

Submission  
No 55

**INQUIRY INTO PLANNING SYSTEM AND THE IMPACTS  
OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON THE ENVIRONMENT AND  
COMMUNITIES**

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**Submission – Parliamentary Inquiry into the Planning System and Impacts of Climate Change on the Environment and Communities**

I wish to lodge a submission to the above inquiry as the current planning systems are totally inadequate and inconsistent when dealing with the impacts of climate change on the Environment and Communities. Currently the impacts of climate change on a local level are being dealt with by Local Council, and Local Council alone. This is inadequate as Local Councils are not accountable to anyone, and are for the most part allowed to make decisions as they see fit regardless of the impact it has on the environment, or how these decisions will affect the future of climate change. They are also making these decisions without adequately qualified staff who have expertise in climate change or the effects of this on the environment. Small, unqualified decision makers without regulation that are in control of large, complex issues will lead to detrimental results for the environment and the community. An overhaul of the planning system is much needed, and more focus needs to be put on forward thinking, environmental protection, and planning for climate change in the most environmentally sensitive manner possible. Approvals and decisions that relate to sustainability, climate change, and the protection of the environment should be consistent and regulated to ensure that they are best practice. These decisions should not be made by Local Council authorities alone. The only way that adequate planning for the impacts of climate change on the Environment and communities is to have a dedicated, independent body governing the way forward as part of the planning system. It is essential to have an independent body that is equipped with facts, science, and whose sole focus is to ensure that environmental protection is paramount, and that the repercussions of climate change are handled with as little detriment to the environment as possible. This body should form part of the planning process for any approval or decision made by local, state, or federal government bodies. This is not the case in the current planning system, and by allowing Local government bodies make these decisions without governance from independent authorities that stand for the environment and are backed by research and expertise, allows local government to make decisions that benefit their enterprise rather than the wider community as a whole. Any decision that has an adverse effect on the environment, or potentially affects the environment on a large scale should not be in the hands of a local government. This type of decision and planning should be being made by independent bodies that have facts, studies, and science to support

decisions being made so that the best outcome for both the environment and the community can be made.

A excellent example of how the current planning system is inadequate is highlighted by the contentious issue of a seawall to be constructed at Wamberal beach. The local Government has the ability to approve a 1.3km long private seawall. They have also acquired 5 parcels of land from the State Government making them both the approving body and the co-applicant! The first issue with this is how can an impartial decision be made when they are both the co-applicant and the approving body – surely this a conflict of interest! Any development application that has Council listed as an applicant should have to be approved by an independent body whose primary focus is on the needs of the environment and the wider community, to ensure that Councils are abiding by the same rules as all other applicants and there is no underhanded approvals that are not endorsed by the community. In the current planning system Council are permitted to be both the applicant and the approver, and do so unopposed and without accountability as they are the governing body for local matters! Secondly, although the seawall is to be constructed on private land, this private land borders the public beach therefore the construction of this seawall will significantly affect the environment of the adjoining PUBLIC beach. Council have authority to approve private works however when works, such as the seawall, have a substantial impact on the environment and public space, there needs to be additional approvals and controls put in place. If Council are permitted to approve this seawall it has the potential to destroy the local beach, and will require eternal sand nourishment. Building the seawall will also only move the “problem” of large swells somewhere else, as the wall may stop the tide from reaching land in one location it must go somewhere, and that somewhere is to the lagoons at either end of Wamberal beach, thus resulting in lagoon levels rising and flooding thousands of houses around the low lying lagoon areas. Despite Council being given reports and evidence to substantiate this, they continue to ignore the science as they are co-applicants for the seawall so they are in favour of its construction. This seawall will have horrendous repercussions for the local environment in order to protect no more than 20 homes that have built on the sand dunes of Wamberal beach (which were approved by the same council who are now wanting the seawall) during sporadic king tides/wild storms. As the Local Council are the only approving body required (and the co-applicant) they can ignore the evidence presented to them, and approve the construction of the seawall without regard for these environmental impacts, or the need to consider future climate change needs. The Wamberal seawall highlights the flaws in the current system as it permits Local council to approve projects with negative impacts on the

environment without recourse, without accountability, without governance from an independent body, and without having to listen to research and science. It allows them the authority to implement a horrendous temporary “fix” that will in fact only move the problem on to other locations with devastating consequences, and this is why there needs to be an overarching body that ensures this type of thoughtless and futile decision making ceases, and that the environment in ALL areas is protected.

This is just one area that I am aware of where the planning system is failing to adequately deal with the impacts of climate change on the environment and the community. Our precious environment needs to be protected at all costs, especially Coastal areas. Areas impacted by climate change need to be preserved in their natural state as much as possible, and this must be done with sensitive planning, and a planning system that supports protection. There is a desperate need to ensure accountability of any party that has authority to approve developments with detrimental environmental effects, and that any negative effects from these decisions have been thoroughly reviewed and mitigated where possible. This can really only be done if there is an independent body who have no other agenda other than to ensure the preservation of our precious coastal environment, and any other protected areas, and to ensure that best practices for handling the impacts of climate change are being utilised at all levels of Government.

Naomi James