

Submission
No 69

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

Organisation: Peninsula Residents Association

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Ms Sue Higginson MLC
Chair, Portfolio Committee No. 7- Planning and Environment
NSW Legislative Council
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000
Dear Ms Higginson

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Submission

Inquiry into the Planning System and the Impacts of Climate Change on the Environment and Communities - Woy Woy Peninsula

The Woy Woy Peninsula¹ is a sand plain adjacent to a major waterway in the Sydney Basin Bioregion. It is surrounded by densely vegetated mountains, has its own micro-climate due to its location near the sea and mountains, and is only 5 metres above sea level.

Broken Bay has an extreme diversity of marine life, some which is unique to the Bay, and is a constantly changing ecosystem of sand islands and reefs, due to its exposure to the ocean and tidal activity.

The Peninsula has the highest population density on the Central Coast, with a total population of almost 38,000. Over 95% of the population lives on the sand plain area of 14.5 square kilometres, making a population density of almost 2,500 people per square kilometre.

The combination of increased housing density, eco-sensitive bushland and coastal areas, make the Peninsula particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change.

1. Current Climate Effects

The impact of climate change, and the environmental and social problems facing the Peninsula, are well known and have been documented in various reports and studies.²

- (a) The beaches are constantly changing, and show continuing erosion in the north of the bay, at Ettalong Beach, and serious degradation of the main beaches during high seas.
- (b) The periphery of the developed area is prone to major bushfires, which threaten housing, closure of the only two access roads into the area, and closure of the rail corridor to the south west.
- (c) The southern area of the sand plain is prone to flooding, and pollution from dumping and chemical usage. These streams all feed into Broken Bay, with subsequent effects on marine life and beach users.



- (d) Areas of the peninsula are already suffering from a huge heat island effect, with temperatures elevated by over 5 degrees in summer. This is the most significant heat effect on the Central Coast, and has been brought about by over-development, lack of tree planting, and negligible tree retention. ³
- (e) Local wildlife species are known to be endangered, and wildlife corridors continue to be interrupted by unchecked development.

2. Planning Policies

Local planning policies, for the last 18 years, have focused on development without regard to the environment and the effects on the community. Council strategic plans have alluded to retaining 'local character', but the net effect of approvals of non-compliant developments, with little regard for the environment, have left us with a Peninsula which is dominated by concrete and bitumen and rapidly becoming unliveable. The Peninsula is an urban area with the lowest green density in the state. Tree canopy of the Peninsula sand plain is less than 10%. ³

This has come about because:

- (a) The Council has failed to enforce the provisions that existed under the previous DCP which supported plantings.
- (b) Council has routinely allowed the removal of trees on developed properties and street verges, have not insisted on replacements, and have not enforced or followed up on vegetation requirements for DAs.
- (c) There is a lack of clear direction and expectations for the planning and development of The Peninsula in local planning documents. ⁴
- (d) Over-development of building sites, arising from compromise to planning standards, is now normal practice. This has led to an absence of green space.
- (e) The recent adoption of a 'consolidated LEP/DCP', substantially departs from the greening provisions of the previous DCP, including setbacks.
- (f) Council strategies, such as Climate Change, Greener Places Strategy, WW Floodplain Study and Management Plan, are slow to be budgeted for, or implemented through the planning system, if ever. And the Council has a budget of only \$40K per annum for trees on the whole of the Central Coast.

3. Coastal Erosion Management

The Council has shown little interest in preparing for and combating the effects of coastal erosion in Broken Bay:

- (a) The north end of Ettalong Beach has been severely eroded, and recent response has been to place a gauze material over the vegetated sand, cordon off the area with plastic tape, and put up warning signs. Council has also allowed the cutting down of trees next to the beach. Years prior to this, they removed large stones which had mitigated the damage to some extent, and dumped small rocks and debris at the waterline.
- (b) Council response to damage by high seas at Umina Beach, which felled trees in the dunes, was to remove the dead trees. There appears to be no plan to address future erosion incidents.

4. Planning Reforms

Changing the planning system to accommodate the effects of climate change will be difficult to implement without stricter adherence to current and future planning rules. Strategies and provisions that may mitigate climate effects have been in place and over-ridden for years (e.g. setbacks and vegetation requirements). State and local physical infrastructure planning and maintenance has simply not been done to explicit community-level plans.

National models to predict local climate conditions are not adequate, and the Peninsula has its own unique micro-climate and conditions. It is therefore essential for any future strategies to involve the community, and genuinely seek their input and opinions, in order to be successful.

5. Anticipated Growth of the Peninsula

The population density and current climate effects on the over-developed Peninsula suggest that 'regulatory options to increase residential capacity' should be avoided at all cost. The proximity of such a large community to so many eco-sensitive areas should be a major influence in this decision.

Summary

The Woy Woy Peninsula is already in crisis due to over-development and lack of tree canopy. Unless State and Local governments immediately implement strict planning strategies to overcome these problems, the Peninsula will rapidly become unsurvivable for both the community and the local environment.

The Peninsula Residents Association would be happy to provide more specific information/details to the committee, and we would welcome further discussion on this matter.

Yours Sincerely,

Jennifer Wilder.
Secretary,
Woy Woy Peninsula Residents Association (PRA)
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References

(1) The Peninsula covers the suburbs of Woy Woy and its bays, Blackwall, Ettalong Beach, Booker Bay, Umina Beach, Pearl Beach and Patonga. The bays, Pearl Beach, and Patonga are not located on the sand plain. The plain is surrounded by Broken Bay to the east, Brisbane Water to the north-east and north-west, Mount Ettalong and other mountains on the southern and western sides. Each of these surrounding areas are very environmentally sensitive.

(2) List of reports and studies

Adapt NSW. *Climate Change in the Central Coast*. NSW Office of Environment and Heritage. Accessed at <https://www.climatechange.environment.nsw.gov.au>

Adapt NSW. *Coastal Erosion in NSW Statewide Exposure Assessment*. 2017 State of NSW and Office of Environment and Heritage. Accessed at <https://www.climatechange.environment.nsw.gov.au/impacts-climate-change/natural-environment/coasts>

LGNSW *Woy Woy Peninsula Climate Change Adaptation Study, July 2021*. Local Government NSW. Accessed at https://lgnsw.org.au/common/Uploaded%20files/Environment/Climate%20Change%20case%20studies/Woy_Woy_Peninsula_Climate_Change_Adaptation_Study_Central_Coast_Council.pdf

Central Coast Council. *Greener Places Strategy: 2021-2031*. Central Coast Council. Accessed at <https://www.centralcoast.nsw.gov.au/council/forms-and-publications/strategy/greener-places-strategy>

Central Coast Council. *Green Grid: Our Place*. Central Coast Council. Accessed at <https://www.centralcoast.nsw.gov.au/council/forms-and-publications/strategy/central-coast-green-grid-our-place>

Central Coast Council. *Woy Woy Floodplain Risk Management Study. Final Report. December 2022*. Accessed at https://cdn.centralcoast.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/202308/d15682708_woywoyfrms_final2_1_mainvolume_r1_adopted.pdf

NSW DPEI. *Central Coast Regional Plan 2041*. NSW Department of Planning and Environment. October 2022. Accessed at <https://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/plans-for-your-area/regional-plans/central-coast/central-coast-regional-plan-2041>

(3) Tree canopy densities and figures :

Urban Forests in NSW & ACT report, Centre for Urban Research (RMIT) & Greener Spaces Better Places.

Central Coast Greener Places Strategy, Part 1, page 7, States the Woy Woy Peninsula has a tree canopy of less than 10%. This is less than half the tree canopy of Sydney City, which is 20.7% and well below the recommended figure of 40%.

(4) Central Coast Local Planning Panel, in December 2022, recommended a strategic planning review of planning controls, development provisions and character statements for Umina, Woy Woy and Ettalong Beach. Central Coast Council has yet to respond.



