Appendix 1: Engagement strategy report

1. Introduction

As part of the Great Lakes Coastal Catchments Initiative (CCI), the Great Lakes Council were committed to engaging stakeholders in developing a Water Quality Improvement Plan for Wallis, Smiths and Myall lakes.

At the beginning of the CCI an engagement strategy was developed, which outlined the objectives for engagement, stakeholders to be engaged, the methodology to be used, a timetable of engagement activities and an intended approach to evaluation.

Above all, this strategy recognised the need to move into the collaborative space and establish a level of trust and transparency in the development of the Water Quality Improvement Plan (WQIP). The strategy highlighted the need to encourage ownership and commitment to the WQIP to ensure the sustainable management of Wallis, Smiths and Myall lakes.

This engagement report provides a background to the approach and objectives for engagement (that were developed through the original engagement strategy), as well as providing a record of the process and outcome of engagement activities undertaken as part of the CCI. An evaluation of the success of engagement is included.

This report can be read as a stand-alone document. However, if more background information is needed please source the original engagement strategy.

2. Engagement strategy aims

The aim of the engagement strategy was to guide the process of communication and interaction with stakeholders for the Great Lakes CCI. It was developed to ensure that everyone interested in being involved, was involved to their level of satisfaction, and could work towards the shared goal of improving water quality. Furthermore, the strategy aimed to establish an open and transparent process for the development of the WQIP combining scientific, local and political knowledge and experience.

3. Engagement strategy objectives

The objectives of the Great Lakes CCI engagement strategy are to:

1. form partnerships with stakeholders from government and the community, and work together on issues of concern in relation to water quality. This will involve establishing an open, inclusive and transparent process for developing the WQIP in partnership with stakeholders, through power-sharing and collaboration.

2. provide opportunities for capacity-building and joint learning with key stakeholders in order to:
    a) ensure issues are identified and addressed proactively, rather than reactively, through the process of developing the WQIP
    b) encourage ownership of the WQIP to promote a high level of responsibility for maintaining and utilising the Plan
    c) develop a well-informed WQIP, incorporating a diverse range of knowledge and opinions, making it practical and relevant to end users.
3. build awareness within the general community about water quality issues and catchment management.

4. Approach to engagement (background)

Engagement is an “inclusive term to describe the broad range of interactions between people. It can include a variety of approaches, such as one-way communication or information delivery, consultation, involvement and collaboration in decision-making, and empowered action in informal groups or formal partnerships” (State of Victoria, Department of Sustainability and Environment 2005).

The State of Victoria, Department of Sustainability and Environment (2005) lists the following levels of engagement, ranging from the most basic to the most complex (in order of listing):

- informing the community of policy directions of the government
- consulting the community as part of a process to develop government policy, or build community awareness and understanding
- involving the community through a range of mechanisms to ensure that issues and concerns are understood and considered as part of the decision-making process
- collaborating with the community by developing partnerships to formulate options and provide recommendations
- empowering the community to make decisions, and to implement and manage change.

The engagement process that was used for the Great Lakes CCI aimed to be as inclusive as possible and to offer everyone the chance to participate in the process. However, the level to which stakeholders were engaged varied depending on the desires of individual stakeholders and the needs of the project. Accordingly, stakeholders were engaged through a range of the abovementioned levels. Descriptions of our commitment to each of these levels of engagement are outlined in Table A1.1. These are shown against a list of stakeholders and engagement tools appropriate to each level.

Table A1.1. Great Lakes Council's commitment to the levels of engagement in this strategy.

Inform	**Consult**	**Involve**	**Collaborate**	**Empower**
Promise:	Promise:	Promise:	Promise:	Promise:
We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns, and provide feedback on how your input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed, and provide feedback on how your input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions, and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.
Example stakeholders:				
General community	Community groups who expressed interest in hosting a presentation and workshop Council CMA Board	Council staff Estuary and catchment management groups Community groups interested in being involved beyond initial workshops	Council staff Project team Rural Management Practice Technical Committee	Great Lakes CCI Advisory Committee Rural Management Practice Technical Committee
Example tools:				
Media Presentations Web site	Presentations Workshops	Presentations Workshops Project updates	Meetings Workshops	Personal Contact Workshops Meetings Presentations Meeting Minutes CCI updates Field observations

Adapted from: International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) (2007).

The CCI is based on the principals of power-sharing, and recognising the need to move into collaborative space and establish a level of trust and transparency in the development of the WQIP. By working with the community from the outset, a maximised commitment to improving water quality can be developed.

5. Project messages

The project theme and messages outlined in this section were used in educational and promotional material developed for the project.

5.1 Project theme

The underlying theme of the Great Lakes CCI was that everyone in the Wallis, Smiths and Myall lakes catchments has an influence on water quality, and thus has a role in the care and management of the lakes and rivers.

5.2 Key messages

Key messages were conveyed to the various stakeholder groups involved in this project. The messages were always working towards the theme of the project and included:

- Water quality is affected when excessive nutrients and sediments come off the land – this influences the health of the lakes and river systems.
- The Water Quality Improvement Plan is being developed collaboratively with catchment stakeholders. Input on management strategies that reduce nutrient and sediment output is welcomed.
- Healthy lakes and rivers support the economic and social values of this area.
- Everyone living and holidaying in the catchments and those working in local, state and federal government departments need to work together to come up with ways to reduce the amount of nutrients and sediments entering our waterways.

6. Stakeholders and information needs

6.1 Identifying stakeholders

To ensure that the engagement strategy was as inclusive as possible and to offer anyone who is interested in the project the opportunity to participate, two types of stakeholders were identified:

- the general community
- key stakeholders who may have a significant interest and /or technical expertise related to water quality.

The general community were identified as needing enough information about the project in order for them to decide if they were interested in being involved. Once they were informed, we could then work with them to find out the level of engagement required for individuals and groups identified. The general community consists of a number of identifiable groups such as progress associations, chambers of commerce and environmental groups. There

are also members in the community that are not affiliated with groups, but who needed to have the opportunity to be involved if they were interested.

Stakeholder groups that had a potential significant interest in the project and could contribute specific local or technical information that the project required were also identified. These groups included government agencies, landcare groups, and oyster and fisheries groups.

Community groups and stakeholders were identified through the snowball sampling method as outlined by State of Victoria, Department of Sustainability and Environment (2005). This involved speaking with a number of key groups with interest in the project to establish a stakeholder list then asking if any additional contacts were relevant for inclusion. This process continued with groups who were contacted and, in turn, continued to identify further relevant contacts until a list was compiled where no listed group or contacts could identify additional contacts.

The resulting list of community groups and stakeholders to be engaged (to varying degrees) is presented below:

Agency groups

Councillors (GLC, GTCC, Gloucester)

Council staff (general)

Council planning and Environmental Systems staff (GLC, GTCC) ~

NSW Planning Department

CMA ~ – Board and staff

Department of Primary Industries

State Forests

Fisheries ~

Agriculture ~

Department of Health

Department of Environment and Conservation ~

Politicians – Local and federal

Department of Energy Utilities and Sustainability

MidCoast Water ~

Department of Environment and Heritage ~

Department of Natural Resources ~

Hunter Councils ~ – Hunter Rems group

National Parks – Marine Parks

Myall Lakes NP District ~

Department of Lands

Conservation groups, Natural resource management groups

Ocean Watch

Ramsar managers network

Great Lakes Environment Association

Water Quality Partnership

Great Lakes Coastal Land Management Network

Estuary and catchment management groups

Wallis CMP Implementation Group (WaLI) ~

Wallis EMC

Myall EMC

Smiths EMC ~

Rural farming groups

Dairy farmers (Myall and Wallis catchments, e.g. Mid Coast Dairy Advancement Group)

Coastal hobby farmers

Graziers (Myall and Wallis catchments)

NSW Farmers Association

Rural Lands Board

Chicken farmers (Myall and Wallis catchments)

Landcare ~

Karuah Great Lakes Landcare

Coomba Landcare Group

Dyers Crossing Landcare

Smiths Lake Landcare Group

Nabiac Landcare Group

Wang Wauk River Land Care Group

Forster Community Landcare Group

Upper Wallamba Landcare

Fishing / Aquaculture

Aquaculture – Perch and Crayfish on Myall

Forster Tuncurry Sport Fishing Club

Club Forster Fishing Club

Wallis Lake Fishermans Co-op Board ~

Bellevue Hotel Fishing Club

Tackle fishing shops

Wallamba Recreational Fishing Club

Myall Lakes Aquatic Club

Oyster farmers ~

Wallis Lake Shellfish Program~

Progress associations, CWAs, Lions clubs, Dunecare groups, etc.

Bulahdelah and District Progress Association

Bungwahl Progress Association

Coolongolook / Wootton Progress Association

Coomba District Progress Association

East Forster Progress and Preservation Association

Failford Progress Association

Forster Keys Progress and Ratepayers Association

Goldens Estate Progress Association

Green Point Progress Association

Nerong Progress Association

Pacific Palms Community Association

Tea Gardens Progress Association

Country Womens Association – Bulahdelah

Country Womens Association – Forster

Country Womens Association – Wallamba

Nabiac Village Futures Group

Forster on Wallis Rotary Club

Great Lakes Rotary Club

Tuncurry–Forster Rotary Club

Forster Tuncurry Lions Club

Hallidays Point Lions Club

Pacific Palms Lions Club

Forster Shores Combined Probus Club

Great Lakes Combined Probus Club

Wallamba Probus Club

Wallamba Womens Probus Club

Banksia Reserve Group

Bulahdelah Tidy Town Committee

Dads Navy

Friends of the Park

Tuncurry Dune Care Group

Tuncurry Flora Park Group

Myall Koala and Environmental Support Group Inc

Great Lakes Canoe Club

Chambers of commerce and tourism associations

Forster Chamber of Commerce

Bulahdelah Chamber of Tourism and Commerce

Myall Chamber of Tourism and Commerce

Great Lakes Tourism Network

Aboriginal community

Forster Land Council

Hunter-Central Rivers Aboriginal Cultural Environmental Network (ACEN) – CMA Partnership Committee

Other

General community

Water users:
– boarders
– skiers
– boating
– yacht club, Myall
– surfer groups

Emergency Services:
– NSW RFS
– NSW Fire Brigade
– NSW SES

Developers

Builders

Master Builders Association

Industrial parks

Tourists / visitors from outside the Great Lakes area

~ Indicates representation on the Advisory Committee. Where suggested groups' contact details could not be sourced, the suggested group was removed from this list.

As stakeholders were contacted, their interests, needs, expectations and desired level of engagement were assessed. Stakeholder profiling was explored in the original Engagement Strategy.

7. Engagement opportunities

A number of key areas of the project were identified as opportunities for stakeholder involvement and input. The project stages and opportunities for involvement are outlined in Table A1.2. Please note this table has been adapted from Table 1.5.1 in Part 1 of the Water Quality Improvement Plan to show what stakeholders were involved in each stage of the project.

Table A1.2. Engagement opportunities in the CCI Project.

	Step	Process	Stakeholders engaged
1	Work out what we want to protect	Workshops were held with local community groups and the Advisory Committee to determine the environmental values.	Advisory Committee Community Industry groups
2	Establish ecological indicators	Aquatic ecosystem protection was the most stringent environmental value chosen for our waterways. Locally relevant indicators included chlorophyll-a concentration, seagrass abundance and water clarity.	Department of Environment and Climate Change
3	Find out the current situation	Results from scientific research were used to determine the 'current' level of protection for each lake.	Department of Environment and Climate Change Advisory Committee
4	Decide where you want to be	The Advisory Committee selected an appropriate level of protection to aspire to and established *draft* Ecological Condition Targets.	Advisory Committee Community
5	Work out how to get there (actions to achieve *draft* ecological condition targets)	Rural and urban stakeholders came up with possible management scenarios ranging from 'doing nothing' to 'best practice'. These were tested in the DSS to see how the ecology of the lake would respond and what actions allowed the Ecological Condition Targets to be met. The most appropriate actions were then reviewed for technical, political, financial and social feasibility through workshops with the Advisory Committee and the community. The economic costs and benefits of these actions were also determined to further refine the WQIP recommendations. This feasibility testing was an iterative process.	Rural Management Practices Technical Committee Landholder Reference Group and landholder workshops / surveys External WSUD stakeholder group Internal WSUD stakeholder group Community groups engaged in step 1
6	Draft Water Quality Improvement Plan actions and targets	The results of this analysis helped us work out how realistic the targets were and what time frames should be given to intermediate targets (i.e. short, medium and long-term targets). The agreed actions and targets were documented in the WQIP.	Advisory Committee
7	Final Water Qualtiy Improvement Plan actions and targets	The Draft Water Quality Improvement Plan was was put on public exhibition and open for comment from the community and stakeholders. The Advisory Committee reviewed submissions, identified how to respond and changes to the Water Quality Improvement Plan were made.	Community members Advisory Committee

8. Engagement methodology

A timetable of engagement activities was developed as part of the original engagement strategy. However, this section will outline what engagement activities have occurred in relation to the stages described in Table A1.2.

The engagement strategy focussed on inclusion rather than exclusion, firstly to gain support for the WQIP being developed and more importantly, to develop a solid foundation for implementing the Plan that will improve water quality of the Great Lakes into the future. As previously mentioned, stakeholders were engaged to varying levels (informed,

consulted, involved, collaborated, empowered) as described in Table A1.1, depending on their needs and wants.

The engagement undertaken as part of the CCI can be described under the following categories:

- awareness-raising within the general community to build awareness about the project and to find out how people would like to be involved (relates to 'informing' in Table A1.1)
- awareness-raising within agencies and government bodies (relates to 'informing' in Table A1.1)
- involving and gathering input from interested community groups, industry groups and individuals (relates to 'involving and consulting' in Table A1.1)
- capacity-building and joint learning with key individuals within organisations and key sectors of the community to support and drive change (relates to 'collaborating and empowering' in Table A1.1).

The method for engagement was inclusive, allowing everyone the opportunity to be involved in the project to the level they have identified.

All of the engagement activities that occurred as part of the CCI will be outlined according to the categories described above.

8.1 Awareness-raising within the community

Initially, identifiable stakeholder groups were invited to be involved in the Great Lakes CCI through introductory letters. These letters were sent to 58 of the groups that were identified through the snowball sampling method (see Section 6.1 of Appendix 1). The government agency groups identified were not sent letters, as it was expected that agency processes and internal project communication would enable them to be sufficiently engaged in the project.

The purpose of the letters sent to stakeholder groups was, firstly, to introduce the CCI project and raise general awareness about water quality and catchment management. Secondly, it was to offer a group presentation by the CCI Coordinator with the opportunity for the group to identify if, how and where they could become involved in the project. Groups were offered the opportunity to have input to the project through identifying the importance and use of their waterways to inform the environmental condition targets for the project (Table A1.2, step 1). Groups that were thought to have key information to contribute to the project were called by telephone, as a follow-up to the initial letter.

In addition to reaching the community through the organised groups that were sent letters (Section 8.1 of Appendix 1), individuals that are not part of groups were given the opportunity to be engaged and informed of the CCI project. Information on the CCI, water

quality and catchment management was presented through a number of channels. These channels included:

- 16 articles in NRM publications, and Council and community newsletters, introducing the project and inviting people to come to a workshop, or providing information on project progress
- poster displays inviting and informing, located in 16 retail outlets within the central business districts of Forster, Tuncurry and Bulahdelah
- website with information about the project
- eight media releases to communicate about the project, which received coverage on television (six stories), radio (13 stories) and in newspapers (14 stories)
- nine field days, where project information was made available through fact sheets, providing general information about the project
- 230 invitations to participate in a rural survey – these initial phone calls also raised awareness about the CCI project
- sending 71 letters to landholders surrounding research sites, raising their awareness about the project and purpose of the research
- visiting 30 individual landholders to introduce the CCI project and scope their interest in being involved in management practice research.

8.2 Awareness-raising within agencies and government bodies

- Eleven council reports were provided to GLC and approximately three to Taree Council, to update elected representatives on project direction and progress. One council report was provided to GSC staff but was not submitted to the council meeting. Two presentations were made to Greater Taree City Council, three to Great Lakes Council and one to MidCoast Water Board.
- Education of colleagues and peers was made through conference attendance and presentation of research reports by DECC and iCAM at various conferences.
- One of the roles of the Advisory Committee was to keep their colleagues informed of the purpose and progress of the CCI.
- Eighteen presentations were made to stakeholder groups (Water Quality Partnership, CMA Board, DECC, Port Stephens Estuary Management Committee, Smiths Lake Estuary Management Committee and Wallis Lake Estuary Management and catchment management committees) to build general awareness about the project, and improve linkages between projects and agencies (e.g. to the Water Quality Partnership).

8.3 Involvement and consultation with interested community members and industry groups

Groups and individuals that expressed an interest in the project were given a presentation on the Great Lakes CCI and provided with the opportunity to participate in (or host) a

workshop. These workshops involved participants in identifying the use and importance of the local waterways, and identifying water quality issues and solutions.

The following groups were involved in meetings and workshops:

- Wallis Lake Estuary Management Committee
- Hawks Nest / Tea Gardens Progress Association
- Myall Koala and Environment Support Group
- Bunyah Landcare
- Karuah Great Lakes Landcare
- Dyers Crossing Landcare
- Nabiac Landcare
- Getaway Luxury Houseboats
- Smiths Lake Landcare
- Great Lakes Coastal Land Management Network
- Hunter-Central Rivers Aboriginal Cultural & Environmental Network (ACEN) – CMA Partnership Committee
- Oyster Growers
- Fishermens Co-op Board
- University of the 3rd Age
- Mid Coast Dairy Advancement Group.

The objectives of these meetings were to:

1. Increase awareness, among meeting participants and the community, of the CCI project and what the project is aiming to achieve.
2. Provide an opportunity for participants to contribute to the development of the CCI project and ultimately work towards ensuring an improvement in our region's water quality.
3. Identify participants' opinions and knowledge surrounding:
    - past and current uses of the region's waterways
    - concerns about losing specific or favoured attributes from the region's waterways
    - what it is participants cherish or appreciate about the region's waterways
    - concerns or pressures affecting water quality
    - future use of the region's waterways
    - better management practices.
4. Find out if the participants are interested in being involved in the CCI Project in the future and, if so, the level of involvement they are interested in having in the project.

The questions and methods used in these meetings are outlined in the original Engagement Strategy. Groups that participated in these workshops were provided with a

report summarising the results of their workshop. This report also informed participants of how the information gathered was used to help the CCI come up with targets for water quality and helped to provide input the decision support system (DSS).

The issues identified by the groups are summarised in Appendix 4, which shows where they have been addressed in the WQIP. Many of the solutions identified by the groups have been integrated into the Farm Scale Action Plan (Section 3.3.2 of the WQIP).

Through initial discussions with community stakeholders, lake use activities were repeatedly identified as having a significant impact on water quality. Initially the CCI project was designed to focus on catchment impacts only. However, as a result of this stakeholder input, a project was established to document lake use issues and identify possible strategies for improvement. The issues that the community had raised about lake use impacts were discussed further by key stakeholders and potential areas for improvement have been documented (Section 3.5 of the WQIP).

Five one-on-one meetings also occurred, between interested individuals and the CCI Coordinator, to discuss water quality issues and solutions.

From the workshop and presentation process, some community groups and individuals decided they would like to be involved in step 5 of the CCI project (Table A1.2). Two meetings were held – one for Wallis and Smiths lakes stakeholders, and one for Myall Lakes stakeholders – to allow groups and individuals the chance to review the water quality targets set for the lakes and the draft management strategies for improving water quality. Fifteen people attended the Wallis and Smiths meeting, and 10 people attended the Myall meeting. Both groups supported the targets and the draft management strategies presented.

To help describe current management practice in the catchments of the Great Lakes CCI, 223 randomly selected landholders were contacted and invited to be involved in a workshop to fill in a management practice survey and provide input to the management practices that could be considered in the WQIP. By randomly selecting participants for this survey, landholders in the community – who may not normally be involved in catchment management works – were given the opportunity to be involved in the project. The survey is further described in the report called *Coastal Catchments Initiative Landholder Survey* (Billingham & Beale 2007).

Of the people contacted, 42 landholders attended workshops to complete these surveys. An additional 13 postal surveys and one phone survey were also completed. The workshops were held across the district, and farmers were given the opportunity to discuss the issues affecting water quality, and suggest effective and feasible strategies for water quality improvement (Figure A1.1). This information was incorporated into the rural strategies and issues summary (Sections 2.2 and 3.3.2 of the WQIP). Workshops also involved providing feedback on the findings of local research.

Figure A1.1. Landholders filling in surveys at workshops.

Three additional workshops occurred with landholders from across the catchment to find out what kinds of water quality improvement actions are practical in our local area. The local Dairy Action Group was also consulted on their ideas for farm and catchment-scale water quality improvement actions at two meetings. In earlier stages of the project, this group was invited to be involved in the Landholder Reference Group and were given information on the CCI project.

Two workshops were also held in Bunyah and Krambach to allow research feedback to be given and to allow input into farm-scale management strategies. These workshops were promoted through local landcare groups, and 22 people attended (Figure A1.2).

Figure A1.2. Landholders attending research and feedback workshop at Bunyah.

A total of 21 landholders were involved in management practice research by offering their property as a research site and answering questions about how they manage their properties. A further 16 landholders were involved in soil analysis and research to inform the catchment model. A total of 27 landholders received summary reports containing results of research undertaken on their property. This information included raw data from

sediment cores, data and a summary report on water quality, fish and macroinvertebrate sampling collected in the farm survey, raw data from nutrient budgets, and agronomic advice based on soil samples. This was seen as an important step in ensuring two-way and open communication, and in continuing to build awareness about the project and the research findings.

8.4 Capacity-building and joint learning with key stakeholders to support and drive change

Identifying opportunities for capacity-building and joint learning was the focus of this project's engagement strategy. This involved key individuals in organisations aiming to improve water quality and members of the public that have a significant interest in water quality. Building the capacity of individuals who will be using the WQIP, and their outputs, are critical to ensuring water quality objectives in the plan are achieved. By focussing on involving people in this way, we are drawing the link between the models, research, decision support tools and implementation frameworks being developed through this project and people. Since people are required to implement the plans (and may need to make changes to the way they or their organisation operates in order to implement them), it was hoped that approaching the project in this way will result in a greater chance of implementation than if these outputs were developed in isolation. This part of the engagement strategy involved key individuals within organisations and members of the community who have expressed an interest in being involved in the project.

Strategic input from the Advisory Committee

In the initial stages of the project, key organisations and groups with an interest in catchment management were invited to be part of the Great Lakes CCI project in an advisory capacity. The role of the CCI Advisory Committee was largely to guide the development of the WQIP, ensuring the relevance of the project outputs. Within the boundaries of the CCI contract with the Department of Environment Water, Heritage and the Arts, there was a philosophy of power-sharing with the committee who advised on project direction (e.g. the contract with the Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts indicates we need to develop a DSS and that the committee influence the conceptualisation of the DSS).

The CCI Advisory Committee was also established to provide technical advice and information to the project (from a variety of natural resource management backgrounds), and to provide stakeholder and community involvement for the life of the project.

Disseminating information to their represented groups and the general community was another key role of the Advisory Committee. Members of the committee acted as a consultative body to ensure input from stakeholders was incorporated into the project. Terms of reference for the Advisory Committee are included in the Engagement Strategy.

Given the broad scope of the project, the range of skills and expertise on the Advisory Committee was also broad. It included representatives from the rural community, the catchment management authority, professional fishing groups, oyster growers, Hunter Councils representatives, community catchment and estuary management groups, researchers, and other key agencies.

To build the knowledge and capacity of individuals on the committee, and to effectively guide the development of the WQIP, meetings have involved:

- reviewing existing environmental values relating to Wallis, Smiths and Myall lakes
- presentations on the latest results from the research and model development to build understanding of catchment and estuarine processes
- presentations on the outcomes of community engagement activities for input and discussion with the committee
- workshops to review existing environmental values for the waterways, and incorporate community views and opinions
- workshops to scope the role of the DSS, including how it will be used and the types of management scenarios we would like to test
- workshops to identify the issues to be covered in the Water Sensitive Development and Design project
- field visits to research and catchment management sites to demonstrate research and remedial activities (Figure A1.3)
- workshops to define the design of the DSS interface, and review the model outputs and scientific research results presented through the DSS
- workshops on the feasibility of Ecological Condition Targets and management actions
- workshops to identify appropriate actions for the Plan
- workshops to identify the mechanisms for using and updating the DSS after the project is completed.

Figure A1.3. Advisory Committee attending field visit and meeting.

In the process of working closely with the Advisory Committee to develop, review and endorse the WQIP, existing partnerships are being strengthened and new ones developed.

Continually building the knowledge and capacity of the committee helped to build political support for the project and the implementation of the WQIP.

A survey was conducted with the Advisory Committee when the committee was first established to find out what level of engagement Advisory Committee members felt they had at the start of the project, and to measure this against what level they felt they had at the end of the project and what level they desired. At the time of presenting this appendix, survey results were still being collated.

Regular Advisory Committee meetings were one of the key mediums for keeping the project team and committee informed about project progress. A total of 15 meetings occurred throughout the life of the project, representing a total of 193 person-days. Committee members were asked what additional information was required to ensure they had enough knowledge to report back to the groups or organisations they represented.

Throughout the CCI project, nine update sheets were produced and distributed. Two field visits have been held with Advisory Committee members – one showing research methods used during the CCI and one showing farm demonstration sites. These were done to build the capacity of committee members to make decisions based on research results and about farm management recommendations.

Stakeholder input into identifying options for improving water quality in rural areas

Rural management practice technical committee

A rural management practice technical committee comprised of catchment management practitioners was established to guide the development of water quality improvement options for rural areas. This committee was formed through identifying key practitioners involved in catchment management in our local area. Stakeholders involved in this part of the project included representatives from the Hunter-Central Rivers Catchment Management Authority, Department of Primary Industries, Great Lakes Council and landcare.

Within the boundaries of the CCI contract with the Department of Environment and Heritage, there is a philosophy of power sharing with the committee who advised on project direction from a technical perspective.

The technical committee provided input to the following areas:

- identifying the scope of key research projects undertaken on rural land including the management practice research undertaken by the Department of Environment and Climate Change, the literature review, landholder survey, nutrient budget and management practice assessments undertaken by the Department of Primary

Industries, and the farm-scale planning and assessment tool developed by Nick Bullock and Associates

- developing the farm-scale action plan for water quality improvement and reviewing stakeholder input
- deriving technically feasible scenarios for different farm management practices that were tested in the DSS for their suitability as recommendations in the WQIP
- developing nutrient budget management practice audit methodologies for high-risk case studies
- developing management strategies for water quality improvement most suited to the Great Lakes CCI
- determining cost estimates for management strategies including program costs
- developing a recommended approach for engaging rural landholders.

This input involved a process of joint learning, developing a common understanding of what will need to be done in the rural areas. This approach helped members of the committee gain an appreciation of what landholders and the organisations they represent need to do to achieve water quality objectives outlined in the Water Quality Improvement Plan.

Landholder Reference Group

To assist with providing detailed input to the project a Landholder Reference Group was established. It was also recognised that, since the WQIP makes recommendations that affect landholders and how they manage the land, landholders should be involved in planning these recommendations.

An open invitation was sent to landholders across the Wallis, Myall and Smiths lake catchments to be involved in the Landholder Reference Group. This was done through a combination of personal invitations (to landholders previously involved in research and project works), and advertisements in local newspapers (*The Land*) and newsletters (*The Wallis*).

Eleven landholders were involved in the Landholder Reference Group. This group met three times. Meetings involved deriving issues and possible solutions for water quality improvement at both the farm and catchment scale. Meetings also provided an avenue to give landholders feedback on research and modelling results.

The specific aims of the Landholder Reference Group were to:

- identify farm-level water quality issues
- identify farm-level solutions to water quality issues
- advise on what is practical in our local area
- define what we should consider as management practice options in the Farm Scale Action Plan for water quality
- ensure that the options identified are relevant and realistic for local farm environments.

Other landholder input

As discussed in Section 8.3 of Appendix 1, landholders involved in initial workshops, and research and planning feedback sessions, were also involved in identifying options for improving water quality in rural areas. These workshops were designed with capacity-building and joint learning in mind, focussing on information sharing.

Stakeholder input into Identifying options for improving water quality in urban and rural residential areas

Two stakeholder groups (internal and external) were established to assist with developing the Water Sensitive Urban Development and Design Strategy.

Internal stakeholder group

The internal stakeholder group included engineers, planners, environmental managers, operation managers and asset managers from Great Lakes Council, and engineering and development assessment planners from Greater Taree City Council. This project was specifically designed to build the capacity of council staff to improve the integration of their decision-making and planning processes. A representative from MidCoast Water was also involved in the internal stakeholder group to help form strong links between the Water Sensitive Urban Development and Design Strategy, and the Integrated Water Cycle Management Strategy being developed by MidCoast Water.

These stakeholders helped provide input through the following ways:

- identifying the issues to be covered in the Water Sensitive Urban Development and Design Strategy
- localising the options for water-sensitive development and design, as well as identifying the local barriers to uptake
- developing a strategy to overcome the barriers to water-sensitive development and design
- working with experts in the field of offset schemes to derive with a scheme suitable to the Great Lakes catchments
- identifying where the council planning scheme can be used to implement the options identified for water-sensitive development and design.

This approach gave individuals the opportunity to contribute to and be part of the decision-making for the framework they will be implementing once the WQIP is completed. Staff had the opportunity to be involved in and guide the project in the following areas.

External stakeholder group

The external stakeholder group involved industry representatives including builders; architects and developers; environmental groups; and local planning, engineering and surveying consultants. These stakeholders had the opportunity to be involved at key stages

to provide a 'reality check' on the implementation of the development and nutrient offset schemes developed through this project. Key stages included:

- input into the direction of the Water Sensitive Urban Development and Design Strategy
- identification of barriers to uptake of water-sensitive urban design
- input into the development of a draft 'deemed to comply' Development Control Plan.

Stakeholder input into identifying options for minimising water quality impacts of lake uses

Through initial discussions with community stakeholders, lake use activities were repeatedly identified as having a significant impact on water quality. Initially the CCI project was designed to focus on land-based catchment impacts only. However, as a result of this stakeholder input, a project was established to document lake use issues and identify possible strategies for improvement. The issues that the community had raised about lake use impacts were discussed further with key stakeholders including Marine Parks, Waterways, oyster growers, professional fishers, Department of Primary Industries, NSW Food Authority and Great Lakes Council. Potential areas for improvement were identified.

Stakeholder input into management systems and institutional arrangements

Management systems and institutional arrangements were developed as part of the CCI, and collectively cover urban and rural areas. These arrangements were developed to help maximise the use and adoption of the WQIP by a number of agencies. To develop these arrangements, engagement opportunities were pursued with elected representatives, boards and staff in a number of different organisations. The following engagement events occurred:

- key staff from partner organisations – the Hunter-Central Rivers Catchment Management Authority (CMA), MidCoast Water (MCW) and Greater Taree City Council (GTCC) – developed Statements of Joint Intent for the Coastal Catchments Initiative. On 4 April 2007 a joint signing event was held on the bank of Wallis Lake in Forster to make these partnership agreements official. Approximately 25 people attended the event, including representatives from partner agencies, Council staff, members of catchment and estuary committees, and the media. The finalised Statements of Joint Intent are attached as Appendix 2.
- one workshop with experts in the field of offsets schemes to build capacity of staff to develop a scheme
- 10 agency representatives met to discuss and review pollution control systems. This meeting provided an opportunity for awareness-raising among new organisations at the state level

- six agency representatives met to discuss management systems, adaptive management framework, financial strategy and institutional arrangements for plan implementation
- meetings will be held with Council staff and the Advisory Committee to establish methods for incorporating the DSS into statutory planning and decision-making processes within government.

Figure A1.4. Great Lakes Council, Greater Taree City Council, Catchment Management Authority and MidCoast Water signing Statements of Joint Intent.

9. Engagement strategy evaluation

Evaluation of the engagement process outlined in this strategy is necessary to assess whether the strategy is effective in achieving its objectives. The following evaluation methodology was used to assess the success of project engagement undertaken as part of the CCI project.

There are two types of evaluation relevant to community engagement (as described by Environment Protection Authority / Department of Land and Water Conservation, n.d.). These are:

- process evaluation – this provides an evaluation of engagement implementation, activities and processes
- impact evaluation – assesses the overall effectiveness of the engagement strategy in achieving its stated objectives. This measures impact and outcomes over time, as a result of engagement.

Due to the short time frame of the CCI project, the focus of the engagement strategy evaluation was process-based rather that impact-based. While it is recognised that impact evaluation is the most appropriate form of analysis, impact evaluation generally requires information to be collected after project outputs have been completed and over a period of time greater that this project's time frame.

The evaluation techniques outlined in Table A1.3 show the objectives for engagement against the measures of success and evaluation indicators. The type of evaluation is identified and the evaluation activities that require impact analysis (that will need to be undertaken after project completion and implementation over a period of time) are indicated.

Table A1.3. Evaluation techniques for engagement strategy objectives and associated measures of success.

Objectives	Measures of success	Evaluation tools / indicators	Evaluation type	Results
To provide opportunities for capacity-building and joint learning with key stakeholders in order to: • ensure issues are identified and addressed proactively rather than reactively through the process of developing the WQIP • encourage ownership of the Water Quality Improvement Plan to promote a high level of responsibility for maintaining and utilising the plans • develop a well-informed Water Quality Improvement Plan, incorporating a diverse range of knowledge and opinions, making them practical and relevant to end users.	Opportunities for joint learning and input from key stakeholders provided	Terms of reference for Advisory Committee established	Process	Established
		Number of project updates	Process	Nine
		Number of field visits and attendance	Process	Five Advisory Committee members attended and experiment demonstration and 23 members attended a field visit (seven person-days)
		Number of Advisory Committee meetings and attendance	Process	Between 15 and 25 different people attended 17 meetings (totalling 203 person-days)
		Number of divisions and agencies involved in developing the framework for Water Sensitive Development and Design	Process	Six divisions within Great Lakes Council and MidCoast Water, 16 external organisations

Objectives	Measures of success	Evaluation tools / indicators	Evaluation type	Results
		Attendance at Water Sensitive Design and Development meetings	Process	Between 10 and 14 officers from great Lakes Council and MidCoast Water attended four internal WSUD working group meetings (44 person days). Between seven and 14 people attended three external WSUD stakeholder meetings (25 person-days).
		Attendance at pollution control workshop	Process	10 agency stakeholders attended a full-day workshop
		Attendance at management system meetings	Process	Between five and nine officers attended three meetings (19 person-days)
		Advisory Committee role assessment survey (at the beginning and end of the project)	Impact	Survey results were still being collated at the time of presenting this report
		Number of Rural Management Technical Committee meetings	Process	Between three and 16 people attended 25 meetings (108

Objectives	Measures of success	Evaluation tools / indicators	Evaluation type	Results
				person-days)
		Number of expert panels participated in	Process	Three (two on development offsets and one on nutrient offsets)
	Project outputs that are used (DSS, Framework for Water Sensitive Development and Design, Guidelines for rural management practices, WQIP)	Number of organisations / individuals using project outputs	Impact *	
	Implementation of the on-ground actions in the WQIP by key stakeholder groups	Number of rural landholders implementing recommended practice outlined in the WQIP (on completion of plan) Number of developments implementing recommendations outlined in the WQIP in relation to water-sensitive urban design	Impact * Impact *	
	Community input valued and considered by project team, and reflected in plans	Number of community members involved in identifying importance and use of waterways, and issues and solutions relating to water quality	Process	175 people (representing 16 groups)
		Number of community members involved in developing and reviewing the WQIP management strategies (attendance at each meeting)	Process	62
		Number of reports written and sent to community groups (e.g. reports from workshops on use and importance of waterways)	Process	14
To form partnerships with stakeholders from government and the community, and work together on issues of concern in relation to	Open and inclusive communication with key stakeholders	Number of presentations to agency stakeholder groups, apart from the Advisory Committee (e.g. CMA board, councillors)	Process	23 presentations (37 person-days)
		Number of project updates	Process	Nine

Objectives	Measures of success	Evaluation tools / indicators	Evaluation type	Results
water quality. This will involve establishing an open, inclusive and transparent process for developing the Water Quality Improvement Plan in partnership with stakeholders, through power-sharing and collaboration.		Number of Advisory Committee meetings and attendance	Process	Between 15 and 25 different people attended 17 meetings (totalling 203 person-days)
		Number of formal communications sent to landholders involved in the project (e.g. letters, monitoring results)	Process	613
		Attendance at monitoring results workshop	Process	22
		Number of property access agreements signed	Process	32
		Number of landholders visited to introduce the project	Process	30
		Number of on-ground projects implemented with CCI funding (rural)	Impact	One project involving three landholders
	Open and inclusive communication with the general community	Number of newsletter articles and media stories	Process	18 articles and 33 media stories
		Number of groups invited to be involved in the project	Process	58
		Number of letters sent to landholders surrounding water quality monitoring properties	Process	71
	Commitment by CMA, Council staff, catchment and estuarine management groups, and other agencies to incorporate the WQIP into existing planning systems or frameworks	Number of Statements of Joint Intent or Memoranda of Understanding signed	Process	Three
		Number of representatives on the Advisory Committee	Process	25 people representing 20 agencies and groups

Objectives	Measures of success	Evaluation tools / indicators	Evaluation type	Results
		Attendance at Advisory Committee meetings by representatives	Process	Between 11 and 21 committee representatives attended 17 meetings
To build awareness within the general community about water quality issues and catchment management	Level of exposure the public has had to the CCI project and its key messages	Number of posters displayed to public	Process	Project posters displayed in 16 small businesses and at nine events
		Number of newsletter articles and media stories	Process	18 articles and 33 media stories
		Groups and individuals provided with an overview of the project	Process	230 people at two information sessions (Forster Probus Club and World Wetlands Day)
	Evidence of behavioural and attitudinal change in relation to current management practice and their impacts on water quality	Number of on-ground projects implemented with CCI funding (rural)	Impact	One project involving three landholders
		Baseline information from rural landholders about current practice and attitudes towards environmental issues	Impact* (baseline only)	
		Number of developments implementing recommendations outlined in the WQIP in relation to water-sensitive urban design (compared to before the WQIP)	Impact*	

* Indicates analysis that will need to be undertaken after project completion.

Although impact evaluation often requires long-term monitoring in order to be measured, there have been unintended outcomes and impacts of the CCI project that can be reported here. These include:

- the Mid Coast Dairy Advancement Group providing input to the Farm Scale Action Plan and setting up a Farmers Targets for Change project in the CCI area as result of their involvement
- landholders who have not previously been involved in NRM projects expressing an interest in setting up projects on their properties as a result of CCI workshops and surveys
- making contact with landholders who have not previously been involved in NRM projects as a result of landholders surveys, workshops and management practice research site selection
- landholders providing in-depth feedback on the future approach and management actions for water quality improvement in rural areas (see Section 3.3.2 of the WQIP)
- landholders making direct contact with the CCI Coordinator to request advice on water quality issues identified on their farm (followed up with Catchment Officer assistance and advice)
- four individuals involved in the landholder survey, Landholder Reference Group and a survey site for the Rural Management Practice Research nominating and becoming members of the Wallis and Myall Catchment Management Group (the group that advise on catchment management programs for the CCI area)
- individuals who attended community workshops requesting presentations on research results for their community group, providing the opportunity to talk about the WQIP to an additional 200 individuals
- media coverage on research results, leading to members of the public contacting the CCI Coordinator to discuss water quality issues in their local area and offering additional communication opportunities through a local newsletter
- one-to-one discussions with an interested landholder on research results, leading to the landholder (who is also an expert statistician) offering to review the Rural Management Practice Research report prepared by DECC
- Development Assessment planners involved in Water Sensitive Urban Design workshops approaching CCI Coordinator for input to the Development Assessment of properties adjacent to ecologically sensitive areas of Wallis Lake

A measure of success of engagement activities can also be drawn from the satisfaction of stakeholders that have been engaged. This can be indicated by:

- stakeholder willingness to attend multiple all-day meetings throughout the project

- Rural Management Practice Technical Group deciding to continue to meet to implement the WQIP and use the products developed as a result of the project
- Landholder Reference Group deciding they were satisfied with how they were involved in the project by agreeing that they did not need to meet again once the overall catchment strategies were presented. The group were open to future involvement on request, indicating that they trusted the process
- stakeholder feedback at catchment strategy workshops was extremely positive, with five of the six people surveyed indicating that they were 'very satisfied' with the information presented at the workshop, with the sixth respondent being 'satisfied'
- individuals from the community approaching the CCI Coordinator after the catchment strategies were presented to express their thanks for returning to present the results of the project
- the Advisory Committee survey (to be completed in late 2008).

A number of lessons were learnt about engagement from the CCI engagement process. These are summarised below:

- sharing power with groups assists with achieving the highest level of engagement (from Table A1.1). The Rural Management Practice Group is an excellent example of this – their input during WQIP workshops highlighted the need for an on-farm assessment tool for water quality management. Due to the power that this group were given for the project, additional funding was sought and provided, resulting in this new project. The group is now closely involved in scoping and developing the tool, which will assist with plan implementation. The group has recommended that they continue to meet to implement the WQIP and use the products developed as a result of the project
- when discussing water quality issues and solutions with landholders, the most in-depth feedback is provided when the number of participants in workshops is very low (i.e. two to four people) and a casual environment is created to exchange ideas
- recognising past involvement in catchment management projects is essential for the success of continued engagement, particularly identifying where previous involvement influences the new program or project
- building trust with groups and individuals (particularly industry groups) is essential to gain support and facilitate input. To gain this trust you need to be able to demonstrate that you are not attending meetings to tell them what to do. This is achieved by listening and answering questions of concern, and being flexible to meet with groups on their terms (e.g. attend scheduled meetings)
- undertaking an engagement strategy that covers all levels of engagement (Table A1.1) takes time. Demanding project timelines can become counterintuitive

when engaging people. This is particularly the case when you are working at the level of 'empowerment' – for example, the majority of the decision-making for the WQIP needed to be made towards the end of the project and decisions were being made on the outputs of complex modelling. With tight timelines and limited time with the Advisory Committee, there was little time for the Advisory Committee to adequately process all of the new information. More time could have been spent describing the assumptions and decisions built into the models to assist with decision-making

- working with stakeholders in the way that they wish to be involved was a commitment made at the beginning of the project. Project time constraints prove challenging when attempting to facilitate stakeholder input to meet project deadlines while fitting in with stakeholders scheduled meetings
- managing expectations of stakeholders is critical to the success of an engagement strategy. This is particularly relevant when stakeholders are used to the traditional inform / consult model (i.e. the lower levels of engagement described in Table A1.1). Going to meet with groups without preconceived ideas about what will be in the WQIP can be difficult to manage when people are used to reacting to ideas 'presented' to them by governments rather than 'coming up' with ideas
- stakeholders appreciate ongoing contact and feedback on project progress, particularly when research results are presented by the researchers themselves. Involving researchers in feedback sessions is an effective way of demonstrating to the stakeholders that their input and contribution is highly valued
- when aiming to collaborate with and empower stakeholders, it is important to involve them in project learnings (e.g. introduce them to research or modelling findings as they emerge). The challenge is when the results change due to updates in the modelling and / or figures. These can lead to confusion, frustration and what can appear to be 'covering old ground'. When this occurs it is essential to clearly explain the reasons behind the changes and remind stakeholders of the approach being used (i.e. learning together)
- approaching engagement in this way requires flexibility, as key members of the project team need to be prepared to respond to the concerns of individuals and clarify project components. Responding in this way takes time, and with tight project time frames managing all identified concerns effectively can prove challenging
- care needs to be taken when managing workshops where some participants have been involved in the whole project and some members have not. Assisting all participants to reach a similar level of understanding within a short time is challenging, and this is best managed outside of the meeting time (e.g. meeting with individual members to brief them prior to the meeting)

- the large number of unintended outcomes recorded during this project was often a result of the strong links across Great Lakes Council as an organisation or with project partners – for example, the catchment officer attending landholders' workshops resulted in many of the unintended outcomes relating to landholders described above.

9.1 Summary

The greatest measure of success in relation to the engagement undertaken as part of the CCI is the completion of the WQIP that combines new research findings with the experience of local people (community and agency representatives).

During the development of the WQIP, engagement was approached in an open and inclusive way, with a vision to involve people in the planning to instil a sense of ownership for the plans and assist in their implementation. Engagement ranged from informing to empowering stakeholders. While it is difficult to quantitatively measure the success of the engagement strategy at this stage, the 100 meetings and workshops representing 500 person-days of participation and input into the WQIP – as well as the unintended outcomes described above – are a clear indication of the engagement strategy's achievements.

The commitment to implement the WQIP can only be measured with long-term monitoring. However, if the commitment to develop the WQIP is to be an indicator of the commitment to implement water quality improvement measures, the WQIP is off to a great start.