



## REPORT

# Australian Coastal Councils Conference

Held at Mandurah, WA on 3 and 4 March 2009

12 March 2008

**NOTE:**

Presentations from the Australian Coastal Councils Conference will shortly be added to the National Sea Change Taskforce web site at [www.seachangetaskforce.org.au](http://www.seachangetaskforce.org.au)

## **SPONSORS**

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## CONTENTS

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Summary   | 3  |
| Program Overview - Australian Coastal Councils Conference | 4  |
| <br>  |    |
| TUESDAY 3 MARCH:  | 6  |
| Welcome   | 6  |
| Official Opening – The Hon. Gary Gray AO MP               | 8  |
| Mandurah and the South West                               | 11 |
| Western Australia's Royalties to Regions Plan             | 12 |
| Climate Change Current Update                             | 12 |
| Coastal Planning and Management                           | 13 |
| Launch of Australian Coastal Alliance                     | 15 |
| Economic and Tourism Benefits of Coastal Trails           | 16 |
| Legal Implications - Planning for Climate Change          | 17 |
| Concurrent Sessions                                       | 18 |
| Group Reports   | 18 |
| <br>  |    |
| WEDNESDAY 4 March 2009:                                   | 20 |
| West Australian Regional Development Initiatives          | 20 |
| Planning for Population Change                            | 21 |
| Economic Strategies for Australia's Coastal Regions       | 22 |
| Priorities for the Future                                 | 23 |
| Report on Economic Conditions in Queensland Coastal Areas | 24 |
| Coastal Emergency Planning                                | 25 |
| Preparing for Ageing Populations                          | 26 |
| Coastal Priorities  | 28 |
| Conference Close  | 30 |

## SUMMARY

The Australian Coastal Councils Conference was convened by the National Sea Change Taskforce and the City of Mandurah to provide an update on key issues affecting coastal councils. It was held at the Mandurah Performing Arts Centre, in Western Australia, on 3 and 4 March 2009.

Australia's coastal councils face significant challenges in dealing with the impact of rapid population growth and the potential impact of climate change. The conference provided coastal planners, managers and decision makers with insights into the key issues facing the nation's coastal communities. The conference also provided an update on the latest demographic data and advances in knowledge of the potential impact of climate change on coastal communities and explored policy initiatives and strategies to address the environmental, social and economic impact of the sea change phenomenon.

The conference was organised by the National Sea Change Taskforce with major input from the Australian Department of Climate Change, the Australian Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government and the West Australian Department for Planning and Infrastructure. The event featured the launch of the initial phase of the Australian Coastal Alliance, which is being established as an interface between coastal planners and managers and members of the research community with a focus on coastal research. The conference also provided an opportunity to identify coastal research priorities and the key issues to be included in a submission to a House of Representatives Standing Committee Inquiry on the effects of the global financial crisis on regional communities. Key presenters at the conference included:

- The Hon Gary Gray AO MP, Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Development and Northern Australia
- Andrew Beatty – partner and environmental lawyer, Baker & McKenzie
- Lalage Cherry - Assistant Director, Coastal Adaptation, Australian Government Department of Climate Change
- Andrew Howe - Senior Demographer, Australian Bureau of Statistics
- Eric Lumsden, Director General, West Australian Department for Planning and Infrastructure
- Dr Kathy McInnes - CSIRO's Climate Adaptation Flagship.
- Mark Newman – CEO, City of Mandurah
- Paul Rosair - Director Major Regional Projects, WA Department of Local Government and Regional Development

## **PROGRAM OVERVIEW - AUSTRALIAN COASTAL COUNCILS CONFERENCE**

The Coastal Councils Conference included the following sessions:

### **TUESDAY 3 MARCH**

*Welcome:* Barry Sammels, Chair, National Sea Change Taskforce

*Opening:* The Hon Gary Gray AO MP, Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Development and Northern Australia

*Mandurah and the South West:* An overview of the issues facing councils at Mandurah and in the South West region

*Western Australia's Royalties to Regions Infrastructure Plan:* Presentations by Paul Rosair, Director Major Regional Projects, WA Department of Local Government and Regional Development

*Climate Change Current Update:* Presentation and questions with Dr Kathleen McInnes, CSIRO Climate Adaptation Flagship and Lalage Cherry, Assistant Director, Coastal Adaptation, Australian Government Department of Climate Change

*Coastal Planning and Management:* Presentations and facilitated panel discussion on current planning discussions and future research with Prof David Wood, WA Coastal Planning and Coordination Council, Dr Bill De La Mare, CSIRO Wealth from Oceans Flagship, Prof Tim Smith, Sustainability Research Group, University of the Sunshine Coast, and Libby Mears, Victorian Coastal Council

*Launch of Australian Coastal Alliance:* Barry Sammels, Chair – National Sea Change Taskforce.

*Economic and Tourism Benefits of Coastal Trails:* Charles Johnson, Executive Planner Special Projects, WA Department for Planning and Infrastructure

*Legal Implications – Planning for Climate Change:* Andrew Beatty – partner and environmental lawyer, Baker & McKenzie. Presentation and questions

*Concurrent Sessions* – Field tour of Mandurah region and Coastal Management Research Priorities

### **WEDNESDAY 4 MARCH**

*WA Regional Development Initiatives:* Eric Lumsden, Director General, West Australian Department for Planning and Infrastructure

*Planning for Population Change* – Presentations and questions with Andrew Howe, Senior Demographer, Australian Bureau of Statistics

*Economic Strategies for Australia's Coastal Regions:* Facilitate forum discussions to consider options for stimulating local economies in coastal areas, with members of the Taskforce CEO Working Group

*Coastal Emergency Response Planning:* Russell Stevens, Director Research and Liaison, Dire and Emergency Services Authority of Western Australia

*Community – Preparing for Ageing Populations:* Mary-Lou Corcoran, Mayor, City of Victor Harbor South Australia

*Current Coastal Priorities:* Break out session followed by group reports and facilitated discussion.

## **TUESDAY 3 MARCH**

### **WELCOME**

Barry Sammels, the Chair of the Taskforce and Mayor of the City of Rockingham in Western Australia, welcomed delegates and said the conference was an important event for our member councils and for everyone with a stake in the future of the Australian coast and its communities. He said that it brought together representatives of coastal councils in every Australian state, policy makers at a State and Federal level, researchers who are focused on the coastal zone, and representatives of State and Federal government agencies and representatives of the private sector.

One of the most important things about the conference is the opportunity it provides for individuals and agencies with an interest in the sustainability of the Australian coast to work together to develop strategies that will address the challenges facing our coastal communities and the coastal environment. Those challenges are complex and difficult. Coastal councils are simultaneously attempting to deal with the effects of rapid population growth and high levels of tourism. Over the past ten years there has been a lack of resources to meet the growing demand for local infrastructure and services. Coastal councils are at the forefront of having to find ways to address the needs of ageing populations. They also face the challenge of how to prepare for the impact of climate change while at the same time minimising their potential exposure to legal liability.

These are complex issues and inevitably they will require cooperation between all three spheres of government. The local government sector cannot deal with them in isolation. Preparing for the impact of climate change, with associated rising sea levels and more severe extreme weather events, for example, is beyond the capability of a single local government authority. It requires a collaborative and coordinated effort on the part of each sphere of government to devise an effective response.

Then, of course, we have the effects of the global financial crisis on the Australian economy and the local communities that we represent. Coastal communities are at particular risk from the effects of the economic downturn. Their economies are heavily dependent on the tourism, property and construction sectors. Each of these sectors has been impacted by the financial crisis with flow-on effects for local economic activity. Finding effective responses to the effects of this economic downturn is a matter of urgency. And that is why we have set aside time at this conference specifically to assess the effects of the economic downturn and to exchange views on how to deal with them.

It is appropriate at this point to acknowledge the measures the Rudd Government has initiated to address the issues facing the Australian local government sector, including coastal councils. We welcome the Federal Government's \$300 million Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Program, announced last November, and the additional \$500 million allocated as part of the recent economic stimulus package for strategic infrastructure projects. This program will be an important boost to local economic development and job creation in Australia's coastal areas.

We also welcome the establishment of the Australian Council of Local Government as a means of achieving a more collaborative national approach between the local government sector and the Federal Government.

We also welcome the opportunity to be represented on the Council Steering Committee. The Steering Committee is made up of 22 local government representatives and the Taskforce is well-represented on this body. As Chair of the Taskforce I have been appointed specifically to represent members of this organisation. Three other representatives of Taskforce member councils have been appointed to the Committee. They are Mary-Lou Corcoran, the Taskforce Treasurer and Mayor of the City of Victor Harbor, Val Schier, the Mayor of Cairns Regional Council and Allan Sutherland, the Mayor of the Moreton Bay Regional Council in Queensland.

These appointments provide coastal communities with a strong voice on the Steering Committee and give us an outstanding opportunity to work with the Federal Government and other local government bodies to help solve the challenges facing our communities. To have this new forum at which local councils can enter into direct dialogue with the Australian Government on issues of national significance is a major step forward for the local government sector.

Turning his attention to the conference and program of speakers Barry Sammels said delegates would have the opportunity to consider the range of issues affecting coastal communities around Australia as well as some of the specific issues affecting coastal areas here in Western Australia.

The conference gives us the opportunity to share information and experiences about dealing with the issues affecting our communities. It gives us the chance to be brought up to date on the work being undertaken to prepare for the impact of climate change. And it will provide us with the opportunity to be updated on the latest demographic trends in coastal Australia.

We have a strong program of expert speakers on issues such as the legal implications of planning for climate change, the need for adequate coastal emergency response planning, and the steps being taken by one coastal council to respond to the ageing of its community. We have also set time aside for future strategy development.

He said that individually, none of us can know all the answers to the major challenges facing our communities. But collectively, I believe, we have the knowledge, the skills and the resources to develop effective strategies to deal with the issues we face. We are therefore setting out to advance our knowledge of the priority issues facing our communities, and we aim to advance our advocacy and research agenda and to do this with the input of our member councils and other representatives present at this event.

Barry Sammels acknowledged the strong support received from the organisations sponsoring this conference. Without their help and encouragement it would not have been possible to present the program of speakers that we have organised. He specifically acknowledged:

The Australian Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government  
The Australian Government's Department of Climate Change  
The City of Mandurah

He also acknowledged the support and extensive input into the program by the West Australian Department for Planning and Infrastructure.

## **OFFICIAL OPENING – THE HON. GARY GRAY AO MP**

The Honourable Gary Gray AO MP is the Federal Member for the seat of Brand and is the Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Development and Northern Australia.

During his speech he said the coastline means much to Australians. They love to live on the coast. It defines our character and provides us with a more moderate and temperate place to live. He said we are rightly proud of our communities and the beautiful coastline. That is what unites everyone here today, more than the fact you live near or have an interest in our coastline, you all have a passion for and a commitment to ensuring:

- that we protect coastal communities;
- that our coasts are utilised well;
- that our coasts are there for future generations; and
- that our coastal communities are sustainable and resourced to face the challenges of the future.

That is why the conference is so important. We need to address the many complex and challenging issues facing Australia's coastal communities and the coastal environment and we need to plan for the sustainability of this valuable national resource.

One of the biggest and most obvious challenges is continuing population growth. Growth can be a major benefit to a community. You only need to go to ghost towns in Western Australia's hinterland to see what happens without growth and communal momentum. But growth at the pace and scale that has occurred along the Australian coast over the past few decades brings particular complications, stresses and mistakes. The migration to the coast has reached historic proportions. And our large and significant population is growing much faster than the rest of Australia.

What growth has meant over the past half a century is that many of the sleepy coastal townships and fishing villages that existed 60 years ago have been subsumed within rapidly expanding urban areas. Mandurah and Rockingham are examples of this. The population of Mandurah is over 60,000 compared to just a few thousand 20 years ago. Similarly, Rockingham has a population of over 90,000 compared to less than 25,000 when I was visiting the beaches here in the early 1980s. Within 5 years Rockingham will have a population of 100,000. Mandurah will achieve this within 15 years. Both Mandurah and Rockingham are growing rapidly - with all the good and bad that growth brings. And this phenomenal growth it is not over.

The demographers estimate that a further one million people will start moving to the coast from next year, 2010, as the 'baby boomer' generation continues to retire. That is in addition to the people who are already moving to coastal areas largely for lifestyle reasons.

I have been impressed by the research done by the National Sea Change Taskforce - congratulations Alan, Barry and the team - into what rapid growth has done to coastal communities and the coastal environment. The findings of your research will be alarming to anyone who is concerned about the sustainability of our coastal zones.

What the research indicates is that all around Australia we are seeing the increasing urbanization of the coast. Suburban development is stretching north and south of cities such as Perth and the capital and major cities on the east coast. It is also spreading to the east and west of Melbourne and Adelaide on our southern coastline, the Shoalhaven, Cairns, all experience these changes.

Coastal communities are attempting to deal with extraordinary growth pressures with limited resources so they are facing great difficulty in keeping pace with demand for infrastructure and services. The Sea Change Taskforce has stated that there is a need for a collaborative national approach to managing coastal growth and protecting the fragile coastal environment. The Rudd Government could not agree more.

It is for that reason that the Australian Government has committed to providing national leadership and working with local communities to address the challenges of coastal growth and to bring a new focus to other challenges facing coastal Australia. One of the first steps towards implementing this policy commitment is the establishment of a parliamentary inquiry into environmental pressures, including climate change, on coastal communities. This inquiry is being conducted by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Climate Change, Water, Environment and Arts - with the Deputy Chair being Western Australian MP Dr Mal Washer- and it has particular regard to:

- existing policies and programs related to coastal zone management, taking in the catchment-coast-ocean continuum;
- the environmental impacts of coastal population growth and mechanisms to promote sustainable use of coastal resources;
- the impact of our changing climate on coastal areas and strategies to deal with climate change adaptation; and
- mechanisms to promote sustainable coastal communities governance and institutional arrangements for the coastal zone.

The committee is currently holding public hearings across the country up until May and it is expected to report back to Parliament in late June or early August. The committee will be in Perth on 7 April and will be visiting Mandurah and Busselton as part of their investigations. This is just one of the steps being taken by the Rudd Government and the Parliament to identify, deal with and establish understanding of the particular issues that face the coast.

Another important announcement was made on 18 November 2008 in response to the emerging global financial crisis. In an effort to boost local economies, the Rudd Government announced a \$300 million Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Program (RLCIP), with \$250 million allocated proportionally to every council around Australia and an additional \$50 million for strategic infrastructure projects. In February this year, in a move aimed at further boosting local economic activity, the Australian Government announced an additional \$500 million over two years to expand the Strategic Projects section of the Program. This part of the program was set up to fund local government community infrastructure projects such as town halls, libraries, community centres and sport centres.

Also in February, aware that the effects of the economic downturn were having significant impact in regional areas, Minister Albanese requested the House of

Representatives Committee on Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government to conduct an inquiry to examine and report on the impact of the global financial crisis on regional Australia. The Minister stated that the Committee will report on the impact of the financial crisis on regional Australia and the role of the Commonwealth Government in ensuring that regional Australia is equipped to respond. Particular focus will be given to:

- the encouragement of economic development and employment; and
- the development of sustainable essential services and social infrastructure designed to enhance the liveability of regional Australia.

The effects of the financial crisis are being felt right across the nation, however regional areas tend to feel the impacts of economic downturns more acutely. Regional communities do not have the same capacity to absorb job losses and economic declines as the capital cities do. I know this is an issue that will be discussed at this conference.

The other initiative that occurred in February was the inaugural meeting of the Steering Committee of the Australian Council of Local Government. As you know, the Minister appointed my good friend Mayor Barry Sammels, the chair of the National Sea Change Taskforce, to the Steering Committee specifically to represent coastal communities around Australia.

Each of these measures is of particular relevance to coastal councils and their communities and they clearly demonstrate the Government's commitment to establishing a new partnership with the local government sector and to playing a national leadership role in addressing the issues facing coastal communities.

I have travelled the country since becoming the Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Development and Northern Australia and I am always amazed at the diversity I find every place I go. The challenges facing a rural town in Western New South Wales are different to the issues in rural towns in Far North Queensland and different again to problems in coastal communities here in Western Australia. One thing that I find common to successful regional and rural communities is the grumpy sense of self reliance - a spirit of get up and go! Mandurah and Rockingham are great examples of places that have that sense of self-reliance - even though many people have moved here in recent times. You notice it when you see the effort people put in to local sporting clubs like the Pirates Rugby team, the Mandurah City Soccer Club or the Peel Thunder AFL team. You see it when over \$200,000 is raised here in Mandurah for Cancer WA's 2008 Relay for Life - or when a school raises thousands for Victorian bushfire victims. You are exposed to it when so many people turn out to support the Seniors Expo, the Mandurah Crab Fest, and the Little Nippers Children's Festival. Harnessing community pride and energy is what Mandurah has done well and I congratulate Mayor Paddi Creevey for her hard work to make Mandurah what it is.

In conclusion, the Government acknowledges that Australia's coastal communities are facing some very complex and challenging issues. These issues cannot be solved overnight and they can not be killed off with a silver bullet. The initiatives I have mentioned today include immediate injections of resources to improve infrastructure and services in regional communities. They also include longer-term measures that will look at the best way to develop regional Australia and importantly coastal Australia.

I would like to acknowledge the instrumental role that the National Sea Change Taskforce has played in researching and identifying these issues and raising awareness of them at national, state and local level. Our challenge for the future is to make our coastal communities smart - great places to live with clever transport links, jobs and amenity.

## **MANDURAH AND THE SOUTH WEST**

### **Mark Newman**

Mark Newman, the CEO of the City of Mandurah, provided delegates with an orientation on the local area. He provided a history of the beginning prior to the 1800s later European settlement. The Mandurah Roads Board had been established in 1949 and this eventually led to the establishment of the City of Mandurah in 1990.

Mandurah experienced 'hyper' growth from the mid 1970s to the mid 2000s, with a 30 year average growth rate of 6.5%. The population had increased by approximately 10,000 people every five years from 1986 to 2006. The population was projected to grow to approximately 98,000 by 2021 and more than 115,000 by 2031.

As a popular destination for retirees Mandurah's population had a higher than average proportion of older residents, compared to the State and National averages. The City also had a high proportion of low-income residents and large income disparities between the 'haves' and the 'have nots'. There have been substantial improvements in recent years, particularly in the area of youth unemployment. There are concerns, however, that the area could experience high levels of unemployment now that the boom is over. Levels of education have improved in the City, but the numbers completing secondary and tertiary education are still behind State and National averages. The percentage of residents with a tertiary qualification has increased from 19.2% in 1996 to 26.5% in 2006.

Mark Newman told delegates that the economic downturn has had a detrimental impact on the City's revenues. This had been partially caused by a slowdown in the resources sector and partly by a correction in property prices resulting from the end of the housing boom in Western Australia. The City's revenues have declined and impacts were expected to be significant in 2009-10. There had been a sharp decline in the number of lots sold in the City, which were well down on a peak of 327 lots sold in the September 2005 quarter. In terms of total metropolitan land sales, Mandurah sales represented 13% of total metropolitan region sales in 2005-06, but had sharply declined in 2007. Dwelling Approvals peaked in 2003-04 which completions following on in subsequent years, before beginning in fall in 2004-05. He noted that unit approvals had increased as a percentage of total dwelling approvals, which reflected the City's policy of encouraging a diversity of housing types and increased densities in the inner Mandurah area. A significant decline in dwelling constructions was forecast in 2009 and this was already being experienced. Average household size is expected to decrease from 2.39% per house in 2006 to 2.32% in 2031.

The City had been actively involved in the Cities for Climate Protection Program since 1999 and had been working to reduce the community's greenhouse emissions. The City had already implemented measures to adapt to the impact of climate change, including providing setback and height allowances for rising sea levels, floods and erosion. The City had also adopted a best practice approach to development, including creation of extended foreshore reserve areas, native vegetation retention, diversity of housing type and density and mixed

use development. Climate change vulnerability assessment reports had been carried out in 2007-08 to determine measures required by developers to respond to potential climate change impacts. Mark Newman indicated that the WA Royalties for Regions Program and the Federal Government Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Program were helping to address the current shortfall in community infrastructure. He told delegates that the City had adopted a triple bottom line approach to strategic planning, financial planning, partnerships, organisational culture and values and community engagement.

### **David Smith**

David Smith, the Mayor of the City of Bunbury, provided an overview of the greater South West Region of Western Australia, which consists of two regions: the Peel Region, which includes the City of Mandurah and the municipalities of Harvey, Murray and Waroona, and the South West Region, which consists of 12 municipalities including Bunbury, Busselton, Augusta-Margaret River, Capel, Collie, Dardanup, Manjimup and Nannup. The South West region covers an area of some 24,000 sq kms and has a combined population of 140,000. Bunbury is the regional capital, and the greater Bunbury region has a population of some 80,000, making it Western Australia's second city. Growth along the coast within the region is still continuing and property prices are still increasing. The Inland municipalities are not doing so well, however.

David Smith said the South West region has a diversified economy, which includes mining, construction, maintenance and repair work associated with the resources sector, transport, meat processing and agriculture. The region was not being noticeably affected by the global economic crisis, which David Smith believed was mainly attributable to the diversified nature of the economy. There are several major projects underway in the greater Bunbury area, including a \$1.6 billion expansion to the Worsley Alumina plant, a new desalination plant at Binningup, a new silicon production plant for Simcoa, and the Bunbury by-pass project, worth \$200 million. These projects are making a significant contribution to local economic activity.

## **WESTERN AUSTRALIA'S ROYALTIES TO REGIONS PLAN**

Paul Rosair, the Director of Major Regional Projects, WA Department of Local Government and Regional Development, provided an outline of the Royalties for Regions fund, which was launched by the incoming State Government following the election held in 2008.

Royalties for Regions is a Western Australian Government funding program that will see the equivalent of 25 per cent of the State's annual revenue from mining and resources royalties reinvested in regional communities each year. The money is in addition to regular Budget programs and in 2008-09 will be equal to about \$675 million.

## **CLIMATE CHANGE CURRENT UPDATE**

### **Dr Kathy McInnes - CSIRO's Climate Adaptation Flagship**

Dr McInnes told delegates that coastal councils and their communities are exposed to the full impact of climate change, including sea level rise, more frequent and severe weather events, changes in rainfall patterns and changes in ocean currents. She provided an outline of the current state of knowledge of climate change and the impact it is likely to have on Australia. Her presentation covered the evidence for climate change, scientific projections for the 21st

century potential impacts, and the steps available for responding to climate change. She pointed out that the Earth's climate has always been variable, with ice ages occurring intervals of approximately 100,000 years. Sea level had increased by 120 metres since the last glacial maximum.

Dr McInnes observed that over the past 200 years, concentrations of greenhouse gases have continued to increase, and as a result the Earth has progressively warmed. The increases in temperatures since 1790 were mostly due to greenhouse gases. Over the past 100 years, global average surface temperatures have increased by 0.7°C, with most of the observed warming over the last 50 years being attributable to human activities. She reported that 13 of the past 14 years were the warmest on record since 1880. Dr McInnes said that emission scenarios and temperatures projections were currently tracking at the very high end of estimates. She told delegates there are two points of action: *mitigation* (addressing the cause) and *adaptation* (planned response to the changes). She observed that:

- Climate change is real and currently underway
- Most of the warming of the past 50 years is due to human activity
- Climate change will continue in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century
- Warmer and drier conditions are expected, with more extreme weather events
- Significant impacts are likely, but impact studies have not been well funded
- Planning will require anticipating change and wide dialogue on how to manage change

**Lalage Cherry** - Assistant Director, Coastal Adaptation Team, Department of Climate Change

As indicated by the previous speaker, the impact of climate change will create a major challenge to the future management of the coastal environment and settlements along the coast. This is a particular challenge for Australia, with such a large proportion of our population living in the coastal zone. It's not surprising, therefore, that both the Council of Australian Governments and the Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council have identified the coast as a priority focus for climate change adaptation.

A number of initiatives are currently addressing this issue, including a 'first pass' National Coastal Vulnerability Assessment, being conducted by the Department of Climate Change, in association with State and Territory Governments. The assessment is aimed at -

- identifying the risks to the coastal zone from climate change (including the implications of sea-level rise);
- providing decision makers with a better understanding of the potential risks; and
- identifying priority areas for research.

## **COASTAL PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT**

Delegates were told that the impact of climate change is just one of the issues that need to be addressed in order to manage the coastal zone for a sustainable future. As the Taskforce has frequently pointed out in its research reports, Australia's coastal communities are defined by the quality of their natural environment. The natural landscapes and biodiversity of the coastal zone are among the major attractions that draw so many new residents and visitors to the coast.

This strong appeal of the coastal environment, however, and the continuing growth in population and visitor numbers, poses a threat to the long-term sustainability of the coastal zone. A panel of expert speakers provided an outline of the research necessary to protect the quality of our coastal ecosystems, and the Chair of the Victorian Coastal Council provided an outline of the new Victorian Coastal Strategy. The panel members were:

**Professor David Wood** is Pro Vice-Chancellor of the Faculty of Humanities at Curtin University of Technology. David holds senior positions on the West Australian Government's peak planning boards including Chair of the State's Coastal Planning and Coordination Council, Deputy Chair of the Ningaloo Sustainable Development Committee and Commissioner of the Western Australian Planning Commission. His primary research interests are coastal and tourism planning. David works extensively on Sustainable Tourism Cooperative Research Centre projects and is leading a project in the CSIRO Wealth from Oceans Ningaloo Cluster. He presented an overview of West Australia's approach to coastal planning and the research work that he believes is needed to fill the gaps in our current state of knowledge.

**Professor Tim Smith** is Professor of Sustainability Science and the Director of the Sustainability Research Centre at the University of the Sunshine Coast. His Centre includes over 30 researchers working on issues relating to building sustainable regions. Professor Smith has worked at several universities and before joining USC was a senior research scientist with CSIRO. He has also led research programs in national cooperative research centres, including being the theme leader for Citizen Science for the Coastal CRC. His research focus is on transforming society towards sustainability, particularly within the contexts of climate change and coastal management.

**Dr Bill de la Mare** is Theme Leader, Marine Nation, CSIRO Marine and Atmospheric Research. Dr De La Mare discussed the concept of uncertainty and the role it played in planning for climate change. He made the point that no-one knew with any certainty just what impact climate change will have on temperature or sea level, but that did not mean it was prudent to wait for more certain scientific information. Policy makers are always going to be faced with uncertainty. The only sensible way forward was to adopt the precautionary principle to minimise risk.

**Cr Libby Mears** is Mayor of the Surf Coast Shire Council, on the western coastline of Victoria. The Surf Coast is one of the fastest growing regional municipalities in Australia, with an average annual growth rate of more than 3% over the past 15 years. In addition to her local government role, Libby Mears is also Chair of the Victorian Coastal Council, and a state representative on the executive committee of the National Sea Change Taskforce.

Cr Mears provided delegates with an outline of the Victorian Coastal Strategy 2008, which is the third iteration of the Victorian Coastal Strategy. The 2008 Strategy sets a long-term vision for the future of the coast and provides policies and actions to guide decisions about coastal management over the next five years. The strategy adopts an integrated approach that addresses three key issues:

- Climate change which will result in impacts on the coast, including rising sea levels;
- Rapid population growth in coastal areas; and
- The health of the unique and valued marine environment.

## LAUNCH OF AUSTRALIAN COASTAL ALLIANCE

The Executive Director National Sea Change Taskforce, Alan Stokes, said the Taskforce was announcing an initiative aimed at addressing a few of the issues facing councils and government agencies with coastal planning responsibilities and the Australian research community. The initiative was aimed at bridging the gap between the needs of coastal planners and managers and the research organisations, such as CSIRO and the universities which conduct relevant research in this area. He introduced the Taskforce Chair, Barry Sammels, to launch the initial phase of the Australian Coastal Alliance.

Barry Sammels told delegates that what the Taskforce was aiming to achieve with the Australian Coastal Alliance was to focus future research efforts on the priority information needs of coastal councils and other government agencies involved in coastal planning and management. It is also aimed at reducing the amount of duplication in research effort and gaining the most value from research expenditure.

He said the Alliance is not intended to be an advocacy body. It is intended to provide a forum for exchange about research needs. In time it could also become an effective reference group for state and Federal government agencies engaged in coastal policy development. The discussions and consultation about the role of the Alliance to date has resulted in the development of a draft vision and mission statement for the new body. The vision is -

To be the national information and communication interface between local government authorities, NRM groups and research organisations.

The draft mission statement indicates that -

The Australian Coastal Alliance will bring together stakeholders with a common interest in achieving sustainability of Australia's coastal zone through:

- acquisition of information and dissemination of knowledge required to achieve the sustainable use and management of coastal Australia;
- advising on the research needs of end-users, including communities, decision-makers and policy-makers responsible for coastal planning and management;

For those of you who are interested in seeing the full vision and mission statement you'll find them included in the papers in the conference folder.

Barry Sammels announced the composition of the initial steering committee, which will guide the further development of the Alliance, as follows:

- Dr Bill De La Mare, is the theme leader, Marine Nation with CSIRO Marine and Atmospheric Research
- Neil Lazarow represents the Australian Coastal Society on the committee
- Nick Montague is Manager - Environment & Planning with the Local Government Association of Queensland, representing ALGA and the State local government associations

- Professor Tim Smith is Director of the Regional Sustainability Research Group at the University of the Sunshine Coast
- Alan Stokes, is representing the National Sea Change Taskforce
- Professor David Wood is Pro Vice Chancellor, Faculty of Humanities at Curtin University of Technology, Australia
- A representative of the natural resource management and catchment management authorities

This steering committee will have the task of directing the initial stage of development of the Alliance - identifying members of its on-going steering committee, further amplifying the body's role and function, deciding on its administration, its mode of operation and its resource needs. In closing, Barry Sammels said the development of the Australian Coastal Alliance provided a good example of how the outcomes of the Taskforce events are translated into practical action.

## **ECONOMIC AND TOURISM BENEFITS OF COASTAL TRAILS**

Delegates were told the economic and tourism benefits of coastal walking tracks and other trails could be significant. They heard there is a bill currently before the House of Lords in the UK, which provides for the creation of a walkable route around the English coastline. The Marine and Coastal Access Bill was first proposed in April last year. The bill covers a broad range of marine issues, including

- A proposal to set up a new Marine Management Organisation under which many of the existing areas of marine regulation would be centralised and coordinated
- And, of relevance to this session, it proposes the creation of a walkable route around the entire English coast.

The proposal to establish the coastal walking route has been strongly supported by organisations such as the Ramblers, which believe that such a project would have major benefits for the fragile local economies in coastal Britain, and would also have significant ongoing benefits for tourism. A report commissioned by the Ramblers has found that opening the country's coast to walkers will boost the nation's economy by an estimated £128m (\$270m). The report estimates that building a walking path along the whole length of the country's coast would create more than 11,300 jobs. The Ramblers chief executive, said the group's vision is for a coastal trail that brings economic and ecological prosperity to coastal areas – currently suffering badly in the recession. The Ramblers report states that investment in the project would improve walking opportunities, provide better wildlife protection on the coast, and would rejuvenate struggling coastal businesses. At the moment it's claimed you can only walk along the coast for an hour on average before being confronted by an obstruction that would force you to turn back or head inland.

Delegates heard a presentation on the economic and tourist benefits of coastal trails from Charles Johnson, the Executive Planner, Special Projects with the West Australian Department for Planning and Infrastructure. He is also one of the local government CEOs who first initiated the establishment of the National Sea Change Taskforce, in 2004.

Charles Johnson said there were many different types of walking trails, and they can be of local, regional and state or national significance. He identified several coastal walks in Australia, including the Great Ocean Walk on the western coastline of Victoria, the Cape Naturaliste to Cape Leeuwin track in Western Australia and the Bibbulman Track, also in Western Australia. He said the Bibbulman Track was 963km long and took hikers an average of 50 days to complete. It is estimated that in 2004 the Track generated \$14M in tourism and \$7M in outdoor equipment expenditure. Average expenditure of track users in 2003 was \$72 a day and expenditure could be as high as \$737 for four days.

Apart from the economic benefits for local communities, there was investment in construction works associated with the tracks. He said that from 1987-2007 \$9 million was invested in trail construction in Western Australia. Other indirect benefits included health rewards for users, community engagement and development involving volunteers, better levels of cooperation between local governments and increased awareness of ecological issues.

## **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS - PLANNING FOR CLIMATE CHANGE**

Delegates heard that Australia's coastal councils are facing a legal dilemma relating to planning decisions in potentially vulnerable coastal areas. The dilemma is that in considering a development application in a coastal area that may be vulnerable to inundation or severe events, such as a storm surge, how much weight should be attached to the potential impact of climate change and associated increase in sea levels?

In Victoria last year, the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal found in relation to a proposed development on the Gippsland coast that potential sea level rises due to climate change are 'relevant matters for a council to take into account' despite there being no explicit duty to do so. Meanwhile, the South Australian Supreme Court last year upheld a decision by the District Council of Yorke Peninsula to refuse a subdivision at Marion Bay on the grounds that the developer had not adequately addressed the effect of coastal retreat due to climate change.

Andrew Beatty is a partner specialising in environment law in the Sydney office of law firm Baker & McKenzie. He is also a member of the Australian board of Earthwatch and the International Conservation Union's Commission on Environmental Law. He told delegates that the legal responsibilities of LGAs included the following:

- discharge statutory functions under enabling legislation
- comply with other, applicable statutes (Federal and State)
- observe common law duties (avoid negligence, act reasonably and afford procedural fairness)
- negligence elements (duty, breach of duty, injury, proximate cause) and defences (contributory negligence)

Andrew Beatty outlined the legal risks for LGAs, which include:

- may be sued in negligence for giving wrong advice; if land is incorrectly (re)zoned; or if development erroneously permitted
- may be sued for compensation by landowners who had an expectation that sites could be developed (or developed in a particular way)
- may be involved in lengthy and expensive planning appeals by unhappy proponents

He also presented a checklist of practical legal issues for LGAs to consider:

- are you aware of the issue?
- do you have access to the latest information (eg, CSIRO)
- do you have any relevant policies in place?
- are you already reviewing current policies?
- have you considered drafting new policies?
- what guidance has your State government or LG Association given you?
- can you satisfy any preconditions for relying on statutory immunity

## **CONCURRENT SESSIONS**

Delegates elected either to go on a field tour of the Mandurah area led by Mayor Paddi Creevey and CEO Mark Newman or they attended a session aimed at identifying coastal management research priorities.

### **Coastal Management Research Priorities**

This workshop session was facilitated by Professor Tim Smith and Dr Laura Stocker. The group of delegates broke up into four sub groups to address the following topics:

- Identification of environmental assets, risks and adaptive mgt including -
  - Climate adaptation for foreshore areas – detailed assessment
  - Likely impact of rising sea levels on adjacent lake systems
  - Methodologies for valuing envtl assets
- Impact of climate change on commercial fishing
- Social and psychological barriers to change/motivational factors involved with change PLUS Engagement tools with communities – social, envtl & economic
- Better legislative framework across all councils to climate change

Each of the groups was asked to consider the following issues:

- Priorities research issues
- What can LGAs do to partner with others? Who to partner with? What councils can do to achieve research priorities?

## **GROUP REPORTS**

### **Barriers to Change and Community Engagement Tools**

This is about the barriers to change and the enablers of change as well as the research and development of practical tools for community work in affected communities. The questions that need to be considered are as follows:

- What are the key elements of the change and adaptation process for individuals and communities to accept climate change and address it positively?
- How can I manage the change process?
- What is the level of community and council knowledge?
- What is the level of community and council concern?
- What is the level of willingness to change at the individual and population level?
- How can these three levels be raised – constructively without panicking people?
- What are the transition pathways and tools needed to achieve a climate change adapted future?

- What does a positive change process look like?
- What are the key elements of a multi-strategy approach e.g. generic media campaign; education; regional initiatives regarding energy, waste management, water management; individual behavioural change; regulatory approach?

### **Impact of Climate Change on Commercial fishing, recreational use of waterways**

- Requires comprehensive research on the impact of water temperature change to sustainability of commercial and recreational fishing
- Develop partnerships with all relevant authorities to identify research already underway to assess the effects of climate change on viability of fish species
- Advocate all levels of government to allocate funding to undertake the research and policy development necessary to mitigate effects of climate change
- To monitor and rate the quality of all waterways along the coast with assistance of Queensland's Healthy Waterways Partnership
- Develop collaborative partnerships to facilitate communication and community engagement in relation to climate change issues
- Provide Local Government Authorities with resources to educate the community on the long term challenges associated with climate change.
- Improve the interface between research and policy
- More research required on the potential for commercial and recreational fishermen to share resources

### **Natural biophysical assets**

#### *Discussion points:*

- Environmental assets – develop methods to find out what people value in terms of social, environmental and economic terms
- Framework for a method to define environmental values and link them to
- Start with a small group of champions to establish and develop core partnerships
- Once partnership gets traction momentum would start

#### *Research priority:*

- Develop methods to find out what people value (socio-economic, cultural, ecosystem services) and a method to then value biophysical assets – to connect values to natural capital and assets
- Develop core champions and a core partnership then opportunities will arise

### **Better legislative framework in relation to climate change**

The group felt that current system is stymieing local government. The challenge is to overcome the system. The onus is on local government to respond to climate change but local government is fragmented and not resourced to do it. There is a need for a coordinated level of response and a need to instil the necessity to respond to uncertainties. There is a need for State guidelines that require developers to address critical points concerning climate change. Developers want certainty too.

#### *The research focus:*

- Find solutions to overcome the obstacles.
- Undertake literature research in the same way as other disciplines do, such as medicine. This would be aimed at identifying best practice to inform development of a new legislative framework.

- Identify best practice and ideas that can be used to inform a new legislative framework (to enable clarity and certainty in respect to LG responsibility) – LG doesn't have the expertise to do the research
- Define what is "good governance" in regard to climate change for LG
- What is needed to indemnify LG?
- How to share the risk – no one can bear the whole risk – no one LG left exposed – agreed approach among all levels of government that creates a defensible position

*Mechanisms:*

- Coordination to overcome the inequities between larger well resourced councils and smaller ones to access research – similar to the Sydney study approach
- Regional approach – jointly councils communicate and contribute

*End goals:*

- BCA with zones and model that fits with the National Coastal Vulnerability Study
- Integrated coastal zone management framework
- Reduced inequity in funding models
- Governance framework that provides consistency of decision-making

## **WEDNESDAY – 4 MARCH 2009**

### **WEST AUSTRALIAN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES**

Delegates heard that Western Australia is a very large state with land area of more than 2.5 million sq km and a coastline with a total length of 12,889 km, which is nearly half of Australia's total length of coastline. The person with responsibility for meeting the planning and infrastructure needs of the state is Eric Lumsden, the Director General of the West Australian Department for Planning and Infrastructure (DPI). Before taking up this position in 2007 he had extensive experience in the local government sector, having been CEO of the City of Melville and prior to that the CEO at the City of Swan. He was formerly a Commissioner of the City of South Perth and was Chair of the Eastern Metropolitan Regional Councils CEO Group.

Eric Lumsden outlined the state's approach to planning and infrastructure. He told delegates that the major challenges for the DPI were growth management, climate change, infrastructure and social impacts. The key current issues for the DPI were the population boom in the South West of the state, the largest impact of sea change impacts would be in the area south of Mandurah, which was also the area most likely to be affected by climate change. The increased frequency and severity of storm surges in these coastal areas is a matter of great concern. He said there is a need for baseline modelling to better understand climate change risks in the coastal zone, and to secure coastal water resources.

Eric Lumsden said there is an emerging national action program, to develop nationally consistent strategic planning approaches and tools for coastal development. The program includes: national benchmarks for key variables for climate change scenarios to inform planning decisions; national guidelines on a risk-based approach for estuaries and foreshores; and a national position paper on liability and responsibilities as a result of climate change impacts. There is a requirement for research and monitoring to support decision-

making and evaluate the effectiveness of policies and programs. This should include: identify key information gaps and incorporate into vulnerability assessments and monitoring programs; develop better understanding of socio-economic dimensions and resilience to climate change impacts; and building on existing national initiatives and protocols.

He said there is a need to strengthen co-ordination of government action at a national, state and local government level and across sectors. This should include: a review of implementation of the 2006 NRM Ministerial Council national approach to Intergovernmental Coastal Zone Management; develop a national approach to coastal policy; facilitate greater co-ordination between NRM and COAG processes; and strengthen regionally-based integrated planning processes. He said adaptation responses should include: improve understanding of vulnerabilities and resilience of existing infrastructure and settlements; enhance knowledge of potential risks when planning infrastructure and settlement patterns to ensure new coastal development and infrastructure is not placed in vulnerable areas; emphasise that the outlook is not all doom, with potential opportunities for innovative developments.

Eric Lumsden said there were six main adaptation responses, as follows:

1. Increasing risk awareness and being prepared
2. Increasing capacity of existing measures
3. Spatial planning
4. Strengthening defences
5. Managed retreat from vulnerable areas
6. Strengthening and/or moving seaward with coastal protection measures

## **PLANNING FOR POPULATION CHANGE**

Delegates heard that one of the factors driving the changes currently occurring in Australia's coastal communities is demographic change. Coastal areas have consistently experienced higher rates of growth than the national average. As we have pointed out elsewhere, the population in non-metro coastal areas increased by more than 1.25 million people over the decade from 1997 to 2007, and the residents of these areas currently represent more than 80% of Australia's entire regional population. But they have also been at the forefront of other demographic changes, such as the ageing of the Australian population.

Andrew Howe, the Senior Demographer with the Regional Population Unit of the Australian Bureau of Statistics outlined the demographic trends and changes taking place in coastal local government areas based on the ABS Estimated Resident Population data for the year ended 30 June 2007. He noted that growth rates in Western Australia were well above the national average. The rate of population growth in WA for people of all ages growth from 1996 to 2006 was 34.8%, compared to a growth rate of 12.4% for Australia as a whole over the same period. Similarly, the WA growth rate for people aged 65 and over from 1996 to 2006 was 60.4%, compared to a growth rate of 21.4% for Australia as a whole over the same period. The WA growth rate for people aged 85 and over for 1996 to 2006 was 90% compared to a growth rate of 59% for Australia as a whole over the same period. He indicated these age groups would continue to increase at a faster rate for the next 19 years.

Andrew Howe also told delegates that the total population in sea change areas would continue to increase at a faster rate than the nation as a whole over this same period. His presentation included demographic projections for specific local government areas in Western Australia, including Albany, Augusta-Margaret River, Bunbury, Esperance,

Geraldton-Greenough, Gingin, Mandurah, Manjimup and Nannup. (This presentation will shortly be available on the Taskforce web site – [www.seachangetaskforce.org.au](http://www.seachangetaskforce.org.au))

## **ECONOMIC STRATEGIES FOR AUSTRALIA'S COASTAL REGIONS**

This was a facilitated forum and discussion Delegates heard that at the end of last year, the Taskforce had begun to receive reports from member councils in various states that they were already experiencing the effects of the economic downturn. These reports indicated that development activity in some coastal communities had virtually come to a halt with flow-on effects for local job markets. The outlook for the tourism sector was also under a cloud. With the local economies in many coastal areas so heavily dependent on these sectors, it appeared that coastal communities could be in for a tough time for the foreseeable future. Over the Christmas-New Year Holiday period, however, many coastal councils reported a major increase in visitor numbers, apparently due to large numbers of people taking local holidays instead of going overseas because of the decline in value of the Australian dollar.

Having been alerted to what appeared to be a decline in local economic conditions, the Taskforce decided to conduct a survey of members to assess the impact of the financial crisis on coastal economies. The Taskforce CEO Working Group developed a questionnaire on the issue and this was distributed to members at the beginning of February. A large percentage of member councils filled out the questionnaire and returned them to the Taskforce, providing a unique insight into current economic conditions in coastal communities all around Australia.

Apart from feeding into the conference session, the survey results will also provide input into the inquiry into the impact of the global financial crisis on regional Australia, which is being conducted by the House of Representatives Committee on Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government.

Alan Stokes provided delegates with an interim report on the trends emerging from the survey results as follows:

### **Unemployment**

- High unemployment rates are a common feature in many coastal areas and appear to be increasing at the moment
- For example, the unemployment rate at Great Lakes (NSW) is 10.1% - more than twice the national average. In March 2004 it was 11.4%. At Kempsey the unemployment rate is 9.8%, which is expected to increase.
- Given the downturn in economic activity, the effect of skills shortages are not as critical
- The growing ageing population will increase demand for health and community services – a potential stimulus for employment in the future

### **Construction**

- Construction is declining in many areas but continuing at a lower rate in others. In Ballina (NSW) local construction still is continuing at previous levels but this is

attributed to a major by-pass project. In Onkaparinga the construction of a desalination plant will offset the general downturn in the sector.

- In Copper Coast (SA) almost 10% of employment in the area is construction related.
- Construction in Shoalhaven is suffering due to the economic slowdown and subcontractors have been particularly affected
- Kingborough – a current local government initiative is the redevelopment of the CBD and development of a regional sports centre. The council expects unemployment to decrease

### **Property and development**

- The property market is flat, with declining sales volumes.
- DA trends are down. At Wyong DAs in Q4 in 2007 were 507. In Q4 2008 were 365, down by 30%. But in terms of value these halved.
- Shoalhaven also saw significant reduction in construction certificates and halving in value of Q4 trends
- Rockingham –value of DAs in Rockingham fell from \$227 million in Q4 2007 to \$88 million in Q4 2008
- Coffs Harbour – Q4 2007 there were 368 which fell to 302 for Q4 2008. However the value fell from \$77 million to \$31 million.
- Some areas increased development activity – Bega Valley experienced a slight increase in DA numbers with an increase in value Q4 2007 \$23 million Q4 2008 \$37 million

### **Tourism**

- In general the trend in annual tourism numbers in recent years has been static or in decline.
- International tourism is down, with particular impacts on centres relying on this market segment
- Tourism is most important to coastal economies, eg. Great Lakes (NSW) tourism is the largest local industry and Gosford City Council reports that 1 in 7 local jobs is generated by tourism.
- Christmas New Year period saw an unexpected peak in domestic tourists – trend across all LGAs in survey. In Gosford one major resort experienced a record month. This is not isolated. The Christmas New Year Holiday period set tourism records in a number of coastal areas

## **PRIORITIES FOR THE FUTURE**

- Maintaining services in a tight economic environment. LGAs are experiencing a decline in revenues from investments.
- Strategies to maintain jobs in local communities and to ensure business viability are critical
- Survey indicated importance of high speed and reliable broadband for business. In 2005 broadband download speed in Bass Coast was 78% of best practice. By 2006 this had dropped to 7%. This puts the shire at a significant disadvantage if it wants to attract new business. Shire needs fibre optic cable

- Ensuring a viable and sustainable agricultural business is critical – the primary industry sector is in decline in many areas. Priorities to stimulate the sector include – diversification, intensive farming, value adding, export and tourism links
- Education and training to improve skill levels in local workforce is seen as a priority, especially in areas of high unemployment, which will help to address long-term skills shortages

### **The Way Forward**

- Changing the tourism product to meet a different type of demand, which may become more seasonal
- Working with others including State and Federal Governments to devise tourism strategies to further develop and stimulate domestic tourism.

## **REPORT ON ECONOMIC CONDITIONS IN QUEENSLAND COASTAL AREAS**

Cr Debbie Blumel of Sunshine Coast Regional Council and a member of the Taskforce executive presented a report on economic conditions in Queensland member council areas. All but one of these member councils had submitted the completed questionnaire.

She told delegates that Queensland coastal communities are facing a common range of issues including: rapid population growth; impacts on the economy – competition for jobs, stress on economic resources; impacts on communities and lifestyle; degradation of environmental values; need for infrastructure including transport, social and recreation facilities, energy supply and water self sufficiency. All Queensland Sea Change communities are experiencing population growth eg. Gold Coast (4.5% between 1996 and 2006) and the Sunshine Coast (3.5% for same period). Tourism numbers have continued to increase in all coastal LGAs - Gold Coast (10.6 million in 2007), Sunshine Coast (3.2 million in 2007) and Whitsunday (740,000 in 2007). She reported that Queensland has experienced strong economic growth in manufacturing, construction, professional & business services, health & communications. Agricultural base is still significant in regional areas, however facing challenges. Cairns, Fraser Coast and the Whitsundays are strongly dependent on tourism.

The major current economic issues in Queensland coastal areas were listed as follows: responding to the global economic crisis –community adaptation and job creation; economic strategies and programs; creating economic diversity and sustainability – support diversity eg Gold Coast marine precinct; providing Infrastructure – transport, telecommunications, community facilities; responding to Community Impacts – unemployment, housing stress, community health issues; availability of Affordable Housing – cost increasing, limited public transport.

Debbie Blumel compared the conditions in Queensland coastal areas a year ago with conditions five years ago: Last year there was a relatively strong economy, with growth in professional & business services, health & communications. The effects of the Global Economic Crisis were starting to be felt with a slow down in retail, construction and tourism. Five years previously the economy was continuing to grow with strong increase in the value of the construction, tourism and hospitality sectors and Increasing impacts on agricultural sector. The current economic outlook was for increased impacts from the global economic crisis, particularly in retail, construction, manufacturing and tourism. There was also expected to be a downturn in rates revenue, fees and charges. There had been strong growth in DAs in past 5 years but a reduction in DAs over the last 12 months. This decline

was expected to continue. There has also been a decline in the construction sector, with a major impact in coastal coastal areas, in particular a reduction in the number of larger developments. This outlook required LGAs to respond with programs such as Community Adaptation.

Tourism was identified as a key sector of the Queensland economy, making a direct contribution of 4.5% (\$8.8 billion) of the State's total revenue in 2006-07. In 2008 70% of Queensland's tourism revenue was generated from domestic tourism. Recent trends in tourism indicated there had been an increase in visitor numbers over the Christmas/New Year holiday period. In previous years there were lower tourist numbers but a higher proportion of overseas visitors. The outlook for the longer term was low growth in the sector with greater appeal to the domestic tourism market.

In terms of infrastructure needs, there was a need for additional funding for telecommunications. There was also unmet need for integrated transport, such as roads, public transport and boat ramps, and both upgrades for and new community facilities. There was also a need for infrastructure for new development areas, such as drainage. Funding programs such as the RLCIP and Federal Government grants, including the Better Regions Programs, had been of assistance, as had State government grants such as the Regional Centres Program for projects such as centre revitalisation.

Debbie Blumel told delegates the survey had identified priorities to stimulate economic activity as follows: development and implementation of economic strategies and policies; strategies to help develop and assist industry sectors, such as marine, export and knowledge based industries; community adaptation programs to develop a coordinated approach to building community connections and resilience; providing infrastructure to service business and development and undertaking local capital works projects.

She told delegates the following strategies and programs were needed to stimulate economic activity: developing targeted economic plans to respond to global economic crisis; economic strategies and policies to stimulate innovative and creative activities; programs to provide business support and facilitation, including liaison, support and facilitation; innovative ways of reducing housing costs for workers; developing high speed broadband connections and integrated transport links; initiating local infrastructure projects. Further possible initiatives included: programs to assist the community to adapt and create jobs; lobby government and encourage development of further infrastructure projects; develop skills in Community Education/ and Development; and work in partnership with the Housing Affordability Task Force.

## **COASTAL EMERGENCY PLANNING**

Delegates were told the recent catastrophic bushfires in Victoria had shown how important it is to have effective planning in place for emergency response to a major natural disaster. But how well prepared are Australia's coastal areas for a natural disaster such as a tsunami or a major inundation associated with the more frequent and severe weather events we are told will occur as a result of climate change?

Russell Stevens is Director of Research and Liaison with Western Australia's Fire and Emergency Services Authority (FESA). He has 25 years experience in emergency response and emergency management planning. Russell manages FESA's research program which

includes tsunami modelling in selected coastal population centres and monitoring impacts of climate change on emergency management. He provided delegates with an overview of FESA and outlined emergency management principles. During the course of his address he also indicated why coastal communities are at particular risk.

He said the four interconnected elements of emergency management were prevention, preparedness, response and recovery. The key to planning effective emergency management was building community resilience by empowering the community and making sure residents understood the risks and prepared for them. He said recovery is more effective if the community has resilience. Russell Stevens said coastal communities were particularly vulnerable because they were exposed to extreme weather events, they had a high percentage of older people and they tended to have high numbers of visitors. A number of smaller communities were also at risk because they had only one way in and one way out.

He said that climate change will tend to increase temperature and make summers longer. There will be more days with maximum temperatures above 35 degrees and fewer colder days. Sea levels would rise and there would be increased likelihood of high intensity summer storms and more intense tropical cyclones. There were a number of uncertainties about the impacts of climate change, but whatever the degree of change there will be potential impacts on emergency management. Community planning is essential. Any plan that does not consider the impacts of climate change is not a plan for the future.

## **PREPARING FOR AGEING POPULATIONS**

Delegates heard that the ageing of the Australian population is one of the most pressing issues facing our society over the next 10 to 20 years. It is a major cause of concern to policy makers at all levels of government, in particular the agencies responsible for planning services such as the public health system and the local government sector, as it takes on an expanding range of services for ageing communities.

It is an issue of particular concern to coastal councils and their communities. Older people have specific infrastructure and services needs, and these needs are projected to increase dramatically over the next 15 years or so.

The conference was addressed by Mary-Lou Corcoran, the Mayor of Victor Harbor on South Australia's Fleurieu Peninsula, and a state representative for South Australia on the Taskforce executive. Victor Harbor has the highest median age of any local government area in Australia, and the highest proportion of people over the age of 65 of any LGA in the country.

Mary-Lou Corcoran pointed out that the Local Government Association of NSW and Shires Association of NSW had stated in a 2004 report that 13% of the Australian population at that time was aged over 65. For the City of Victor Harbor, however, the percentage of residents aged over 65 years of age in 2004 had already reached 31.2% - a figure which Australia as a whole is not expected to reach until beyond 2050. This places the community profile for Victor Harbor almost 40 years ahead of the national trend. She said the City had developed four levels of response to the ageing of its community:

- Collaborative Service Planning
  - Internal – multi-disciplinary teams
  - External - Southern Fleurieu Positive Ageing Taskforce

- Strategic
  - Council's Strategic Plan
  - Urban Growth Management Strategy
- Planning Policy
  - Residential (Hindmarsh Valley) DPA
- Planning Development Assessment
  - Residential Accommodation for the Aged and people with disabilities

She said that internal multi-disciplinary teams bring together professions within the Council, including planners, social planners, building officers, engineers. They listen to and understand each other's views, advice and opinions. Meanwhile, an external group of health and aged care service providers and local governments was established in 1999 to develop a 10 year strategic plan for ageing. This external group, called the Southern Fleurieu Positive Ageing Taskforce, conducted research into ageing, provided an advisory and coordinating role, facilitated planning across sectors, ensured that community infrastructure, resources and services kept pace with development.

The City of Victor Harbor Strategic Directions 2006-2009 details the actions Council will undertake to achieve vision. It sets out a response to two-fold pressures of significant population growth and a rapidly ageing community, Informs short term operational plans and financial plans. Actions responding to ageing community are included in each of the City's six broad strategic directions. Examples of actions responding to the needs of an ageing population included the following:

- Governance and Administration - Determine the implications of the State Government's population policy. Identify Council's response to the National Strategy for an Ageing Australia
- Environment and Open Space - Support the involvement of volunteers in the maintenance and development of reserves
- Assets and Infrastructure - Ensure that the planning, design and construction of infrastructure and open space considers the particular needs of an ageing community. Develop a pedestrian strategy that considers current and projected needs, including Electric Mobility Scooters (Gophers)
- Local Business and Investment - Improve understanding of the business and investment opportunities provided by an ageing population.
- Urban and Rural Character - Amend policies relating to the use of public footpaths and Support the broad adoption of adaptable housing principles.
- Community - Review Council's Disability Access Action Plan and provide social impacts advice for significant development proposals.

Mary-Lou Corcoran said the City's Urban Growth Management Strategy (UGMS) 2008-2030 encouraged a diversity of population while targeting younger people to live & work in the area. It was also aimed at achieving the sustainable provision of physical infrastructure & community services and balancing the pressures of a high level of growth by safeguarding the environment, lifestyle & prosperity. She said Each UGMS Objective is supported by strategies and actions for implementation covering the following actions:

- Increase provision of affordable Housing
- Increase Housing Diversity
- Identify areas for future residential facilities
- Improve public transport services
- Encourage the development of a child and family friendly community

- Develop community meeting places
- Facilitate provision of health and community services
- Ensure safe neighbourhoods through good urban design
- Improve disability access
- Encourage a vibrant community culture
- Ensure easy access to information on local services and facilities
- Consider models for social inclusion projects
- Support a volunteer referral service for residents
- Ensure roads and pedestrian networks meet the needs of older people

The City of Victor Harbor Adaptable Housing Planning Policy recommends that housing for aged people be located so that residents could interact with other sections of community. (Not “gated” communities). Such housing should also be within walking distance to services or public transport and provide an interesting ‘outlook’. The policy also included the following recommendations:

- Site - Reasonably flat , free of steps to facilitate mobility aids
- Car parking - Undercover , parking space dimension of 6m x 3.8m, Easy access between car park and dwelling
- Design - Step-less entries, wider corridors and door way openings, adequate circulation space for wheelchair and walker users, design easily modified, Internal fittings

## **COASTAL PRIORITIES**

The final session of the conference was aimed at identifying the priority issues to be raised in the Taskforce submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into the impact of the global financial crisis on regional communities being conducted by the House of Representatives Committee on Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government.

The delegates were told this inquiry was critical from the point of view of coastal communities. It provides an opportunity to strongly advocate for the support needed to assist coastal communities deal with the effects of the economic downturn. Given that the Taskforce has just completed a survey of economic conditions in coastal areas it is in an excellent position to make input into that inquiry. Delegates then identified two key issues to raise in the submission, and formed two groups to consider these issues, as follows:

- Strategies to stimulate local economies in coastal areas; and
- Strategies to stimulate tourism in coastal areas

### **Economic Stimulus**

Allan Bawden, the CEO of Bass Coast Shire in Victoria, reported on behalf of the group that considered strategies to stimulate local economies, as follows:

- Councils have a number of key roles to play. They are large businesses in their own right and they are a large community employer, with the capability to bring businesses together.
- One of the issues to be faced by coastal councils is that the economic crisis will have the effect of reducing the LGA revenue base, which means they will have less revenue to pump into the local economy.

- The Federal Government acknowledges the value of committing funding to local community projects. There were plenty of worthwhile projects that required funding.
- The sorts of local projects appropriate for funding included infrastructure, in particular green technology, water harvesting, state of the art Bed and Breakfast establishments and solar energy initiatives.
- Other potential projects included those related to adaptations to climate change, measures to address ageing populations, accessible shared pathways around the communities.
- Affordable housing was an important issue in the downturn. The first home buyers grants were helping to alleviate this issue. There was potential to develop new partnerships with the private sector to tackle the issue.
- With the current low interest rates, LGAs have low debt levels and are therefore in a good position to borrow.
- Discussion about constraints to stimulating local economies included availability of land supply for major developments, the time required to get through the planning approval process. There is a need for state and federal support to streamline planning processes.
- Local Government revenue equates to less than 3% of total taxation revenue, so there is a need for State and Federal assistance to undertake stimulus initiatives.
- Unemployment is growing. There is a need for Federal Government assistance to initiate effective job creation schemes.
- The group believed that the financial crisis could continue for more than one or two years.

### **Tourism strategies in Coastal Areas**

Paul Anderson, the General Manager of Eurobodalla Shire Council (NSW), reported on behalf of the group that considered tourism strategies in coastal areas, as follows:

- Tourism is a key factor in stimulating local economies.
- There was wide agreement that we need to develop a strategy aimed at providing visitors with an enjoyable tourism experience. Assistance is required from state tourism authorities to promote coastal regions. This should not be restricted to iconic areas.
- Federal stimulus package is required to assist in providing infrastructure to meet visitor needs, including jetties, boardwalks, caravan parks, mobile home facilities, parking facilities, bike paths, boat ramps, picnic facilities, toilet facilities and shade shelters.
- Develop strategies that encourage people to extend their stay beyond one day.
- Redevelop caravan parks and tourism parks to meet family requirements.
- Assistance required State and Federal Governments to address long term infrastructure issues, including transport to access coastal areas. Eg. Mandurah's bus program.
- There is a need to review census data to determine what the real numbers of visitors are in tourist areas.
- Review the Queensland tourism model to assess potential application elsewhere.
- Incentives are required for operators to develop package deals to attract more tourists.
- Develop strategies to encourage local hospitality businesses to operate on Sundays and public holidays to provide additional employment and raise service standards. Review policies to facilitate seven day trading in tourism areas.

- There is a need for engagement with Area Consultative Committees and Regional Development Boards to establish access to RDA funding.
- Review 'work for the dole' programs to increase capacity for construction of infrastructure.
- Promote alliances of LGAs to assist with the development and exchange of stimulus initiatives.
- Review guidelines for national parks and what is permissible within these areas.
- Explore development of regional branding programs to identify benefits of collectively managing sign posting and directional signage, in consultation with road authorities.
- Develop strategies to ensure the marine environment is properly managed, maintained and protected.

## **CONFERENCE CLOSE**

The conference was brought to a close at the end of this session by Cr Paddi Creevey, Mayor of the City of Mandurah. She thanked delegates for their attendance and the conference organisers for their efforts which she said had helped the event run smoothly. She commented that the event had been very interesting and an outstanding success.