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Ms Janet Holmes
Committee Secretary
Standing Committee on Climate Change, Water, Environment and the Arts
PO Box 6021
House of Representatives
Parliament house
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia

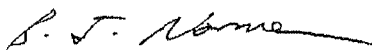
Dear Ms Holmes,

Inquiry into climate change and environmental impacts on coastal communities

I welcome the Inquiry into climate change and environmental impacts on coastal communities. This is a critical issue that requires a whole of government response and one that will affect a large proportion of the Australian community. It is particularly challenging in that it needs to examine questions concerning risk, cumulative impact and uncertainty and find a pathway forward that ensures the safety and well being of the coastal environment and its communities.

Attached is my submission for the House Committees consideration. I would be pleased to elaborate on the recommendations at a hearing.

Yours sincerely,



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Inquiry into climate change and environmental impacts on coastal communities.
House Standing Committee on Climate Change, Water, Environment and the Arts

Submission by Barbara Norman, Global Cities Research Institute RMIT University, past national president and Life Fellow of the Planning Institute of Australia, May 2008.

Towards an Intergovernmental Agreement for Sustainable Coastal Planning

1. Urban growth, the coast and climate change.

The House of Representatives Inquiry into climate change and the environmental impacts on communities is welcome and timely. This is a critical issue that requires a whole of government response and one that will affect a large proportion of the Australian community. It is particularly challenging in that it needs to examine questions concerning risk, cumulative impact and uncertainty and find a pathway forward that ensures the safety and well being of the coastal environment and its communities.

This submission specifically responds to the 5th terms of reference 'governance and institutional arrangements' but in doing so touches on other terms of the Inquiry as there is an inherent overlap when seeking to find solutions to such a complex issue. In particular it focuses on three areas in the context of climate change:

- Managing coastal urban growth
- Linking urban growth and infrastructure planning with emergency management and
- A COAG Agreement on 'Planning for Climate Change'.

This submission also highlights the larger national issue- the absence of any strategic approach to settlement planning in the context of climate change. There are two major global phenomena: urbanisation and climate change and this is no more evident than in our coastal environments. The House of Representative Inquiry into Sustainable Cities 2005, examined the question of planning for Australian cities. The Sustainable Cities report recommended:

Recommendation 1:

'The committee recommends that the Australian Government (HoR 2005);

- *Establish an Australian Sustainability Charter that sets key national targets across a number of areas, including water, transport, energy, building design and planning.*
- *Encourage a Council of Australian governments agreement to the charter and its key targets.'* (Sustainable Cities 2005:xvii)

There has been no Australian Government response to the Sustainable Cities Inquiry. It is hoped that this more specific Coastal Inquiry takes into consideration the broader questions raised by the joint parliamentary report. I refer the House Committee also to the National Planning Institute of Australia statement 'A National Action Plan for Urban Australia (PIA 2005) and the significant work by the National Seachange Taskforce. The issues in relation to coastal settlement and climate change cannot be resolved by looking at the coastline in isolation to the broader challenge of a sustainable settlements strategy for managing urban growth in Australia.

The House Committee's attention is also drawn to the Australian Government commitments as a signatory to a number of International Agreements relevant to the issues of climate change, coastal planning and sustainable development including:

- The Kyoto Protocol 1997 (ratified by Australia 2007)
- Rio Declaration 1992 (signed by Australia 1992)

Enshrined in these Agreements are principles that should frame the Australia Governments response to climate change and the environmental impacts on coastal communities. Arguably the most important principle is the 'precautionary principle':

Principle 15

'In order to protect the environment, the precautionary approach shall be widely applied by States according to their capabilities. Where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation.' (RIO Declaration on Environment and Development 1992 – endorsed by the Australian Government 1992)

2. The Australian coast under pressure

The Australian coast is already under environmental pressure. The coast is 36,000 kilometres long and accommodates over 86% of the Australian population. The Australian State of the Environment Reports 1996, 2001 and 2006 all conclude that the Australian coastal environment is suffering environmental degradation (SOE 1996, 2001, 2006). This combined with the new challenges of climate change presents significant public policy challenges for the Federal Government.

The National State of Environment Report 2006 expresses significant concern on the deteriorating environmental condition of the coastal environment and the lack of a nationally coordinated approach to address the causes. This was before any serious concerns regarding

climate change had been recognised by the Australian Government. In relation to the coastal environment, the SOE 2006 states:

At the Commonwealth level, the main responses dealing with environment issues have been through regional marine planning, through the EPBC Act, the Fisheries Management Act, and programmes implemented through the natural resources management system. For coastal and marine systems, these collective responses lack effective integration, both within the Commonwealth and with other levels of government. The lack of a pro-active integrated and national approach, the lack of well-substantiated models for prediction of impacts, and little measurement or verification of environmental outcomes, leaves a considerable gap in Australia's knowledge base. It may be leaving the ecosystems, particularly the coastal ecosystems and their resources, at risk (SOE 2006).

The 2006 State of Environment Report further concludes in relation to 'Coasts and Oceans':

The overall conclusion that can be drawn from this analysis is that in 2006, most, if not all, of the issues identified and assessed in both the 1996 and the 2001 national State of the Environment reports still remain to be resolved. Some issues have changed in importance, but all have been foreshadowed in earlier state of the environment reports.

This calls into question the effectiveness of Australia's responses to identified key national problems that afflict coastal and marine ecosystems, and particularly the reforms in governance that are required to enable a move away from short-term and sectoral management towards a more systematic, integrated and planned approach to managing coast and ocean issues. Such reform would not only deliver better solutions (hence increasing the effectiveness of governance) but would also increase efficiency through reducing the large amount of existing duplication and redundancy in governance systems, and ultimately achieve reduced monetary costs to governments, communities and the private sector for management of ocean and coastal issues.

The examination of the Australian coastal environment at the national level is not new. During the early 1990's, the Australian Government undertook a comprehensive review of coastal planning through the Resources Assessment Commission (RAC 1993). As part of that process, the RAC identified and summarized the findings of '29 previous national and noted 34 state inquiries' (Harvey and Caton 2003:208).

The RAC concluded that:

'Evidence to the Inquiry shows that the coastal zone is suffering the environmental and social stresses of continuing urbanisation, which is occurring both on the urban fringe of

metropolitan areas and in an increasing number of coastal regions outside capital cities. If no action is taken to change the way in which coastal resources are used, there is a very considerable risk that ecosystems will be destroyed, the recreational amenity of the coast will be degraded, and economic growth and employment opportunities will be lost; in short the collective benefits provided by the coastal zone will cease to be available to Australians (RAC 1993: 358).

The key recommendations of the RAC 1993 were to:

- To establish a National Coastal Action program;
- Establish a National Coastal Agency and a National Coastal Consultative Council; and
- Enact a Coastal Resources Management Act.

Since the RAC Inquiry, the Federal Government under Prime Minister Keating developed a national coastal policy. The Howard Government revised this during 1997. Since then there have been a number of initiatives by the Federal government particularly through its Coastcare program, one of four programs funded by the Natural Heritage Trust (effectively implementing the first recommendation above). There has been no action on the establishment of an agency or a separate Act. The emphasis has been on voluntary partnerships and cooperative agreements as distinct from the legislative approach being recommended by the RAC.

3. Coastal governance arrangements

The Australian Federal system provides for all three levels of government to be involved in managing the coastal management. Overall, State and Local Government are primarily responsible for land use planning and environmental management of coastal lands and seaward to 3 nautical miles. The Commonwealth government is responsible for 3 to 200 nm seaward known as the exclusive economic zone.

However, the power of the Commonwealth Government has significantly widened over recent decades in relation to the environment as a result of High Court decisions, notably the Franklin Dams case (1983). The Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act, 1999, dealing with matters of national environmental significance, has enhanced this power.

Climate change has brought a new dimension to the national interest particularly since the Australian Government ratified the Kyoto protocol 2007. Similarly, when funding arrangements are examined, the Commonwealth Government is significantly involved as a result of the Natural Heritage Trust (NHT) funding arrangements to the State Government. Coastcare has been one of the four major programs of NHT and has a national goal 'to protect our coastal

catchments, ecosystems and the marine environment.’ Finally, where the Commonwealth Government is the owner of the land or sea, it is not affected by State and local government land use planning regulations.

The Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council (NRMCC) endorsed *A Framework for a National Cooperative Approach to Integrated Coastal Zone Management* on 3 October 2003. It states that:

‘ Forward thinking is required to initiate a nationally cooperative focus on achieving ecologically sustainable development through Integrated Coastal Zone Management. Now is the time to enhance more active rehabilitation, protection and improvement of these important aspects through proactive planning and management. ’

The Commonwealth identified that the underlying policy framework should be the ‘Catchment-Coast-Ocean’ Continuum and identified five areas that could benefit from national cooperation:

- Land and marine based sources of pollution;
- Managing climate change;
- Introduced pest plants and animals;
- Allocation of coastal resource base and
- Capacity building.

The abovementioned areas are broadly supported but the challenge is translating these concerns into meaningful outcomes on the ground. The Framework has led to some local initiatives but essentially skirted around the three most critical areas for action:

- Climate change adaptation plans for managing rapid urban growth on the coast;
- A risk management plan particularly where significant urban development or key installations are located in low- lying coastal areas and
- A set of agreed COAG principles that outline the responsibilities of Federal, State and Local government

This is partly due to the previous Federal Governments lack of recognition of the importance of climate change and partly due to the particularly Australian view (as distinct from all other OECD nations, the US and neighbouring Asia-Pacific) that urban planning is a States only responsibility. It is compounded by little connection between land use planning and emergency management. The global challenges of urbanisation and climate change require a new approach involving an unusual collaboration between all three levels of government, the government and the private sector and engagement of the coastal communities.

In summary, there has not been a shortage of reports examining our coastline and with climate change there is clearly a 'national interest'. However as the SOE 2006 states, there has been a lack of coordinated action. Three levels of government (Commonwealth, State and local) responding to rapid urban coastal growth and the impact of climate change presents unique challenges in delivering effective policy implementation to protect the environmental qualities of our coastline. It requires new understanding and connections between science, land use planning and emergency management (Norman 2008). It also requires a mix of policy responses drawing on international best practice that can plan for cumulative impact and risk.

4. A COAG Agreement on 'planning for climate change'

The National Sea Change Taskforce has undertaken considerable research on coastal communities. The forthcoming report – *Planning for climate change: Leading practice principles and Models for Sea Change Communities in Coastal Australia* (Gurran, Hamlin, Norman 2008) includes a number of important recommendations including:

'That an intergovernmental agreement involving all three levels of government be developed to clearly state the commitments and responsibilities of Federal, State and local government in Planning for Climate Change'.

Specific coastal case studies by Norman in the Gippsland Lakes, Point Nepean and the Geelong region (Vic) reinforce the conclusion that a more integrated approach by the Commonwealth Government is necessary (Norman 2005). The challenge is designing governance arrangements that straddle the 'catchment to coast continuum', public and private lands, state borders such as NSW-Queensland coastal urban conurbation, and deals with sudden dramatic weather events such as storm surge and long term environmental impacts such as temperature and sea level rise. It is recommended that such a scenario can only be addressed through a COAG agreement that translates national concerns to practical actions at the local level.

5. A 7- point plan for coastal climate change

There are several steps required to develop an effective COAG response to climate change and the coast. The current House Inquiry is an excellent starting point to crystallise the issues and possible responses stemming from the evidence presented. What is required is a plan of action to review and implement, as appropriate, the findings. What is not acceptable is inaction along the lines of the 'no response' to the Sustainable Cities report. There is sufficient knowledge concerning the issues of climate change and coastal communities that will hold governments very accountable to communities if disaster does strike (eg New Orleans).

The following 7-point plan is recommended to the Inquiry:

1. A multidisciplinary team should be established to address the extent of risk and appropriate policy solutions including legal and financial implications as well allaying community concerns.
2. A risk management plan is required, particularly where significant urban development or key installations are located in low-lying coastal areas. Such a plan would necessarily involve urban growth and infrastructure design, emergency response agencies and advice from the insurance and financial sectors;
3. Define coastal climate change buffer zones to keep development out of lands mapped as being at risk of inundation just as we already do inland with the 1 in 100 year flood plain;
4. Prepare a COAG climate change response facilitating the development of sustainable coastal regional plans underpinned by a set of agreed COAG principles together with support for implementation;
5. Devise a set of tools available to State and local governments that can be adapted to local circumstances. These should include financial incentives, regulatory tools and public investment and partnership programs to enable local communities to prepare for the impacts of climate change
6. A financial commitment to a continuing multidisciplinary research program into adaptive responses to the impact of climate change on our urban settlement and coastal communities.
7. A capacity building and awareness program for local communities responding to climate change drawing on best international practice.

6. Conclusions

So what does this mean for the role of the Commonwealth in coastal planning and climate change? The RAC originally recommended a Coastal Management Act supported by a National Coastal Council. Fifteen years later we have a framework agreed to by the States and Territories for managing public lands. The missing gap is managing urban growth for which the States argue sole responsibility.

Cooperative Federalism needs to produce more than this if the Australian coastal zone is to be managed in a sustainable way and respond to climate change and the environmental impacts on coastal communities. The States need to recognise that urban development does not stop at State borders (e.g. the eastern seaboard) and the Commonwealth needs to respond in a more coordinated manner integrating its array of funding programs across the portfolios that affect the coast. This can only be achieved through a COAG Agreement with an integrated funding

