

**Submission  
No 208**

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

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## Wamberal Beach brief

### Key developments

- Central Coast Council (Council) is preparing a Wamberal Beach seawall Development Application (DA) with some private beachfront landowners, aiming to lodge the DA by December 2023.
- The proposed seawall would be an enormous 1.3 kilometer long, three-meter-high vertical concrete structure. For context, the proposed Wamberal seawall would be five times as long as the Collaroy seawall.
- The overwhelming majority of locals strongly oppose the proposed seawall. The issue is cited as a significant reason Sam Boughton, who campaigned 'no seawall,' secured a significant swing in the Terrigal electorate in 2023.
- The beachfront is a mix of privately owned land, five State Government owned public land lots and some Council land including the surf club and some access paths. Wamberal Beach Save our Sand (SOS) community group and other locals have petitioned the state government to not transfer the five public lots to Council as Council's intention is to 'wall' the lots in a bid to secure a continuous beach seawall from one lagoon entrance to the other. Surprisingly, Minister Paul Scully MP recently wrote to the petitioners to say he supported a transfer of the public land to Council. As at the date of this brief, Council has advised there has not been a land transfer, however, they say negotiations are continuing. SOS sees any action by State Government to assist the land transfer to Council as an act of complicity for the seawall. SOS has met with and called on Minister Harris to assist efforts to stop the seawall and the land transfer. In a related issue, a growing number of beachfront private owners are objecting to the seawall and will not participate in the DA and so Council is now conceding the so-called Terminal Protection Structure (seawall) may in fact not be continuous. This raises other issues in terms of end effect erosion along the beach impacting no-wall property owners. SOS calls for NSW government not to transfer the land.

### Major impacts of a seawall

- Experts Professor Andrew Short (USYD), Angus Gordon OAM (co-author of the NSW Coastal Management Act) and others claim the proposed seawall would:
  - Destroy public beach amenity through significant sand loss
  - Undermine public safety along the beach through post-storm scouring
  - Increase the risk of sea surge flooding of the adjacent Terrigal and Wamberal lagoons which are home to thousands of residents. Seawalls have 'end effects'. A Wamberal seawall would drive wave energy into the lagoon entrances, scouring them to become efficient channels of sea surge energy resulting in increased lagoon precinct flooding.
  - Introduce risk of end effect impacts on the adjacent protected Wamberal Lagoon Reserve area managed by National Parks and Wildlife Service, a significant pristine dune ecosystem.
- The 2017 State Government funded Marsden Jacob Associates (MJA) Wamberal Beach Cost Benefit Analysis commissioned by the Office of Environmental Heritage (OEH) found that all the seawall options were the worst options. The report recommended adaptive 'soft' options. The MJA report was shelved, is not available from Council or OEH. Incidentally, NSW Government last week released new NSW Coastal Design Guidelines that would not support the proposed seawall and also calls for adaptive strategies.

## **Current roadblocks for NSW Government to remove**

### Fix the Minerals Act

Experts, reports and even Council point to the current problem of insufficient beach sand supply and the need for infrastructure to support sand nourishment of Wamberal Beach and other places. Experts say the Minerals Act mistakenly treats sand mining licenses for beach replenishment in the same way as sand for construction. Experts are adamant that sand dredging to return sand back to the coastal ecosystem is sustainable and deserves to be managed separately from construction sand. An adjustment to the Minerals Act and State-Federal government funded dredging equipment would make sand nourishment for Wamberal and other places a more sustainable and cost-effective option than hard seawalls.

### Dune recontouring and revegetation

With sand replenishment solved through the above actions, adaptive beach management strategies including dune recontouring and revegetation can be applied to restore Wamberal Beach, improving natural amenity, tourism and providing a benefit to the community, including increased resilience for beachfront landowners. Refer to other examples of this approach, referred to as [NABE](#).

### Voluntary buy-backs

According to Professor Short, over the longer term (decades) there may be a need for Council to buy-back a relatively small number of less viable beach properties as those properties go on the market. Experts are not advocating the need for mandated property takeovers. Voluntary buy-backs are not new to Wamberal.

## **Political tides**

### Pro-wall Mr Crouch

Over the past six years, Adam Crouch MP has actively lobbied and campaigned for a Wamberal seawall. He has publicly acknowledged his close relationship with the beachfront land-owners and their Wamberal Protection Association Inc pro-wall interest group. Mr Crouch MP played a role in the establishment and direction of the Wamberal Seawall Advisory Taskforce. Mr Crouch and beachfront owners made numerous TV news appearances during storms around 2016, 2017 and 2020, promoting the rights of beach property owners to protect their private property but self-servingly omitting the legal obligation of those property owners not to adopt protection options that would have an adverse impact on adjacent properties or public beach amenity.

### Council in administration

Over the past four years, Council has been under administration, so there is a related issue that the vast majority of the community do not want the current unelected Council to lodge a DA for what will arguably become a regional precedent for beach management in the longer term. On 6 November 2023, Council advised SOS that they cannot wait for a sand replenishment solution and are pressing on with their seawall plans.

### Ministers Harris, Scully and Sharpe under heat from SOS

While Labor's candidate, Sam Boughton, campaigned on no-seawall, Labor ministers have not been seen by SOS or the wider local community to be actively working to prevent a seawall. SOS went to Minister Harris seeking support for the no-seawall petition. In the end, SOS secured the sponsorship of Abigail Boyd MLC who has consistently spoken against the seawall, citing expert's concerns.

## **The ask**

SOS calls on Labor to act to stop the seawall through the following avenues:

1. Advancement of Angus Gordon's Minerals Act and dredging recommendations
2. Halt negotiations on the transfer of State Government public beach land to Council

3. Work with Council to establish a Beach Preservation Taskforce, in the way Adam Crouch previously established a Seawall Taskforce, but with more representative community involvement.
4. Announce a no seawall position with respect to Wamberal
5. Conclude, announce of clarify the Wamberal Seawall "Review" Mr Harris announced last April.
6. Announce and commence dialogue with Federal Labor and Council with respect to sand nourishment and adaptive strategies for beach preservation.

SOS notes that none of the above actions would be acts of interference with Council's DA process, also noting there is currently no DA. Please note that local community members, including SOS volunteers, have incorporated an Association, No Wamberal Beach Seawall Inc with a charter to stop the seawall and advocate adaptive strategies to preserve beach amenity.

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