

Barriers to Effective Climate Change Adaptation Inquiry
Productivity Commission
Locked Bag 2
Collins St East
Melbourne 8003

Dear Commissioners,

Response to Draft Report

On behalf of the Australian Coastal Society I am pleased to make the following response to your draft report.

First we are a little concerned by any suggestions that there are substantial uncertainties surrounding the science of climate change. Any reading of the IPCC reports suggests this is not the position. The PC needs to be quite strong in its terminology and choice of words here. In any case it is the adaptations to climate change that need to be addressed and whatever the cause of the undeniable increased frequency and severity of climatic events such as floods, droughts and storm surges there needs to be a strong concerted sustained governmental response.

Again we emphasise the Society's view that this response needs to be set within a National Coastal Policy and a National Coastal Information System driven by a permanent National Coastal Commission under a Coastal Commission Act. We fail to see how temporary advisory bodies or COAG based councils and committees will have the sustained and continuous knowledge base and commitment to action that our proposed governance system possess and which matches the scale of the problem that the nation confronts.

There needs to be a clear strong mechanism to deliver the recommendations of yours and other reports and we believe this to be the governance system that the ACS has proposed.

Again we would urge greater focus and attention on the various coastal risk assessment reports that have been produced.

We would emphasise that despite the Commonwealth lacking direct jurisdictional powers here the Commonwealth possess the resources that are lacking at local government level in particular to make a significant long term input to adapting coastal infrastructure at the rate and to the extent necessary to address these issues of coastal risk.

We would again urge consideration (as we did in our first submission) of the nature and potential role of an independent local facilitator / broker may play as a way of overcoming local communities distrust of government authorities.

As well we believe the question of national building standards to resist the threats associated with coastal erosion and the issues of legal liability be considered. The insurance industry has been strong in support of such standards which would be an efficient and effective way of reducing costs associated with coastal erosion in the future.

In conclusion, whilst not wishing to appear repetitive, the national policy of the ACS on coastal governance (attached) has been well considered and developed over a long period of time and reflects not only a response to the matters you are considering but also to a whole range of long term coastal planning and management issues in this country. We urge you to consider it careful again.

If you wish to discuss this matter further please contact me as a contact point for the organisation.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute and good luck with your critical deliberations.

Yours sincerely

Assoc. Prof Geoffrey Wescott
Vice President Australian Coastal Society
Melbourne 11 June 2012.

AUSTRALIAN COASTAL SOCIETY

Policy on Coastal Planning and Infrastructure Reform: July 2010

The coast is important for all Australians now and into the future as a place where we work, live and play.

Our coast is undergoing twin pressures of climate change and population growth. Given that coastal planning and management crosses many institutional lines in all three levels of government, it is urgent that the nation develop new ways to mainstream and coordinate the management of these vital natural and built assets, including our ports and airports.

Progressive and cooperative reforms are needed to address the pressures of a growing coastal population and the inevitable challenge of sea level rise. Land use and infrastructure planning and investments must be linked to the management of both catchment and coastal natural resources. Improved understanding of institutional impediments reinforced by continued research on coastal vulnerability, community attitudes and infrastructure resilience, and assessment of adaptation options, must remain a national priority.

Continuation of the current program for Climate Change Adaptation in the Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency, including in the medium term the continuation of an Interim Coasts and Climate Change Council, is critical. **ACS recommends** that the following three steps should be introduced as a matter of urgency within the Government's next term if the Australian community is to successfully meet the challenge of sustainable use of natural and built assets around the Australian coast:

1. Formulate a **National Coastal Policy** in consultation with the states and local government through COAG, and formally supported by an **Intergovernmental Agreement on Coasts** that defines the national need for information and investment in public infrastructure that underpins the provision of facilities vital to securing the services required for the economic and social well-being of coastal Australia in the context of environmental changes and impacts.
2. Establish a **National Coastal Information System**, similar to NOAA in the USA, that will ensure sustained R&D in coastal biophysical and social sciences; in the development of user-oriented decision support systems; in the coordination of diverse state and local government information on risk to the adverse impacts of climate change; and in communicating the national adaptation options to communities, the professions and businesses.
3. In order to secure these steps it will be necessary to form a **National Coastal Commission**. This Commission should be empowered under a federal **Coastal Commission Act** to: (1) review the effectiveness of those actions and investments in coastal planning and management that relate to the long term sustainability of natural and built assets across all levels of government; and (2) provide advice to all levels of government on initiatives needed to secure adaptation and improved management of coastal ecosystems, infrastructure, social welfare needs and regional economies.