work to be completed on the southern section this year includes bridges to be built over Emigrant Creek, Teven Road and the Cumbalum interchange, a permanent detour of the Pacific Highway onto the new diversion north of Deadmans Creek Road and a temporary traffic diversion at the intersection of Teven Road with the Pacific Highway (to allow an interchange to be built). The entire project is due for completion late 2012.

The total cost of the three road projects in the Ballina Electorate, the Ballina Bypass, the Alstonville Bypass and the Tintenbar to Ewingsdale upgrade is \$1.15 billion. This is an enormous boost to our local economy and will provide jobs and flow on economic benefits until 2014. It will also save many lives.

## Meryl Brown Rehabilitation Unit officially opened

In a fitting tribute to Meryl Brown, the former Nursing Director at Ballina Hospital who died suddenly in June 2009, the hospital's \$5-million rehabilitation unit has been named after her.

The Meryl Brown Rehabilitation Unit is a purpose built 24-bed facility that incorporates seven double rooms, eight single rooms, gym facilities, outdoor therapy courtyard, patient dining areas and a kitchen.

It provides support for patients recovering from surgery or medical conditions.

## Rail Trails Bill defeated now reopen Casino-Murwillumbah line

The Labor Government's recent withdrawal of the Rail Trails bill is good news and indicates it is time for the Government to focus on something positive and reopen the Casino to Murwillumbah rail line.

The Rees Government knew the Bill wouldn't be supported by the Nationals, Liberals or the Greens so it wisely decided to shelve it. The fact the Government was planning to introduce legislation that would allow rail tracks and corridors to be potentially sold off to developers was extremely troubling and community groups including Trains on our Tracks (TOOT) immediately protested.

Recognising how unpopular the proposal was the State Labor Government proposed some amendments but communities weren't fooled and saw the threat to the future of public transport and freight rail options and continued to voice their concerns.

It was a victory when the Government withdrew the bill.

The Government should now use this opportunity to focus on regional transport and reopen the Casino to Murwillumbah rail line and develop plans to build a line to the Queensland border. The Queensland Government is well advanced with its plans to extend its rail line to Coolangatta at the southern end of the Gold Coast whilst the NSW Government continues to deny the benefits of that rail service continuing down into NSW.

The Casino to Murwillumbah rail line should be used for a commuter and light rail service linking towns and villages in the Northern Rivers.

The Labor Government should also put plans in place now to extend the line to the Queensland border.

## More support needed for small businesses

I continue to lobby for more support for small and medium businesses in NSW, particularly those in regional areas like ours. Some businesses have found the last 18-months tough going in an uncertain economic climate. The business forecast certainly looks a little stronger as we march into 2010 but the State Government can do more to help business operators achieve their full potential.

More than half (56%) of liquidations in Australia are occurring in NSW and bad loans in the business sector are six times worse than the mortgage sector.

The NSW Government also has the lowest confidence level by the business sector of any Government in Australia.

As the Shadow Minister for Small Business I applaud the Coalition's policy of a 15% reduction in payroll tax and a 20% cut in areas of high unemployment.

We need to make NSW the number one state for doing business and that means reducing workers compensation premiums, cutting payroll tax, getting Government agencies to pay their bills on time, fast-tracking infrastructure projects and slashing red tape.

The NSW Coalition's policy to change NSW and fix hospitals, transport and the economy are being well received.

The NSW Coalition intends to establish Infrastructure NSW that will fix the state's crumbling roads, rail and public buildings. The body will be overseen by an independent board to ensure projects are delivered on time and on budget and will meet the needs of the public now and into the future.

## NRMA report on Pacific Highway upgrade

The NRMA has completed a report card on the Pacific Highway upgrade and found the Australian and NSW Governments' target of duplicating the length of the highway by 2016 was unlikely to be fulfilled.

The President of the NRMA, Wendy Machin, said while the Australian Government should be congratulated for injecting much needed funds over the past five years, unless there is a further injection of funds, people using the Pacific Highway will have to continue to put up with a sub-standard highway.

Ms Machin said only 50% of the highway has been upgraded despite \$3.5-billion in State and Commonwealth investment since 1989.

The report found:

- Of the projects for which full data is available, almost seven in ten Pacific Highway upgrade projects finished late.
- 50% of the route remains to be upgraded. At the present rate of expenditure, government forecast estimate route duplication could be between 80-85% complete by 2014.
- The 2016 completion target is unlikely to be achieved without an injection of accelerated funding.



Ray Lawrence, Tina Twomey, Noel McAviney (Local Controller), Allan Gibson and Don Page. Congratulations to Ray, Tina & Allan on achieving their 10 year long service award.

## Mullumbimby SES Headquarters open and ready for action

Great news for the town of Mullumbimby with the new State Emergency Headquarters officially open. Indeed within days of moving in (before the official opening), the new headquarters were being used when the region was hit by storms and strong winds. I had the pleasure of joining local SES controller Noel McAviney, Emergency Services Minister Steve Whan and Commissioner Murray Kear at a ceremony to mark the occasion. The new operations headquarters came at a cost of \$235,000 with the Byron Shire Council contributing \$61,000 plus land to house the new building.

The State SES Headquarters allocated \$150,000 and the Mullumbimby unit provided \$24,000.

The Mullumbimby SES now enjoys a facility that includes specially equipped rooms for operations, communications, a workshop, storage space, a garage, kitchen and amenities. We as a community should be extremely proud and grateful to our SES volunteers for the work they do in times of disaster and distress.

## Immunise against Whooping Cough and save lives

The death of four-week old Dana McCaffery from Whooping Cough in March last year was a tragedy and has highlighted the importance of immunisation in our community.

The Northern Rivers unfortunately has one of the highest rates of Whooping Cough infections in New South Wales, and last year was in the grip of an epidemic.

Whooping Cough, or Pertussis, can be prevented through immunisation and we, as a community, should ensure we do all we can to stamp out this disease.

That means we need to get our children immunised. Sadly the north coast has the lowest immunisation rate in NSW with 30% of children not vaccinated against the disease. The average rate of children across NSW not vaccinated against Whooping Cough is 3%.

We should also be aware that Whooping Cough vaccinations wane after 10-12 years so adults should have a booster shot to protect themselves from the disease.

Early symptoms of Whooping Cough included tiredness, a runny nose and a mild fever which develop into violent coughing bouts followed by a deep gasp (whoop) and vomiting.

More information about Whooping Cough is available from your local GP or the North Coast Area Health Service.