

Save Collingwood Beach

PO BOX 21
VINCENTIA 2540

The Hon. Rob Stokes MP,
52 Martin Place,
NSW, 2000,
20th December 2016.

CC: the Hon. Shelley Hancock MP
CC: Shoalhaven Mayor Amanda Findley

Re: Collingwood Beach, Jervis Bay

Dear Minister Stokes,

The Save Collingwood Beach partnership wishes to outline to you the result of the recent community consultation process concerning vegetation management at Collingwood Beach, Jervis Bay. We have attached the full report for your information but will summarise it briefly below.

The reason we have felt compelled to draw your attention to this report is that the Collingwood Beach Preservation Group (CBPG) has, since the release of the report and despite the release of the Draft NSW Coastal Management State Environmental Planning Policy Maps identifying Collingwood as occurring in the Coastal Vulnerability Area, repeatedly and publicly stated your support for their position on dune vegetation management. There is a clear effort being made to subvert the will of the vast majority of Shoalhaven residents (and non-residents) using your profile as an influential member of cabinet to do so. We note that the CBPG is a member group of the NSW Coastal Alliance which has a presence across the NSW coast. It is therefore clear that Collingwood Beach is a test case for the entire NSW coastline, and has the potential to set a dangerous precedent.

We urge you, and your colleague the Hon. Shelley Hancock MP, to publicly support the will of the Shoalhaven community in regards Collingwood, to take steps to prevent your name being used in this manner and to ensure that well-connected fringe groups are not allowed to dictate public policy and subvert public consultation.

Members of our group met with staff from the Department of Planning and Environment (DoPE) on Friday 16th December at Old Erowal Bay to discuss the draft SEPP and its relevance to the Shoalhaven coast. We learned that the staff had met with the CBPG, accompanied by two Shoalhaven Councillors, immediately before our meeting. We believe that this was an attempt by the CBPG to intimidate your staff into altering the maps, and was an unfair position for DoPE staff to be subjected to. We would draw your attention to the fact that some Councillors have been long opposed at the draft Shoalhaven Coastal Zone Management Plan being submitted to you, despite the fact that this could cost the Shoalhaven its slice of the \$36 million earmarked for implementation of the *Coastal Management Act*. This opposition is due to an ideological stance on Collingwood Beach and sea level rise.

Key outcomes of the consultation process were:

- The receipt of two petitions opposing the dune vegetation plans, one of 1500 signatures, the other of 946;
- The receipt of seven submissions from community groups, all but one of which strongly opposed the plans;
- The receipt of three opposing submissions from government agencies, including OEH, DPI and Lands;
- The receipt of 511 individual submissions.

Of 520 submissions considered, 71% opposed both plans while 19% supported one or other vegetation management plan. Of those submissions from within the Shoalhaven (77% of all submissions) 79% opposed both plans. Of those submissions from outside the Shoalhaven (19% of all submissions) 40% opposed vegetation management, while 47% supported either the CBPG plan or the Shoalhaven City Council (SCC) plan. This contrasts with a study of 168 visitors conducted by Macquarie University students in Easter 2016 which found 47% supported managing the dune for stability (i.e. to prevent erosion), 41% for animals and just 2% for views. This dichotomy likely reflects submissions received in support of vegetation management from Collingwood Beach holiday home owners and their relatives.

The co-author of the Tasmanian Coastal Works manual felt compelled to make a submission highlighting that the CBPG plan was based on an extract from the manual which had been taken out of context. Crown Lands informed

SCC of their responsibility to manage the dune in accordance with the *Crown Land Act*. DPI expressed concern that negative impacts could accrue to Jervis Bay Marine Park via the need for erosion management as a result of increased erosion as a result of the plans. The OEH stated that the plans did not comply with state government coastal legislation or guidelines, including the *Coastal Management Act*, and expressed concern that the proposed vegetation management would increase coastal hazards. Besides these submissions, others highlighted inconsistency between existing SCC policies and the proposals, anger at the perception that persistent vandalism was being rewarded and concern that the proposals would negatively affect wildlife and the future stability of the area.

The outcome of the consultation process was that the Shoalhaven community (like those surveyed by Macquarie University) independently arrived at the hierarchy of management objectives included in the *Coastal Management Act* (hazard protection – environment – general use). This should be a cause of some satisfaction for you and DoPE. Unfortunately, the subsequent repeated use of your name by the CBPG in conjunction with misleading information as to the motivation of the group serves only to cast doubt on the credentials of the *Coastal Management Act* and undermine SCCs ability to implement it.

Cross-party support for the community's position

One of the most interesting elements of the Collingwood Beach saga is that opposition to the vegetation management proposals cross political boundaries. This is best illustrated by this picture, taken outside the Vincentia polling station at the Federal election in July, that shows active supporters of Liberal, Labor and Green candidates alongside the creator of one of the petitions. Unfortunately, up to now only The Greens have taken an active interest in ending the saga in concurrence with the wishes of the community.



Where to from here?

SCC resolved to develop a new plan for Collingwood in accordance with the community's response and to develop a vandalism policy at the same time. These are to be completed by July. Because the CBPG has demonstrated a refusal to accept the will of the Shoalhaven people, the Save Collingwood Beach partnership is growing its membership in order to demonstrate clearly to elected representatives the breadth of concern for this issue. We now represent five community groups with approximate membership of 700 people and anticipate the support of several more.

Your staff assured us that you were making evidence-based decisions on coastal zonings, and that no changes to the Coastal Vulnerability Area would be made without scrutiny from the Coastal Council and without strong supporting material. We urge you to maintain this position, and in fact we are of the view that the sea level projections for the Shoalhaven are likely to be conservative. The Shoalhaven Natural Resources and Floodplain Management Committee recently recommended SCC adopt stronger sea level rise policies. Council voted to reject this recommendation.

Save Collingwood Beach wishes you a Happy Christmas and requests a meeting at your convenience in early 2017.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Oisín Sweeney'.

(Oisín Sweeney, on behalf of the Save Collingwood Beach partnership).