

## MINUTES OF THE SHOALHAVEN HEADS ESTUARY TASKFORCE

**Meeting Date:** Wednesday, 16 June 2021  
**Location:** Council Chambers, City Administrative Centre, Bridge Road, Nowra  
**Time:** 4:00pm

The following members were present:

Clr John Wells – Acting Chairperson  
Clr Nina Digiglio – (remotely)  
Ms Robyn Flack  
Mr Gerald Groom – (remotely)  
Mr Phil Guy  
Mr David Lamb – (remotely)  
Mr Paul Ell, representing The Hon Gareth Ward MP – (remotely)  
Ms Jessica Zealand

Also present:

Phil Costello – Director City Development  
Michael Roberts – Manager Environmental Services  
Nigel Smith – Coastal Coordinator

Clr Wells assumed the Chair and gave an Acknowledgement of Country.

The Taskforce members welcomed Council's new Environmental Services Manager, Michael Roberts.

### Apologies / Leave of Absence

Apologies were received from Clr White, Clr Pakes, and Mike James.

### Confirmation of the Minutes

**RESOLVED** (Robyn Flack / Clr Wells)

That the Minutes of the Shoalhaven Heads Estuary Taskforce held on Thursday 3 December 2020 be confirmed, incorporating the Matters Arising set out below.

### Matters Arising:

Robyn Flack submitted the following notes to be incorporated into the Minutes:

#### 1. Item 20.1 – Dredging Options

Greg Britton's presentation in line 9 of the minutes in regard to the River Road channel noted:

"There are no distinctive natural processes that would lead to natural replenishment – this can only be achieved by artificial renourishment. This option would require ongoing maintenance". The Shoalhaven Heads – Channel Dredging and Beach Nourishment report to be considered today repeats this professional view. And yet a recent reply from Council to a resident on river road regarding bank erosion included the words "Hopefully some calmer weather conditions over the coming weeks and months will allow nature to take its course and more sand to naturally be placed back on the area in front of the rock revetment and along the foreshore". Observers of the channel and river bank know there are no natural weather processes which build the sand naturally along this area. Understanding this science is a vital input to future management plans of the area.

## **2. Item 20.2**

The issue raised by Gareth Ward MP regarding the spending of the portion of Tourism Grant funds is also of interest to SHET members. Could the SHET please request a copy of the explanatory letter sent to the Member for Kiama at number 2 of the recommendation.

## **3. Item 20.4**

The SHET members have conferred and agree that the Taskforce's purpose and objectives can be met and the SHET disbanded if/when a comprehensive and effective coastal management program is adopted;

The issues which the SHET still sees as needing to be understood include:

- The acceptance that Shoalhaven Heads has high recreation, economic and tourism value; not considered in the 2008 Estuary Management Plan which focused on the environment. The EMP Acceptable, Unacceptable and Tolerable Risks leant heavily to adaptive methods of management, this led to nothing being done to fix storm water drainage and erosion issues along River Road until catastrophe was looming.
- The 3 year permit to remove mangrove seedlings from the front of Holiday Haven Caravan Park approved with the express guidance that this maintenance work should be included in the CMP.
- A clear understanding of the mechanisms affecting the river road channel and the need for ongoing sand replenishment and other maintenance e.g. sand scaping of sand fans which build from the discharging 8 stormwater drains into the channel must be included in the CMP for regular maintenance.
- An entrance management plan for flooding which works and meets the needs of the community. It is the SHET's view that a couple of scenarios exist – simply – let the flood waters build until a force opens the entrance and scours a deep and long lasting opening. This option will see major flood inundation and high cost to private and public assets. Or, manage the entrance by intervention at specific points which releases the water and prevents inundation damage but fails to scour the silts which are wide and deep and result in a shallower and shorter lived opening. Further studies are needed to assess the value of a dredged channel towards the entrance.

CARRIED

## **Declarations of Interest**

Nil

## REPORTS

### SH21.1 Shoalhaven Heads - Channel Dredging and Beach Nourishment

**HPERM Ref:  
D21/208501**

Phil Costello (Director, City Development) explained that a grant funding opportunity has arisen since this report was drafted, and is being pursued. Further environmental studies and approval will be required to shore up a formal dredging project.

Robyn Flack passed her compliments to staff for this good report on the issues of dredging in the area.

Clr Wells recommended there be a change in nomenclature for the River Road boat ramp from the expression "Holiday Haven Boat Ramp", which is misleading as it is used by the whole community.

He also expressed concern that with revenue being spent in Shoalhaven Heads on Wharf Road Boat Ramp, the importance of the River Road Boat Ramp may be diminished. Both boat ramps are fully utilised.

Phil Guy noted the boat ramp in River Road is mainly used by caravan park residents, whereas the Wharf Road boat ramp is more likely to be used by locals and itinerant users.

Clr Wells raised the deteriorating condition of the beach in front of the caravan park.

Jessica Zealand has not been receiving Taskforce communications, and is to be included in circulations.

### **Recommendation (Item to be determined under delegated authority)**

That the Taskforce receive the Shoalhaven Heads – Channel Dredging and Beach Nourishment Options Report for information and endorse the next steps. In summary, the next steps include:

- Endorsement of the Transport for NSW (TfNSW)/Maritime Infrastructure Delivery Office) grant application and acceptance by Council;
- Subject to the provision of grant funding, pre-dredge feasibility studies will be undertaken including, but not limited to, hydrographic survey and land survey, engineering studies and terrestrial and aquatic flora and fauna studies for input to a Review of Environmental Factors (REF) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS);
- Subject to the outcomes of the pre-dredge studies, preparation of a REF (or EIS), including intergovernmental consultation, and submissions and approvals; and,
- Subject to environmental approvals from the REF (or EIS), prepare a detailed cost-benefit analysis to ascertain the viability of undertaking channel dredging and beach nourishment.

### **RESOLVED (Robyn Flack / Phil Guy)**

That the Taskforce receive the Shoalhaven Heads – Channel Dredging and Beach Nourishment Options Report for information and endorse the next steps. In summary, the next steps include:

- Endorsement of the Transport for NSW (TfNSW)/Maritime Infrastructure Delivery Office) grant application and acceptance by Council;
- Subject to the provision of grant funding, pre-dredge feasibility studies will be undertaken including, but not limited to, hydrographic survey and land survey, engineering studies and terrestrial and aquatic flora and fauna studies for input to a Review of Environmental Factors (REF) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS);
- Subject to the outcomes of the pre-dredge studies, preparation of a REF (or EIS), including intergovernmental consultation, and submissions and approvals; and,
- Subject to environmental approvals of the REF (or EIS), prepare a detailed cost-benefit analysis to ascertain the viability of undertaking channel dredging and beach nourishment.

CARRIED

**SH21.2 River Road Foreshore Precinct Rehabilitation Project  
Progress Report**

**HPERM Ref:  
D21/209794**

Clr Wells asked whether point (d) in the Project Update, “Undertaking beach scraping/nourishment works, supplemented from dry-notch maintenance, in conjunction with the Coastal staff”, is foreshadowing the relocation of sand from the dry notch to the river. Nigel Smith clarified the sand is from the stockpile from the dry notch maintenance at the entrance was used at the toe of the rock revetment wall in its entirety. The beach scraping was to move sand further east of the rock revetment. This work has been carried out and site completion surveys have been submitted.

Phil Guy advised the sand may be washed away now. The bank at that location is undermined, from south-westerly winds, but there is a large log there and as a temporary measure he suggested a bobcat be used to push it underneath the bank to stop it eroding. Phil noted the log can't shore up where the area is totally eroded, and some banksias on the edge are at risk, but it may help. He showed an image of the area to the Taskforce.

Regarding the sand, Phil Guy advised the stockpile has been removed so there is no excess sand. It should be a priority that work still needs to be done on it holistically. He explained that when the bank was identified as being at risk it was divided in 4 sections (A-D) and 4 priorities. B priority is east of the rock wall, where erosion is currently occurring, and another B priority is near the toilet block. Unfortunately, nature is telling us that while we're fixing this we're breaking that, and we need to move on.

Jessica Zealand recommended taking a long term perspective as this issue with the rock revetment is going to continue, due to ongoing tidal impacts when the entrance is open.

Clr Wells noted this erosion had been identified as a potential risk. Same phenomenon occurred elsewhere. He has had representations from the CCB Chair, which have been passed to the relevant Directors.

Michael Roberts clarified that in relation to the long term plan, this is an adaptive program, and will be captured in the Coastal Management Program (CMP) for the Lower Shoalhaven River. The Water Research Laboratory (WRL, 2016) tech report that had identified the zones can be revisited as part of the overall management of the site.

Jessica Zealand noted a concern of the community is how it is represented within the current estuary management and how that is reflected in the Estuary Management Plan (EMP) and then the CMP. The 1999 EMP report refers to living with the consequences. The Estuary Management Plan currently doesn't represent the view of the community and what needs to be done for the long-term management. At the moment the Plan is very restrictive on what can be done in the Shoalhaven Heads area.

David Lamb noted the Lower Shoalhaven Estuary Management Program committee has many community representatives on it. Those community interests need to have a voice.

Robyn Flack raised the matter of some Council work at Jim Napp's property on Bolong Road two years ago. Council had undertaken restoration work which is standing up very well. This work could be re-examined to understand why it is working so well.

Regarding the point “Rock revetment construction as per the design and peer review amendments”, Robyn asked whether all the requirements of the rock revetment contract have been checked and signed off. Michael Roberts confirmed they have, with some outstanding issues being worked through with the Project Management Team, to clarify the full execution of this scope. Originally, the tender specification was that understory species were to be planted on the rock revetment, but from a practical perspective there would be issues associated with their survival/longevity given the harshness of this environment. Assessment of suitable planting to partially cover the revetment is therefore ongoing.

Phil Guy clarified that Robyn had been referring to the infilling of the rock from 1.5 to 4 metres high not being included in the revegetation principles plan. The draft planting plan has missed this from contractor's specifications. He asked whether this is the case, and whether that requirement has been overwritten or omitted. Michael Roberts advised it was originally in the WRL report, and the landscape architect and Council's plans (supporting the REF) also included it. It was then the contractor who spoke to the Project Management Team and decided that the lower understorey shrub species were probably not practicable for those areas. He agreed with Robyn that Lomandra, Dianella vines and scramblers would work in certain areas, and this will be worked through with the Project Management Team. Environmental Services had also raised this with the team at the time

Phil Guy noted the bushcare volunteers in the area are keen to commence work to beautify it, including planting to strengthen the bank above the rock wall. Council's Bushcare Coordinator is aware of this. Cllr Wells suggested the Bushcare Coordinator liaise with City Services management to arrange for the bushcare groups to undertake maintenance. Michael Roberts confirmed that potential handover to the bushcare group has been discussed with the Bushcare Coordinator.

Michael Roberts advised that the non-native species are located at the eastern end of the wall at boundary fences where there is a private property. Phil Guy advised that the resident has been planting for privacy, to deter people walking around the property. Council staff confirmed that an Environmental Officer has spoken with the resident, and advised that while some species can be retained (native species), some of them can become environmental weeds and will need to be removed.

There is to be a meeting of the project management team on 30 June to discuss all of these outstanding issues. It was recommended that information be passed to the Forum that will come to SHET.

Jessica Zealand raised the issue of the 4 knot zone. No signage is visible when approaching from the west until halfway along the rock wall. This is due to the sign being moved during the recent rock revetment works. To maintain some stability by keeping the boat wash down, the sign should be moved back to a visible location.

Phil Guy added the 4 knot sign approached from the public jetty is not easily noticed, and proposed that Council request Transport for NSW better define the 4 knot zones from the public jetty to channel. Michael Roberts mentioned that this correspondence should mention the implementation of their compliance functions to enforce this.

### **Recommendation (Item to be determined under delegated authority)**

That the Taskforce receive the Shoalhaven Heads River Road Foreshore Precinct Project (Regional Growth - Environment and Tourism Fund Grant # RNSW1279) Progress Report for information.

### **RECOMMENDATION (Phil Guy / Paul Ell)**

That:

1. The Taskforce receive the Shoalhaven Heads River Road Foreshore Precinct Project (Regional Growth - Environment and Tourism Fund Grant # RNSW1279) Progress Report for information.
2. Council relocate the 4 knot zone and to write to Transport for NSW in relation to the visibility of other signage requirements as well as their enforcement of this to reduce boat wash and associated erosion.

CARRIED

**SH21.3 Update on the Lower Shoalhaven River Estuary Coastal Management Program (CMP)****HPERM Ref:  
D21/212553**

Nigel Smith advised that Council has been successful in receiving DPIE funding on a 2-to-1 basis for the Coastal Management Program for the Lower Shoalhaven River. The project brief is large and there is a lot of work to be done, but it is 90% complete. Council is working with Northern Coastal Management Program Advisory Committee on this project brief before it is advertised for tender.

Clr Wells asked whether a copy of the project brief could be provided to the Shoalhaven Heads Community Forum to be pass to SHET for information. Nigel advised the brief is guided by the Scoping Study, so the topics under consideration in the current discussion are not included but will be part of the consultation phase in the community.

Jess Zealand asked when the strategic plans are undertaken for each of the area, if they become the estuary management plan, addressing the more detailed actions into which the community are seeking to have input. Nigel confirmed this is the case, and advised the information such as the WRL report (inclusive of the coastal erosion risk zones) for River Road will be included for the consultants to respond in this brief. The community submissions made as part of the scoping study will be included.

Robyn Flack asked whether all the issues raised which are of long standing, such as the sand fans, stormwater, and removal of mangroves from in front of Holiday Haven, will already be logged. There is concern that these matters the community are trying to communicate may be lost in translation. Nigel advised the consultants are responding with different methodologies for engagement in their tender proposals. Hence this issue will be dependent on the specific consultants responses received for the Lower Shoalhaven River CMP Request for Tender (RFT).

Clr Wells noted the next stage is the release of the brief and the tender, and then the end of stage 4 when Council will go back into community with an implementation strategy.

Nigel advised the flood study, at least in draft, will be available by the end of this year. A review of the entrance management of Shoalhaven Heads will be recommended, to be addressed as part of the CMP. Jessica Zealand described changes to what is now a deep channel, and changes to how the water moves that will impact the flood study and entrance management; it is a holistic system, and they should not be looked at as separate issues. She stressed the importance of the CMP and the strategic plan, as this will hopefully rectify much of the frustration in the community.

**Recommendation (Item to be determined under delegated authority)**

That the Taskforce receive the report on the status of the Coastal Management Program for information.

**RESOLVED** (Jessica Zealand / Robyn Flack)

That the Taskforce receive the report on the status of the Coastal Management Program for information.

CARRIED

**SH21.4 Shoalhaven Heads Estuary Taskforce - Review of Purpose, Objectives and Achievements****HPERM Ref:  
D21/215714**

The following points were raised in discussion of this item:

- The Taskforce requires members from Greenwell Point, given that occurrences at Shoalhaven Heads have a significant influence on Greenwell Point.
- There is potential at Shoalhaven Heads for large tourism activities as it has the only flat waterway in the area. Shoalhaven Heads has limited growth potential, being bordered by natural areas. Visitor numbers rise from 3k to 8k at peak times. Resources need to be managed to be robust and accessible. It is important to balance tourism and environmental impacts, and to weight up how many visitors Shoalhaven Heads and its boat ramps can take without impact. Tourism is set to grow more than the 5% given in the report; currently it is running between 17 and 25% above pre-COVID levels.
- Issues of water quality to be considered.

Phil Costello confirmed the new Council will reconsider all the committees at its first meeting following the Local Government election in September. It should be made clear to the new Council that the Taskforce consider there is much work still to be done, to inform Council's decision.

There was agreement the Taskforce could be disbanded once the CMP Lower Shoalhaven River that encompasses these matters is in place and sufficiently robust.

**Recommendation (Item to be determined under delegated authority)**

That the Taskforce review the purpose/objectives of the Shoalhaven Heads Estuary Taskforce as per the attachment.

**RESOLVED** (Phil Guy / Paul Ell)

That the Shoalhaven Heads Estuary Taskforce retain its objectives and purpose per the attachment, pending the decision of the Call Meeting of Council following the September 2021 elections.

CARRIED

**Introduction of Items as Matters of Urgency****RESOLVED** (By consent)

That the following addendum reports be introduced as matters of urgency:

1. SH21.5 Membership - Resignation from Mike James

CARRIED

The Chairperson ruled the matters as ones of urgency as they relate to urgent business of Council and allowed their introduction.

## ADDENDUM REPORTS

**SH21.5 Membership - Resignation from Mike James**

**HPERM Ref:  
D21/244363**

### Recommendation

That Council

1. Accept the resignation of Mr Mike James and Ms Carole Cassidy.
2. Write to Mr James and Ms Cassidy to thank them for his contribution to the Taskforce.

### RECOMMENDATION (By consent)

That Council:

1. Accept the resignation of Mr Mike James and Ms Carole Cassidy.
2. Write to Mr James and Ms Cassidy to thank them for their contributions to the Taskforce.

CARRIED

## GENERAL BUSINESS

- Jessica Zealand is to be added to the membership circulation list.
- Phil Guy asked about the status of the Northern Floodplain Risk Management Plan Advisory Committee. Michael Roberts will check with the Senior Floodplain Engineer and provide a response via SHET.
- Phil Guy advised that communications are being made between SHET membership and Council regarding the review of the River Road rock wall and associated works project, with management being positive towards that concept.
- Phil Guy raised a **Question on Notice** for the Director City Services regarding drainage works at the rock wall project: There were three parts to the project the drainage, the rock wall, and the dredging. Apparently during the drainage works there had been an issue related to the trench, meaning it was difficult for Council to continue the works, and a call was made that the works were to be abandoned. However, that call was not forwarded to the project management team. Was this the case?

Clr Wells recommended that members send questions in advance of the meeting where possible.

There being no further business, the meeting concluded, the time being 5.06pm.

Clr John Wells  
ACTING CHAIRPERSON