

ITEM 19: LMM 24/09/2019 - Stockton Coastal Erosion

MOTION

That City of Newcastle:

1. Notes with concern the devastation to Stockton Beach following ongoing and sustained coastal erosion, acknowledging the effects that the loss of much of Stockton Beach is having on the local community;
2. Reassures the Stockton community that the City of Newcastle stands with them, noting that we want Stockton Beach to be a useable beach enjoyed by the public, and that we will undertake all actions that are permissible by the NSW Government to achieve this goal;
3. Notes that any long-term solution to address coastal erosion at Stockton requires both approval and funding from the NSW Government, and that this was discussed at a recent meeting at Parliament House with the Minister for Local Government, the Hon. Shelley Hancock MP;
4. Writes to the NSW Premier, the Hon. Gladys Berejiklian; the Deputy Premier, the Hon. John Barilaro MP; the Minister for Local Government, the Hon. Shelley Hancock MP; and the Minister for Energy and the Environment, the Hon. Matt Kean MP, inviting them to Stockton to inspect the devastating coastal erosion occurring at Stockton Beach;
5. Joins with Federal Member for Newcastle, Sharon Claydon MP, who has called on the Morrison Federal Government to intervene and provide support to address coastal erosion at Stockton¹ at the Federal level, and writes to the Prime Minister, the Hon. Scott Morrison MP, seeking support from the Commonwealth Government.

Background:

Stockton erosion update

It has been a confronting few weeks watching large swells eat away at our cherished coastline along Stockton Beach.

At City of Newcastle we are doing everything we can to keep the community safe and find a solution with the NSW Government to this escalating issue.

Since the storms of 2015, we have invested \$5 million to address erosion at Stockton, including the construction of infrastructure that is currently protecting community assets like Stockton Surf Life Saving Club.

We have already undertaken emergency works at Stockton Beach in response to the unprecedented erosion impacts in recent weeks. This has included protecting sections of the coastline with one-tonne sandbags and closing beach access for public safety. We are now preparing to complete multimillion dollar works at the northern end of the Mitchell Street seawall.

Our priority is keeping the community safe. We remind people to remain away from the top and bottom of the sand cliffs as they have potential to collapse without warning.

¹ <http://2nurfmnews.blogspot.com/2019/09/federal-government-asked-to-step-in-at.html>

I want to assure the community, however, that while the images showing the huge loss of sand immediately in front of Stockton SLSC, the adjacent car park and Lexie's Café are difficult to see, coastal engineers have confirmed the seawall is working and these areas are protected for the long-term.

We want Stockton Beach to be a usable beach enjoyed by the public and will continue our efforts to achieve this goal.

Stockton Beach is a quintessential part of our Novocastrian identity and the City of Newcastle stands with the Stockton community in this challenging time.

Media release



20 September 2019

City delivers works in face of ongoing Stockton erosion

City of Newcastle will undertake multi-million dollar works at the northern end of the Mitchell Street seawall to protect it from future failure caused by ongoing coastal erosion.

The City has undertaken emergency works at Stockton Beach in response to unprecedented erosion impacts in recent weeks, including protecting sections of the coastline with one-tonne sandbags and closing beach access for public safety.

City of Newcastle CEO Jeremy Bath said the City was doing everything it was allowed to do under State Government legislation to protect property and public safety at Stockton.

“City of Newcastle is committed to protecting the Stockton coast and community, including emergency works like sandbagging, and working with the State Government to secure approval and support for a long-term solution for the area,” Mr Bath said.

“While I understand footage of the huge loss of sand immediately in front of Stockton Surf Life Saving Club, the adjacent car park and Lexie's Café are difficult for the community to see, coastal engineers have confirmed the seawall built by the City in 2015 is working and these assets are safe for the long-term.

“The State Government endorsed the Newcastle Coastal Zone Management Plan in late 2018. This Plan only provides City of Newcastle with approval to undertake short to medium actions, but critically no long-term actions to counter coastal erosion,” he said.

Lord Mayor of Newcastle Cr Nuatali Nelmes said the City and the community want Stockton Beach to be a usable beach enjoyed by the public.

“City of Newcastle’s preferred option is to bring sand back to the coastline. However, this can only be done via the State Government’s Coastal Management Program process.

“We are working with Government agencies on the development of a Coastal Management Program which legislation dictates will come into effect from 31 December 2021. This Program will include a long-term solution to ongoing erosion at Stockton.

“Until then, our hands are tied in terms of what we can do, unless the State Government intervenes.

“The City’s priority right now however is keeping the community safe. We remind people to remain away from the top and bottom of the sand cliffs as they have potential to collapse without warning,” she said.

Meanwhile, due to south easterly swell and tide on the back of limited sand accretion, Stockton Beach has seen further coastal erosion south of the Mitchell Street seawall.

Cabins at the holiday park were vacated this week as a precautionary measure ahead of condition inspections by City of Newcastle Coastal Engineering specialists. The cabins have now been reopened.

City of Newcastle has spent more than \$5 million since 2015 on managing erosion at Stockton, including the recent emergency works.

Save Our Stockton: Erosion crisis is breaking the beach and breaking our hearts

Newcastle Herald | 21 September 2019

Opinion: Callan Nickerson

Stockton Surf Life Saving Club will be 112 years old this summer. It became an official lifesaving organisation on 15 January, 1908.

The club was established on the back of the need for a rescue service for Newcastle harbour. The founding fathers of the club were members of the 'Rocket Brigade', Stockton men who launched rowboats to salvage sailors whose ships had struck danger navigating the port.

Fast forward over a century later and the scenario could not be more different. The very thing that saw the club established - the port - is directly contributing to the erosion crisis on our hands.

Surf clubs up and down the east coast of Australia are a microcosm of the communities they serve.

Stockton is no different. The rich history created by club members over decades is phenomenal. The heroism of the 1956 Stockton Bight disaster and the rescue efforts of Stockton club members during the Maitland floods spring to mind.

With that go stories of our beach from yesteryear. Older members and stalwarts of the club and community talk with grins on their faces and delight in their voices of the rolling sand dunes and the long walk from the start of the sand to the water's edge.

Now, those stalwarts talk of the heartbreak the erosion crisis is causing.

As this preventable problem has tightened its grip on our beach, our community has suffered as a result. Many people have told me how important the beach is for them, and has been their whole life in some cases. The ritual of many, to come home from work and head to the beach to unwind is not a reality anymore. People head there now to have a look at how much more sand we have lost.

Stockton people have not only suffered socially and culturally but now the erosion crisis is having an economic impact too.

This month saw the peninsula's only daycare centre close its doors. It means families need to find alternate care arrangements some distance away from where they live. It means jobs lost in the community.



WORRY: Taking in the view at Stockton on Friday. Picture: Jonathan Carroll

As president of the club and less than a week away from the patrolling season, our members and committee are usually busily preparing for the start of the season.

Sadly, instead of getting ready to put the flags up, the club's committee is assessing what our season will look like.

It is a grim thought that our club may well be the first in NSW and perhaps Australia, to temporarily cease patrolling because of erosion.

I hope it does not come to that. When critical community services such as childcare and lifesaving clubs are at risk, it is time to act.

Our surf club has worked collaboratively and constructively with City of Newcastle and the NSW government for years to find a long-term solution to this problem and has had input into the navigation of the arduous bureaucratic processes, long before it became a crisis.

Through that time, many studies have clearly shown that the hard structures of the breakwall and deepening of the harbour have resulted in sand loss for Stockton beach.

Council have done almost everything within their limited budget and powers to reach a long-term solution - now the state government must act.

There is no more time for long and expensive studies, that conclude what has been shown before. They cannot sit idly by, counting the proceeds of the sale of the port without immediate action for this crisis.

Our community needs to get back to the days of the rolling dunes and long walk to the water's edge.



Residents desperate plea for help as Stockton's identity erodes along with the beach

IT was never going to be pretty, but when the weather cleared on Thursday and Stockton residents stopped blinking at the desolation before them, they realised they were looking at a catastrophe.

A huge stretch of coastline crippled by erosion, devoid of any usable beach.

Many fear they are seeing a landscape forever altered by the continual loss of sand so great that they describe the beach as "broken".

In five hours this week, a section of the beach lost 2.5 metres in sand height. The most severe erosion in 20 years.

Cabins at the caravan park were evacuated and reopened after inspections by coastal engineers.

City of Newcastle is being forced to undertake multi-million dollar works at the northern end of the Mitchell St seawall to protect it from "future failure caused by ongoing erosion".

A sixth generation local, Stockton Surf Life Saving Club president Callan Nickerson, said he was dismayed by the scene he faced following three large erosion events in as many months.

For decades Mr Nickerson has witnessed extensive scarping along the coastal strip, but what he saw this week he described as "bleak".

"It's totally unusable - it's the worst it's ever been," Mr Nickerson said. "It's broken and it's got state government finger prints all over it."

Mr Nickerson is one of many Stockton residents who view the beach as the suburb's "identity" and described it as heartbreaking watching it disappear.

The surf club's executive will hold an urgent meeting on Saturday to "discuss possible options" for the upcoming nipper and volunteer patrol season.

Last year many of the sand events for the club's growing nipper ranks had to be held on a grass oval nearby.

"The beach is the heart and soul of our community and here it is in this broken state," he said.

"To be truthful, I get really upset about it."

Former professional lifeguard Noel Burns, who spent 37 years patrolling Newcastle beaches, described it as a "horrible mess".

Mr Burns spent years measuring the impact of erosion on Stockton beach as part of his daily job.

"It's just getting worse and worse by the day at the moment, I've never seen it this bad," he said.

"It gets worse at the same time as bureaucratic red tape continues to prevent anything happening to fix it."

Earlier this month Stockton lost its only child-care facility that closed abruptly due to the worsening erosion crisis, forcing City of Newcastle to start emergency sandbagging at the northern end of the Mitchell St rock wall to protect several roads and a string of beachfront homes along Barrie Crescent.

To date, the community's lobbying - over decades - for a long-term solution has fallen on deaf ears and with every new storm the beach continues to disappear.

But a glimmer of hope appeared on Thursday, when in response to questions from the *Newcastle Herald*, Local Government Minister Shelley Hancock - responsible for coastal erosion in NSW - agreed to visit Stockton. A spokesman for the minister said she wanted to see the beach "firsthand".

"Minister Hancock is aware of the serious nature of the erosion occurring at Stockton beach and has requested an urgent briefing from the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment," he said.

"The NSW government is continuing to support the council in implementing its plan to address the erosion occurring. Progress is also being made on identifying actions that can be taken to ensure a long-term solution is reached."



City of Newcastle chief executive Jeremy Bath described the erosion in recent weeks as "unprecedented".

Mr Bath said the city was doing everything it could under state government legislation to protect property and public safety. But he confirmed residents' worst fears, that a long-term solution could be years away.

"City of Newcastle's preferred option is to bring sand back to the coastline," he said. "However, this can only be done via the state government's Coastal Management Program process.

"We are working with various government agencies on a coastal management program which state government legislation dictates will come into effect from 31 December, 2021.

"This plan will include a long-term solution to ongoing erosion at Stockton. Until then, our hands are tied in terms of what we can do, unless the state government intervenes."

Successive studies dating back to the 1970s have outlined the need for a long-term solution to the continuing erosion of sand, but still no decision has been made on how to save the beach.

Over the past century Stockton beach has lost more than 10 million cubic metres of sand and the seabed has dropped more than seven metres.

A 2001 report found coastal degradation was increasing dramatically. The annual average of 50,000 cubic metres of lost sand had increased to 170,000 cubic metres, or enough to fill more than 113 Olympic pools.

It's estimated about 500,000 cubic metres of sand, or 50,000 truck loads, is needed to replace what has been lost from the beach and provide a buffer in front of the seawall.

In a grim prediction, Associate Professor Ron Boyd, of Newcastle University's School of Environmental and Life Sciences, said he fears the reservoir of sand that used to sit off Stockton and replenish the beach is "no longer there".

A long-term Stockton resident, Associate Professor Boyd said while coastal erosion was caused by climate cycles, too much sand had been lost from Stockton due to the construction of the breakwaters for the beach to recover.

"I believe we're not going to get growth of the beach again in the next few years," he said. "It will come back a little bit, but next time a big storm hits we'll have the equivalent amount to what we have now or potentially worse."

It is estimated up to 70 metres had been lost from the beach since 1981 and 10 million cubic metres lost since the 1860s before the Newcastle Harbour breakwaters were built.

Each year east coast low storm surges push huge waves into the Mitchell St rock wall stripping the coastline of sand.

With Newcastle and Stockton breakwalls trapping shore drift sand at Nobbys, there is not enough sand to replenish Stockton beach.

Experts have estimated there is a 4.4km-wide sand deposit off Nobbys containing 40 million cubic metres of sand, meant for Stockton beach.

Associate Professor Boyd described offshore sand extraction as a "very viable" and affordable solution to Stockton's problem if the state government would allow it.

He said between \$5 million and \$10 million would be enough to replenish the sand - the preferred option to save the beach - using offshore extraction

"Construction is not a good solution for a beach," he said. "In terms of recreational value of the beach, fishing, surfing and people enjoying the beach, that all disappears with construction of rock walls and other things."

In response to questioning by Newcastle MP Tim Crakanthorp about whether offshore sand extraction could be used at Stockton, Ms Hancock said sand was classified as a mineral and could not be sampled or extracted without a licence.

"Most of the state's waters are declared as a 'reserved block' to control who has access to minerals and to protect the environment," she wrote. "Currently no areas within the reserved

block have been released and unsolicited applications are not valid under the [Offshore Minerals] Act."

Residents have previously campaigned for the Port of Newcastle to fund a long-term solution to the erosion problem that is largely caused by the harbour-entrance breakwaters.

But a spokeswoman for the Port of Newcastle said last year that the beach was "outside" the port boundary and not part of the port lease landholdings. "The breakwaters and Macquarie Pier are NSW government assets," she said.

Hastings Funds Management and China Merchants won an auction for the Port of Newcastle in 2014, paying a hefty \$1.75 billion to secure a 98-year lease. It's estimated the NSW government pocketed \$1 billion on the deal, some of which Stockton residents believe should be used to tackle the erosion problem.

Northside Boardriders president Simon Jones said the erosion was caused by the breakwaters. "This is not natural erosion, that sets Stockton apart from every other beach in NSW experiencing erosion problems."

Save our Stockton: Our beach is in crisis but does state care?

The erosion of stockton is anything but natural.

Beaches in their natural state don't erode and recede by metres every time they're exposed to a moderate swell.

As far back as 2002 studies suggested that as a direct result of the construction of the breakwalls and the deepening of the harbour channel, Stockton beach has been stripped of its sand supply.

By causing the waves to break and dissipate their energy before they reach the shore this sand supply offers a beach's first line of defence.

As demonstrated by this week's event, Stockton has been rendered defenseless in the face of these storms.

These studies also make note that unlike most beaches, which do experience cycles of erosion and rebuilding, the erosion of Stockton beach is progressive.

This means that left unchecked the problem is only going to get worse.

The loss of these sandbars also means the loss of surfing amenity. Some of the best memories I have of my childhood are of surfing after school with my mates. We could grab our boards and head out without even looking at the beach.

There was bound to be a surfable wave somewhere within walking distance. Kids these days don't check the beach after school either. Only they don't check for a different reason - there is almost assuredly no waves breaking.

It's shameful that despite countless studies pinpointing the causes and extent of the issues of Stockton beach, we're still seemingly no closer to a solution.

As it stands now, the community is suffering. We're not just suffering financially, but also in a less quantifiable way, socially and culturally.

As president of the Northside Boardriders I am in a strong position to comment on these aspects of Stockton life.

Stockton's culture is shifting, opportunities and lifestyles are being pushed aside by political agendas. It highlights a shameful lack of compassion from the authorities.

I dreamt that one day I could show to my children what it means to be a member of this great Stockton community, but if there is no serious action I worry that community will no longer be what it once was.

So, you'd think that with the cause of the erosive decline of Stockton beach figured out it'd be a pretty straightforward task to go to the owners of the offending infrastructure and get them to find and fund a solution?

Well, apparently it's not that simple when the owner of that infrastructure is the NSW government.

Why should we, the Stockton community and the people of Newcastle bear the cost, while the government reaps the profits?

What is the social responsibility of our government?

Maybe it's not to make us happy, but it certainly isn't to stand idly by while their infrastructure erodes the opportunities of the future generations.

At least, on a positive note, it has been amazing to see that while we are battered, the community is not defeated.

It brings me immense satisfaction to see the people of Stockton and the surrounding suburbs rallying together and showing such support in the face of adversity.

The authorities may not care about us, but we certainly care about each other.