

Urban growth, the Australian coast and climate change

SUBMISSION NO. 20a

1. Three major issues: managing urban growth: linking urban growth and infrastructure planning with emergency management and a COAG Agreement on Planning for Climate Change.
 - Coastal urbanisation and climate change – how do we plan for it?
 - Challenge of managing uncertain risks and possible cumulative impacts – sea level rise and storm surge, subsidence and salt water intrusion;
 - Outcome should be a strategy that both minimises risk to coastal communities and protects the coastal environment
 - The coastal environment can provide a critical natural buffer that can soften the impact of climate change on existing settlement and infrastructure
 - Australia is a coastal nation with over 86% of the population living on the coast. While this Inquiry is specifically on the coast, it is in many ways examining the issues that will confront most of our urban communities in Australia.

2. **Managing coastal urban growth and climate change**
 - Larger national issue is the need for a strategic approach to settlement planning in the context of climate change;
 - The House of Representatives Inquiry *Sustainable Cities* report 2005 recommended an *Australian Sustainability Charter*. There has been no parliamentary response to the Sustainable Cities report to date. This needs to be revisited in the context of climate change.
 - Continued non-metropolitan urban growth particularly on the coast and urban growth in our major capital cities also on the coast (except Canberra) together with the evidence from the IPCC and CSIRO strongly suggests that this need is even greater today. We need a national spatial plan for climate change adaptation making a direct link between climate change impacts and how we build, rebuild and in future locate settlements and infrastructure.
 - The recent COAG decision 30 April 2009 to review 'existing strategic planning frameworks' is welcome. This is an opportunity to take a step forward to more integrated strategic planning in Australia. This review should also incorporate 'planning for climate change'. This, I believe, would provide a stronger platform for the implementation of some of the outcomes of this Inquiry eg a set of principles that could underpin coastal planning in Australia.

3. **Current Needs**
 - Climate change adaptation plans for managing rapid coastal urban growth
 - A national risk management plan particularly where significant urban development or key installations are in low-lying areas and
 - A set of agreed COAG principles that outline the responsibilities of Federal, State and Local Government in relation to coastal communities and climate change eg given the increased knowledge on climate change, who bears the risk when a storm surge wipes out a township?
 - The almost negligible connection between the Australian land use planning system and the Emergency Management system. The extreme 2009 weather events of floods on the east coast, heat stress in Adelaide and bushfires in Victoria have highlighted this issue. We should be working together much more closely in designing future and redesigning

existing settlements and infrastructure in coastal areas that could be at risk from inundation.

4. A seven point plan

Norman, B (2009) Principles for an intergovernmental agreement for coastal planning and climate change in Australia in *Habitat International* Vol 33 Issue 3 July 2009 (published online).

- I. That a coastal climate change buffer zone be declared to underpin a precautionary approach to coastal development in proximity to the coastal foreshore.
- II. That coastal dependent uses be the primary land use activity on coastal public lands.
- III. That an ongoing evidence based assessment of cumulative risk and impact of climate change impacts on the coastal environment be undertaken to advise government and industry policy responses.
- IV. That the importance of community engagement in place -based solutions be recognised as critical to achieving sustainable outcomes.
- V. That 'sustainable regional plans' for managing urban growth and infrastructure be recognised as a key policy instrument in implementing integrated coastal management.
- VI. That the intrinsic value of natural and cultural heritage and Indigenous interests in coastal planning be recognised in developing responses to climate change and
- VII. That capacity building for local communities including tools for climate change adaptation is supported over the long term.

The essential elements of Integrated Coastal Management i.e. vertical and horizontal policy integration remain but with a greater emphasis on processes that have consequences for both adaptation and mitigation including strengthening community resilience through community engagement, urban and regional planning and evidence-based research.

I would add the need to commit to skills training at the professional level both in tertiary education and continuing professional development. We currently have a critical shortage of coastal planners and coastal engineers which is an inadequate basis for responding to the future issues of climate change and coastal communities.

While not exhaustive and could be refined by further research, it is suggested that the steps above provide the essential ingredients for a more sustainable approach to coastal planning and climate change in Australia. They combine the precautionary principle, evidence based risk assessment, natural resource management, urban and regional planning and community engagement and seek to build the essential bridge between the social and physical sciences in responding to climate change.

In summary, the climate change adaptation plan for coastal settlements and infrastructure plan that minimises future risk to people and environments, provides a framework for developing community resilience into the future and as a coastal nation offers a leading example to our region on best practice for a sustainable future.

Barbara Norman 20 May 2009