

Minutes

Minutes of the Tweed Coast and Waterways Advisory Committee Meeting held Wednesday 9 August 2023

Venue:

Murwillumbah Community Centre

Time:

9.00am

Present:

Rhonda James (Chair), Tom Alletson, Chris Cherry (Mayor), Cr Nola Firth, Peter Comerford, Robert Quirk, Grahame McIlveen, Lindy Smith, Jonathan Yantsch, Larry Woodland, Brian Bycroft, Ben Fitzgibbon, Carl Cormack, Scott Benitez Hetherington, Jordan Vickers, Joanna Gardener, David Cranwell, Frances Smith-Wright.

Guests:

Janelle Saffin MP (Member for Lismore), Elisa Thompson, Rod McDonagh (NSW Maritime), Fletcher Mingramm (DPI Fisheries).

Apologies:

Jane Lofthouse, Naomi Searle, Marcello Sano, Adam Andrewartha, Ian Berger, Eli Szandala.

Acknowledgement of the Bundjalung Nation

Minutes of Previous Meeting:

Moved: David Cranwell

Seconded: Peter Comerford

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Tweed Coast and Waterways Advisory Committee meeting held Wednesday 14 June 2023 be accepted as a true and accurate record of the proceedings of that meeting.

Special Agenda to discuss with Janelle Saffin

Rhonda welcomed Janelle and Elisa.

Introduction and background to Tweed Coast and Waterways Advisory Committee

Rhonda gave a summary of the background and duties of the committee. Being an advisory committee allows Tweed Coast and Waterways Advisory Committee (TCWAC) to make recommendations to Council.

The Tweed River Estuary Coastal Management Program

Tom gave an overview of the Tweed Estuary Coastal Management Program.

High priority issues emphasised included: a highly modified flood plain, minimal vegetation on riverbanks and serious bank erosion. A Coastal Management Plan (CMP) has been prepared and will be implemented over the next ten years. The program will cost an estimate of \$26 million over 10 years, with some funded by normal operations and others by grants.

Three issues of concern were highlighted: post flood river rehabilitation funding; catchment management; and power boat wake (particularly wake boarding).

Management issues of concern:

- **Vessel wake and erosion**

Noted that in the CMP there was an action that Council recommends to Transport for NSW (TfNSW) Maritime that character zones be adopted in the river that would complement certain activities. It was proposed to include a conservation zone around Stotts Island and a restoration zone upstream of Murwillumbah – these areas would prohibit towing. TfNSW Maritime would not support the recommendation, and this has not progressed. This subject is polarising for the community.

Additional comment included:

- Erosion from wake boarding results in the investment of community money which is not an efficient use of funds.
- The river is considered to be used excessively for wakeboarding by the Gold Coast community.
- There has to be a compromise on how the river is used, with areas set aside for passive use.
- Noting that the Tweed is a high value biodiversity area.
- Towing enthusiasts want no further restrictions and are adamant that bank erosion is from flooding and poor land management, not skiing and wake boarding. Grafton has a code of conduct on the river that allows skiing but no wake boarding.
- Erosion stabilisation using rock will be required in many areas, so a major priority is to ensure that this is done in the most environmentally friendly way by incorporating fish habitat and revegetation. Reducing the wake pressure in some areas would enable a reduction in the use of rock engineering to stabilise the riverbanks.

- **Funding for post flood river rehabilitation**

The only post flood natural areas restoration funding that the Tweed has been awarded is \$600,000 from NSW Local Land Services (LLS) that is being used to rehabilitate flood damaged riverbanks near Uki. It was also noted that the NSW Environment Protection Authority (EPA) funded a river debris removal program that was a major benefit and appreciated by Council and the community. Council has written to the NSW government requesting that repair and resilience building for natural assets be included in post disaster funding programs. The value of the Tweed River as a drinking water catchment was emphasised and noting that it gets an insignificant fraction of the funds allocated to road repair. River systems are important assets, and we need more funding to preserve them.

Action: Janelle Saffin requested a summary of the history of these requests.

Janelle mentioned that she had heard of \$68m potentially available for funding and would follow it up.

Council has the mechanisms in place to rehabilitate riverbanks with support of other government agencies. Landcare groups do a lot of work up stream in the hinterland areas. They have received small grants of \$6000-\$8000 but would appreciate more funding.

- **Catchment Management**

Tweed Shire has the potential to achieve sustainable catchment management, however current institutional arrangements are very coast centric. Councils must prepare CMP's and get them certified. The Marine Estate Management Strategy highlights the threats that affect the coast. Poor water quality in freshwater rivers shows that a catchment management approach is required, but there is no overarching legislation or government agency that leads, funds or mandates integrated catchment management. The recently released Far North Coast Regional Water Strategy acknowledges these problems but does not deliver solutions for them. We need more focus on catchment management in NSW.

Additional comment included:

- The Far North Coast Regional Water Strategy has predicted a future loss of freshwater flow which will result in a decline in estuary health.
- LLS were initially created for the farming community and is agriculture orientated. We need a more environmentally sensitive body to look at catchments.
- CSIRO has done a study of the efficacy of catchment revegetation for flood control and there will potentially be funding made available to implement such a program.
- River condition mapping requires review. The last review was in 2008. Only 18% of waterways are in good condition.
- The previous Catchment Management Authority (CMA) did have power, but this was not transferred to the LLS.
- In a CMA project, the Tweed was broken up into sub-catchments. Planning prioritised catchments, with funding allocated. Landholders were on board with this, and the structure worked well. We need to go back to that model.
- More funding is needed for the control of Devil's Fig.
- There is no legislation in place to prevent cattle from entering and defecating in our water supply. This risk is highlighted in Council's Drinking Water Management Plan, but we have no mandate to control the risk. We need bold and visible policy from the State Government. We need to make it the new norm that cattle are fenced out of creeks and work with landholders on this problem. Council offers River Health Grants to assist landholders with achieving this outcome.

Janelle gave a summary of her impressions of the meeting and highlighted a few points:

- There are some longstanding problems with river health and degradation of riverbanks. Government mechanisms in this field are lacking. There is no one institution in charge.
- Northern Rivers Watershed Initiative – Potentially \$5m in funding coming soon.
- Post flood has been hectic and other actions have dominated. Climate change is not high up on people's agendas.
- LLS are a respected institution, though maybe not as integrated into community structures as they could be.
- Keen to follow up and target some of the above.
- Wake boarding – a polarising subject but need to look at the safety and erosion aspects.

Rhonda thanked Janelle Saffin on behalf of the committee for coming to participate in our meeting.

Janelle Saffin MP, Elisa, Mayor Chris Cherry and Cr Nola Firth left the meeting at 10.45am.

Business Arising:

BA1 Flood Risk Management.

Ben Fitzgibbon stated that NSW Flood Plain Management Program is very confident with the Tweed Shire Council's model for flooding. The model has been expanded further upstream. The Tweed flood study is a work in progress, and he would be happy to report back once complete.

Agenda – Project Updates

A1. Jordan presented the following project updates:

Hastings Point Headland Management Plan

The survey closed at the end of July and had a good response. The results of the survey reiterated issues that we had identified. People enjoy viewing the coastline, open views, bird and whale watching and connection with the natural landscape.

Improvements needed:

- 25% of respondents do not want anything to change.
- Concerned about status of road, more delineation of parking.
- Natural environment to be cared for.
- Cultural values.

Concerns for future:

- Overuse of area.
- Maintain area – open to everyone but manage impact.
- 50% - leave as is with better management practices.
- Keep it low key.
- Camping – 10% for and against.
- Picnicking – keep the headland bare of structures – down by kids' playground – have more trees to sit under. Understanding the different character areas and working within their needs.

Consultants are now preparing a draft management plan. This should be completed before Christmas and placed on public exhibition. Consultants to come to a committee meeting and give a brief on the draft management plan once completed.

The committee consensus was that natural values are of the highest importance in managing this area into the future. How this area is impacted will affect multiple local ecological communities. Increasing protection for the ecosystem on the rocky foreshore is an ongoing concern for the committee. It may be timely to include recommendations in a management plan for higher levels of protection for the rocky shore, and that these recommendations be provided to the NSW Government. Noting that this has been

attempted previously by Council, without being supported by the then Minister for Primary Industries.

Coastal Management Program community consultation

Consultants have begun work on coastal hazard assessments. Simultaneously the survey on Your Say Tweed went live on 12 July. Several weekend market visits to promote the survey to the public have also been completed.

Technical studies will be completed towards the end of the year. An Options Assessment (how to address hazards) will then be prepared and exhibited.

Jordan confirmed in relation to Fingal Head that the Coast and estuaries CMP program was aimed at coastal areas and not the Tweed River. Tidal inundation in the Tweed River has been mapped under a number of different future scenarios. This would be a tool for the council to use once we have developed an adaptation strategy. Council will need a well thought out policy before mapping tidal inundation as an 'inundation zone' as this would have repercussions for residents and landowners.

General Business:

GB1. Jack Evans Boat Harbour - stairs

Stairs to facilitate snorkelling and diving are being craned in tomorrow at Jack Evans Boat harbour.

GB2. Letter of thanks to Janelle Saffin MP

Robert requested a letter of thanks be sent to Janelle Saffin for her attendance at the meeting.

GB3. Cobaki Broadwater wetlands

Lindy gave a brief summary of hydrological and acid sulphate soil impacts being observed in the Cobaki Broadwater wetlands. There are multiple impacts from multiple projects affecting both surface and groundwater, and flora and fauna.

Next Meeting:

The next meeting of the Tweed Coast and Waterways Advisory Committee will be held on Wednesday 11 October at 9am.

The meeting closed at 11.40 am.

EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP TEAM'S COMMENTS:

Nil.

EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP TEAM'S RECOMMENDATIONS:

Nil.