Meeting Notes

Manning River Estuary Coastal Management Program Community Reference Group

Date	12 February 2020	Time	9.00am – 12.30pm
Venue	MidCoast Council – Boardroom, Taree Office	Note-taker	Andrew Morris
Present	Councillors Len Roberts and Katheryn Smith (Co-Chairs) Chris Scott – Manning Landcare Sam Nicholson – MidCoast Dairy Advancement Group Peter Longworth – Manning Delta Landholders Group (beef industry) Peter Bignell – representing beef and dairy industry John Harris – Recreational fishing Ian Crisp – Manning River Oyster Farmers' Association Kirsty Hughes – community representative Noel Piercy – community representative Tony Wales - community representative Neil Kelleher- NSW Department of Planning Industry and Environment Andre Uljee – Transport NSW Geoff LeMessurier – Hunter Local Land Services Paul De Szell, Gerard Tuckerman, Louise Duff, Prue Tucker, Karen Bettink – MidCoast Council		
Apologies	Councillor Dr David Keegan Joedie Lawler - CEO Taree Purfleet Local Aboriginal Lands Council Josh Chivers – National Parks and Wildlife Service Peter Neal – Manning Delta Landholders Group (dairy industry)		

Meeting items

Item	Key points/actions
1	Councillor Roberts, opened the meeting, acknowledged the traditional owners and welcomed all for attending the second manning River Estuary Coastal Management Program Reference Group meeting.
2	Minutes from previous meeting. **Adopted** **Action**: declare pecuniary or conflict of interest at next meeting using the form provided. ➢ No pecuniary interests declared.
3	Introduction (Louise Duff) Purpose & Outcomes of today's meeting. • Receive reports from Stage 2 of the CMP process which is now complete • understand and discuss threats, vulnerabilities and risks Stage 3 tasks due for completion this year: • April meeting: Confirm Strategic Direction and management objectives • July meeting: Identify potential Management options for each of the coastal management zones • October meeting: Evaluate acceptability of actions ➢ **Action**: Members are invited to read the Stage 2 reports on the Community Values Survey and the farmers consultation on best practice catchment management available at www.midcoast.nsw.gov.au/ourmanningriver
	Update on catchment (Louise Duff) • About 100mm of rain fell across the catchment in 3rd week of January followed by 150-320 mm in the first week of February • Significant increases in flow rate and height of all waterways in the catchment • High turbidity recorded in some rivers, especially Nowendoc with readings of over 1300 NTU which is extremely turbid water. • Ash in most systems, the risk to water quality is poorly understood, DPIE is researching and providing advice on this issue. Discussion on turbidity, anecdotal evidence to date that within estuary the turbidity is not as bad as 2011 flood. Water monitoring will evaluate the trend and severity of current discharge into the estuary.
	NSW Marine Estate Threat and Risk Assessment Prue Tucker explained that a Threat and Risk Assessment (TARA) for the NSW Marine estate was undertaken by the NSW Government in 2017. The Manning River Estuary CMP Technical Working Group (TWG) reassessed and ranked threats and risks relevant to the Manning. Risks assessed included: • agricultural diffuse source run-off

	• stock in marine vegetation • modified freshwater flows • climate stressors • urban stormwater • vegetation clearing • recreational and commercial fishing • pests and disease • sewerage and effluent run-off • entrance modification • aquaculture • unsealed roads • pollution/litter The TWG also identified information gaps that led to the Stage 2 studies presented below. **Discussion**: is loss of oyster habitat and reefs an issue? Remaining reefs are within existing leases, regulations are in place to control reef construction. There are examples in the US of reef construction boosting crab and prawn production.
4	<u>Rapid Site Assessments – overview and discussion</u> (Karen Bettink) Karen Bettink presented key themes from a report prepared by NSW Government's Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (DPIE) on the Manning Rapid Site Assessment program. The report has been peer reviewed by MCC and an independent consultant. • Two teams undertook rapid assessments at 206 sites throughout the catchment over 5-weeks in August 2019. • Key themes covered in the presentation included: • Water quality varies from good to very poor. Some sites had highly elevated nutrients. • Flow: major flow centres are Barrington Tops, Gloucester Tops, New England tablelands and groundwater. • Refugia pools fed by groundwater were very important for wildlife during the drought. Opportunity for better management. • Stock access to the riparian zone is a key issue for the catchment. • Irrigation increases generation rates for nutrient and sediment run-off. • Opportunity to improve awareness of the value of riparian vegetation and the role of vegetation in the water cycle. **Discussion**: the rapid assessment was undertaken during the worst period of the drought and shows a single point in time. This is useful in building knowledge and setting benchmarks. Adding to the knowledge through subsequent future assessments in different conditions would be of value as part of the implementation of the CMP. ➢ **Action** – Louise Duff up-load Rapid Site Assessment report to Our Manning River web page and circulate link with minutes. ➢ **Action** – John Harris review the report on behalf of the reference group and report back to next meeting.
5	<u>Spatial Risk Assessment – overview and discussion</u> MCC contracted the NSW Government's Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (DPIE) to produce a risk assessment of the Manning River Catchment with a focus on estuarine health. Louise Duff presented an overview of the report.

	The risk assessment identifies subcatchments that pose the greatest risk to ecological and community values. These subcatchments will be prioritised for further investigation and action. Lansdowne River catchment (subcatchments 88, 223) presents the highest risk of impacts from nutrient and sediment inputs, acidic runoff from acid sulphate soils, and pathogen inputs from stock. Other catchments which pose a high risk to ecological and community values of the Manning River estuary include: • Cedar Party Creek (subcatchment 95, nutrient risk to water quality and pathogen risk to secondary recreation) • Cattai Creek (subcatchment 93, acidic runoff impacts) • Dingo Creek (subcatchment 86, pathogen risk to drinking water quality) • Barrington River (subcatchment 117, pathogen risk to drinking water quality and secondary recreation). Subcatchments posing the highest risk of hillslope and streambank/bed erosion impacting on riparian vegetation and ultimately water quality in streams and the estuary include: • Manning River (subcatchment 105, 110) • Upper Manning River (subcatchments 92 and 96) • Myall Creek (subcatchment 76) • Barnard River (subcatchment 82) Other risks covered in the report include pathogen risk from septic systems, and acid run-off risk. A map showing the subcatchment numbers is attached. **Discussion**: how is fire factored into the results of the risk assessment? Land-use covered by the risk assessment will remain the same and is the primary influence on catchment health over time. Sediment run-off from the fire-grounds and a bed load moving through the catchment are likely to increase Total Suspended Solids and turbidity. While the sediment will settle out, there will be a legacy issue with fine sediments re-suspending during future flood events. from the fire ground caused by the recent flood event. NSW Government is undertaking an inquiry into fire impacts, Neil Kelleher advised this is likely to cover water quality ➢ **Action** – Louise Duff will complete a summary document for distribution to the Reference Group.
6	<u>Tidal inundation, climate change and wetland risks</u> Karen Bettink explained that the CMP needs to address vulnerability to coastal inundation under Sea Level Rise (SLR) scenarios, as well as other risks associated with climate change. • NSW Estuary Tidal Inundation Exposure Assessment Report (DPIE, 2018) assessed exposure risk of current to tidal inundation associated with a range of potential future Sea Level Rise scenarios. • Manning is included in the 10 most exposed estuary systems in the North Coast region. The report quantifies various assets affected under SLR scenarios. Manning is 3rd in state for roads affected, and 5th for powerlines. • Council is currently undertaking a Manning River Flood Study that has modelled coastal inundation and flood extents. • Former Greater Taree City Council undertook a climate change risk assessment. The report covers a range of adaptation actions infrastructure and assets, environmental management, land use planning, emergency management and community wellbeing and corporate services.

	Karen Bettink also presented a report prepared by EcoLogical on coastal wetlands in the Manning estuary. • Manning Estuary has 13 coastal wetland types covering 8,906 ha • They are rated as good/excellent condition (69%), fair condition (19%) poor/very poor (12%) • The majority (86%) of all wetland types mapped for the study are protected under State or Commonwealth legislation • Risks include environmental weeds, urban and agricultural development, accessibility, isolation and fragmentation, inappropriate fire regimes and climate change (particularly sea level rise). **Discussion**: was held about Gross Pollutant Traps. MCC recently undertook an audit of stormwater infrastructure to guide an upgrade and maintenance program.
7	<u>Facilitated discussion</u> Councillor Roberts facilitated a group discussion covering four key themes. Key points and thoughts of participants are summarised below. **Vegetation** • Riparian management. Management issue for farmers, weed management, ongoing efforts, fencing types • Areas of bank erosion are correlated with absence of riparian vegetation, high risk during extreme weather events. Boat wash - Not as big an issue • Acknowledge complexity and expense of stock exclusion. • Partner with landholders to identify solutions that suit farms. Partnerships, flexibility, and incentives are the best approach. • Explore alternatives to rock filleting for bank protection. • Promote Biodiversity Conservation Trust agreements with landholders • Need to clarify jurisdiction over vegetation management in the foreshore area. • Raise awareness of mangrove value and impacts to landholders • Educate new landholders on natural assets and risks, legislation, regulations, management. Investigate welcome information packs. • Facilitate peer to peer learning • Improve enforcement and compliance, engage community in reporting **Runoff** • Agricultural runoff key issue for oyster farming. Faecal coliforms not all based on onsite sewerage management systems as previously assumed, more from cattle. Getting saltwater back into the estuary is the key from an oyster perspective. • Drought and dry soil is creating more run-off, loss of water to property. • Improved soil health = better productivity for farmers and better for health for catchment. • Improving soil will enable landscape to absorb more runoff, improve resilience to drought and fire • Prioritise programs to improve infiltration rates, ground cover, soil organics. • Farmers will need to hold more water for stock in a changing climate. • Reconsider 10% harvestable right for estuary properties. -More retention to cope with climate change impacts • Understand and address the barriers and disincentives to landscape rehydration. • Expect high peak flows in stormwater system under climate change scenarios, understand impacts. • Explore more rainwater harvesting to reduce stormwater impacts

	• Safeguard capacity of the sewerage system now, and in a changing climate. • In urban areas, government has major control over runoff; while in rural areas its landholders. • We need engagement from both government and the community to reduce run-off impacts. • Ongoing long-term macro-invertebrate and fish-surveys could be valuable resource for monitoring ecosystem health. Methods available include Aust Rivas and Sustainable Rivers audit. Could also cover veg, platypus. • Consider adding biological monitoring to CMP, possibly with a citizen science component (eg Riverwatch). **Climate Change** • Regenerate farming important role • Government has a role in both rural and urban environments • Flow rates an issue • Macro invertebrate populations are indicators to change, extreme events • Soil water retention will help with climate change resilience; mitigate drought stress and reduce run-off in flood events. • Improving soil organics captures carbon and increases productivity. • Every scenario / case different – need a holistic approach • Urban areas - stormwater main issue. We need practical solutions, water sensitive urban design. • DPIE - River styles historical data could be useful. **User Impacts** • Bank loss due to high tides, floodwaters, riparian vegetation loss considered much more significant than boat wash. This may appear the case but undercut causes collapse during a flood. Boat wash a considerable factor in narrow waterways as documented in evidence from the Wallamba and Williams Rivers. • WRL Studies – in large open waterways aligned to the dominant wind, wind waves are more significant risk factors for bank erosion. • Narrow rivers more vulnerable to bank erosion than wide reaches. • Need data on number of boats and trends. Manning boat use is seasonal and sporadic. Anecdotal evidence it is increasing. • Dawson River - fully vegetated banks but banks being undercut. Identify people / activities that are the problem, develop solutions. • Boat size, power and wake height are increasing. • ID Zones • Discussion on experience from Wallis Lake, where Council successfully worked with recreational users to introduce zoning. • Consider planning now to manage use - identify appropriate zones; “place for everyone"
8	Councillor Roberts and Smith thanked all for their attendance and contribution and closed the meeting.

Meeting Actions

Meeting	Action	Status
11th Dec 2019	Declare pecuniary or conflict of interest at next meeting using the form provided.	Ongoing
12th Feb 2020	Members are invited to read the Stage 2 reports on the Community Values Survey and the farmers consultation on best practice catchment management available at www.midcoast.nsw.gov.au/ourmanningriver	
12th Feb 2020	Louise Duff up-load Rapid Site Assessment report to Our Manning River web page and circulate link with minutes.	
12th Feb 2020	John Harris review the report on behalf of the reference group and report back to next meeting.	
12th Feb 2020	Louise Duff will complete a summary document for distribution to the Reference Group.	

Next meetings

Date	29 April 2020	Time	10 am – 1 pm
Venue	MidCoast Council – Chambers, Taree Office	Note-taker	TBC

ATTACHMENT 1: Manning River subcatchments with numeric codes used in the Rapid Site Assessment and Risk Assessment reports