

Coastal Erosion Policy

At the recent NSW Local Government Association annual conference at Coffs Harbour, as Clarence Valley Council Mayor I successfully moved:-

- “1. That the Association request that the NSW State government develop and clearly articulate its policy on coastal erosion and the threat posed to private policy and as a matter of urgency provide legal guidance to Councils on this issue.
2. That the Association Executive develops a coastal erosion policy for consideration at 2008 Conference
3. That the Association also engage with the Federal Government on the issue”.

The matter of coastal erosion is a serious and rapidly emerging issue.

It was explained to conference that the federal Department of Environment had recently released a policy discussion document which itemised and placed under scrutiny the issue of local government responsibility in consequence of inevitable sea level rises.

There is an emerging national focus, through the climate change and global warming debate, on coastal erosion and threats posed to coastal fringe private property.

The NSW government has not yet articulated a policy position on coastal erosion.

Building approvals by well intentioned local councils near frontal dunes 50 and more years ago, places the potential of huge liability questions on today's councils.

Some advice indicates that such liability may well be able to be avoided by insurance underwriters.

Parts of the 1300 km of NSW coastline are eroding at an alarming rate. In the Clarence Valley seaside locations like Woody Head, Brooms Head and Wooli face potential risk in the future.

The NSW government has commendably spent considerable sums on securing a good understanding of coastal erosion processes. However our constituents rightly argue that it is simply not good enough to allow natural coastal processes to occur.

All potential remedies have proven to be beyond the financial reach of councils.

Rock armouring of the dunes in front of houses can lead to total loss of beach for public use and creates a large ongoing maintenance bill.

Sand pumping from outer sea sand deposits or from behind breakwaters is very costly to install and maintain.

House buy backs are not an option given that the infrequent and much sought after coastal cottages are fetching over one million dollars.

A policy of house retreats is unrealistic as most cannot be moved and other problems such as blocked roads would occur.

The Local Government Association needs to develop and lobby sound policy to protect coastal councils from potential liability exposure and to afford some hope for those of our constituents in fragile coastal fringe locations.

The NSW government must be lobbied strongly to articulate a policy which protects councils and our ratepayers and also provides sound legal guidance for affected councils.

Clarence Valley Council will continue to lobby governments on this serious issue.

Ian Tiley
Mayor Clarence Valley Council
23rd October 2007