



## **NATIONAL SEA CHANGE TASKFORCE**

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Committee Secretary  
Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage  
House of Representatives  
PO Box 6021  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam,

### **Re: Inquiry into a Sustainability Charter**

I am lodging this submission to the Inquiry into a Sustainability Charter on behalf of the National Sea Change Taskforce.

The Taskforce was established in 2004 to represent the interests of coastal councils and communities experiencing the effects of rapid population and tourism growth. The Taskforce now represents 68 coastal councils in all states, which in turn represent a large percentage of the population of coastal Australia. These councils seek to work collaboratively with the Australian, State and Territory Governments to ensure that coastal development occurs in a sustainable way. At stake is the future of the nation's most highly valued natural asset – the Australian coastline.

The Taskforce submits that the Sustainability Charter proposed by the Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage should acknowledge the need for a national strategic planning framework to guide the planning and managing of growth and development in coastal areas.

One of the first actions of the National Sea Change Taskforce has been to commission research to find out more about the nature and impact of the movement of population to the coast. This first phase of research, released in February 2005, identified the key social, economic, and environmental planning issues facing coastal sea change communities in Australia and reviewed current responses to these issues. (In November 2005 this first phase of research won two major awards at the Planning Institute of Australia NSW 2005 Awards for Excellence - the President's Award and the Institute's Planning Scholarship, Research or Teaching Award).

### **Meeting The Sea Change Challenge Phase 2 Report**

The second phase of the research project, titled *Meeting The Sea Change Challenge: Best Practice Models of Local & Regional Planning for Sea Change Communities*, was released on 23 January 2006, (the report can be accessed at the following url - [www.seachangetaskforce.org.au/Members/members.html](http://www.seachangetaskforce.org.au/Members/members.html)). This report documents the range of governance, environmental, community, economic, and infrastructure challenges affecting "sea change" councils in Australia and internationally, and identifies best practice in addressing these issues. The phase two report builds on the earlier research and provides planning authorities with a best practice planning 'tool kit' to address the challenges of coastal growth.

One of the key points to emerge from the Phase 2 report is the need for a comprehensive strategic framework, covering coastal management and protection, environmental conservation, land use planning and community wellbeing, as the basis for integrating the multiple issues affecting sea change communities. It is the view of the National Sea Change Taskforce that development of a national strategic planning framework, which would assist in establishing a more consistent and better coordinated planning process for Australian coastal areas, should be included in the proposed Sustainability Charter.

As the *Meeting The Sea Change Challenge* report indicates, in the section headed *Best Practice Principles and Strategic Responses*, (p8):

*'Ideally, frameworks will be developed at national, state, regional and local scales, through integrative processes to coordinate the various jurisdictions with responsibility for planning and management in coastal areas. Such processes should include mechanisms for involvement by the various coastal stakeholders, particularly local governments, as well as local residents and traditional indigenous owners, environmental groups, industry representatives, and recreational users. Frameworks should:*

- *Set clear goals and indicators to show how these goals are being addressed;*
- *Adopt a long term planning horizon (at least 15-20 years, with longer time frames for certain issues, such as the management of sea level rise);*
- *Reflect the diversity of environmental, social, and economic values and needs of coastal communities;*
- *Be "place based" rather than "issue based" – in other words, tailor goals and strategies to particular spatial areas, recognizing their diversity;*
- *Draw on broad based community involvement and establish ongoing mechanisms for community participation;*
- *Apply the principle of "subsidiarity" – that is, that higher levels of government should not take responsibility for matters able to be addressed by lower levels of government, but rather, should fully support and enable lower levels of government, particularly local government, to adopt these roles; and,*
- *Be closely linked to implementation tools (ie. regulatory frameworks and financial resource allocation processes).*

As further indicated in the *Meeting the Sea Change Challenge* report, in the section headed *National and Regional Approaches* (p8):

*'At the national level, a strategic framework should articulate overall objectives in line with the national and international values associated with the coastal zone. It should provide a basis for coordinating policy making and land use planning on coastal areas with the other national interests and responsibilities that impact on development in the coast (such as environmental protection and heritage, management of territorial waters, defence, infrastructure provision, and regional economic development). The New Zealand Resource Management Act 1991 provides a good model for the national coordination of coastal policy and planning with broader resource management and land use decisions at national, regional, and local levels (Nolan and Kirman 2004).*

*'Other examples of national approaches to integrated coastal governance include the national coastal planning policy of the United Kingdom (UK) (UK Planning Policy Guidance 20). This policy must be implemented by local authorities in their plan making and development assessment activities. To some extent, the existence of a national policy reflects administrative arrangements in the UK (where there are no "state" governments and only a recently introduced regional tier). Thus parallels could be drawn between this policy and equivalent state coastal policies in Australia. However, the benefit of a national approach provides consistency in management of all coastal areas and provides an administrative basis to coordinate the various roles and responsibilities associated with coastal issues.'*

The Phase 2 research report is aimed at providing best practice models for local government authorities seeking to engage with stakeholder groups and the community to identify what needs to change and how to make these changes.

The Taskforce promotes the adoption of a coordinated approach to managing growth in coastal areas that is based on a commitment by all three levels of government to work collaboratively to ensure that coastal growth is managed with a focus on sustainability of coastal communities and the coastal environment. There is a clear need for enhanced coordination of planning and management of coastal growth at a local, regional, State and Commonwealth level. There is also a greater need for cross-jurisdictional coordination between all levels of government in relation to coastal planning and management.

In conclusion, the Taskforce wishes to advise that at a Special General Meeting of Members, held at Port Douglas on 3 April 2006, the organisation adopted a Sea Change Sustainability Charter which outlines *a collaborative national response to sea change growth which seeks the commitment of all spheres of government to:*

- *develop **innovative and best practice strategic planning** at regional and local levels*
- *preserve **local character and sense of place***
- *provide for the **timely provision of resources** to meet the needs of high growth communities for **infrastructure and services***
- *integrate **coastal management and conservation objectives** with economic development*
- *support **community wellbeing***
- *ensure **community ownership and participation** in key planning decisions affecting the coast*

It is the view of the Taskforce that these principles should be incorporated in the Sustainability Charter proposed by the Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage. (The Charter and accompanying notes are provided as an attachment to the covering email).

Yours sincerely,

**Alan Stokes**  
Executive Officer  
National Sea Change Taskforce

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION HELD BY THE COMMITTEE**

**ATTACHMENT TO SUBMISSION NO. 42**

ATTACHMENTS, APPENDICES AND PHOTOGRAPHS PROVIDED WITH SUBMISSIONS ARE  
HELD IN THE COMMITTEE OFFICE