



**Productivity Commission Public Inquiry
into
Barriers to Effective Climate Change
Adaptation**

Submission

**Local Government Association of Queensland Ltd on behalf of the
Coastal Councils Adaptation Taskforce Establishment Committee**

16 December 2011

The Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ) is the peak body for local government in Queensland. It is a not-for-profit association setup solely to serve councils and their individuals needs. LGAQ has been advising, supporting and representing local councils since 1896, allowing them to improve their operations and strengthen relationships with their communities. LGAQ does this by connecting councils to people and places that count; supporting their drive to innovate and improve service delivery through smart services and sustainable solutions; and delivering them the means to achieve community, professional and political excellence.

Submission

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the public inquiry into the barriers to climate change adaptation from a Queensland local government perspective.

This submission is made by the Local Government Association of Queensland on behalf of the Coastal Councils Adaptation Taskforce (C-CAT). The Coastal Councils Adaptation Taskforce (C-CAT) is being formed to collectively improve the capacity of Queensland coastal local government to adapt to coastal climate change challenges.

The establishment phase of C-CAT has representatives from 21 councils on the Establishment Committee working together to develop a proactive agenda and work plan for C-CAT.

The submission does not seek to respond to all questions posed in the issues paper, but provides information gathered from a recent survey conducted by C-CAT of Queensland coastal councils. As with any significant and long term threat, it is important to have a common understanding of the specific challenges being faced by each sector. The *Queensland Coastal Councils Climate Change Adaptation Activities Survey* was designed to gain a snapshot of current coastal council adaptation activities, gather examples of best practice adaptation activities and collect further information on councils' priorities and needs to assist them in undertaking coastal climate change adaptation activities.

Local government has a critical role to play but cannot fulfil that role without the collaboration and assistance of the State and Australian governments and key stakeholders within the community and industry sectors.

The results of the survey point to a number of significant barriers resulting in low levels of confidence by local government to take action.

The survey results found priority needs to enable further progress in the short and medium term are:

- 1. Appropriately scaled data (only 25% have Sea Level Rise/Inundation data and 50% have flood data)**

Most non-urban coastal councils do not have the resources to undertake detailed modelling at a local scale to determine the level of exposure and vulnerability to climate change impacts of their assets, infrastructure, natural and social values.

- 2. Appropriate methodologies and guidelines (across most activity areas, but especially with regard to understanding vulnerability)**

Councils need adequate and clear guidance for a range of complex and difficult decision-making processes from understanding social and economic vulnerability, determining acceptable levels of risk and how and when to respond to reduce these risks within their communities, to the particularities of determining when a development application should be refused without exposing their organisations to legal and financial risks.

- 3. Access to technical information (particularly about cost effective adaptation responses)**

Adaptation responses are required at the physical, social, environmental, planning and organisational levels within each local government area. Responses need to be adaptive and flexible in themselves to fit regionally and locally unique requirements. It is well beyond the scope of most Queensland coastal councils to invest in or undertake the research and testing required to determine what adaptation responses are available, how well they may work, how long they will be effective for, how

much the lifecycle costs will be and how economically, socially, environmentally, ethically effective they are.

4. Improved internal organisational prioritisation

Results of the survey found that the majority of council respondents felt better outcomes would be achieved if climate change adaptation was prioritised more within the organisation. However, lack of prioritisation may be driven by all of the other barriers listed here, resulting in a low level of organisational confidence to take more action.

5. Legislative framework (clarity of roles and responsibilities)

Respondents are concerned about legal liability in making decisions that might unnecessarily quarantine land from development or exacerbate future vulnerability. Similarly, they are concerned that other market drivers such as access to insurance may begin to impact the future viability of their communities if timely decisions are not made.

There is a need to establish a consistent national approach to climate change adaptation, with the participation of Australian, State and Territory and Local Governments, to assist councils to develop the capacity to address climate change risks.

Consideration should be given to the recommendation by the Parliamentary coastal inquiry that the Australian Government develop an Intergovernmental Agreement on the Coastal Zone, in cooperation with State, Territory and Local Governments and the development of a National Coastal Zone Policy and Strategy that sets out the principles, objectives and actions to be undertaken to address the challenges of integrated coastal zone management for Australia.

Queensland councils seek the adoption of legislation, whether in the *Queensland Local Government Act 2009* or another head of power, to give similar effect to that provided by Section 733 of the *NSW Local Government Act*, which affords protection from legal liability for local councils where they provide advice or make a decision in good faith on best available information relating to coastal planning and the impact of climate change.

6. Activation of funding streams

Councils need adequate resources to undertake adaptation activities. There is also a need for a Coastal Natural Disaster Mitigation scheme to assist councils to implement emergency mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery arrangements to address the impact of extreme weather events.

There is a need to increase the adaptive capacity of local government to deal with the impacts of climate change through measures such as the Local Adaptation Pathways Program (LAPP) and the Coastal Climate Change Adaptation Pathways Program. However, competitive funding programs are resource intensive and disadvantage smaller councils that have fewer professional staff to prepare grant applications and implement funded programs.

Survey results of councils that had been granted LAPP funding found that they had gone on to invest in further risk assessment work, so the grants functioned as a 'kick start' for these councils.

The costs of establishing, maintaining, and renewing adaptation responses are still a largely unquantified aspect of adaptation and of concern to most Queensland councils.

Conclusion

Until these needs are substantially met, local governments are likely to remain reluctant to act, in the event they inadvertently expose themselves to legal and organisational risks, until such time as an extreme event and/or public demand force a response.

The final report of the survey results has been attached for your information. Also attached for information is the recent LGAQ submission to the Queensland Office of Climate Change in response to its *Climate Change Adaptation for Queensland Issues Paper* consultation.

Please don't hesitate to contact Dorean Erhart, Principal Advisor – Natural Assets, NRM & Climate change on 07 3000 2202 or at dorean.erhart@lgaq.asn.au if you wish to further discuss any aspect of this submission.