



DIRECTOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT SERVICES REPORT

16th January 2007

DSDS6	KILLICK CREEK ESTUARY – RED SEA HARE INFLUX JANUARY 2007	
FILE: 47	KEO	{Folio No. *}

SUMMARY:

Reporting on the Sea Hare infestation of Killick Creek, January 3-5, 2007.

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DESCRIPTION:

On 3 January 2007 an influx of sea hare were noted to wash up on Killick Beach and enter Killick Creek Estuary. A number of hare (likely to number in the tens of thousands) were deposited at the high tide mark both on the beach and within the estuary. This situation occurred again with the incoming tide 4 January 2007. A number of the sea hare were taken out of the estuary with the out going tide, a vast number remained deposited at the high tide mark on the beach and within the estuary.

The sea hare influx intensified the issues associated with the red weed trapped in the estuary at low tide. The decomposition of both organisms provided an unpleasant environment.

The sea hare washed ashore and exposed at low tide and died were noted to be decomposing, causing quite a severe odour problem, blow fly attraction and an visual amenity issue for locals and visitors alike. The public and Council staff perceived this as a potential public health issue and planned to remove the dead sea hare and clean up the beach and estuary on Friday 5 January 2007.

Contact with NSW Department of Primary Industries Fisheries officers was made on 5 January 2007 requesting permission from Fisheries to remove the dead sea hare from the beach and estuary.

Hastings Fisheries office advised that if Council perceived the situation as causing a potential public health issue then Council could exercise its right to 'groom' the beach and entrance to the estuary if:

- it is conducted in a controlled manner;
- excavation is kept to surface scapping of the decomposing material;
- excavation is kept to a localised section of the beach and estuary; and
- material removed is disposed of in a safe and environmentally sound manner.

Council subsequently contacted Newcastle Fisheries Office Senior Consultant and was advised in writing (e-mail) that Fisheries had no objection to the removal of dead animals from swimming and beach areas, as long as the material was disposed of at a suitable waste site. It was also indicated that if the red weed was also an issue it can be removed from the swimming areas and preferably deposited up the beach away from the well used areas.

Council inspected the beach and estuary at approximately 11.15 am Friday 5 January, just after the peak of the incoming tide and it appeared that the condition of beach and estuary had improved considerably, the quantity of sea hare present had decreased considerably from that of the previous two (2) days. Council also mobilised equipment to undertake a further clean up of the beach / estuary on Friday 5 January 2007.

REPORT IMPLICATIONS:

- ***Environmental***

This event is a natural occurring phenomena. This incidence may have been exacerbated by the condition of estuary system. Council adopted the Killick Creek Estuary Management Plan in September 2006, implementation of this plan may assist with the management of future natural events. An Environmental Impact Study (EIS) is required to progress the management plan and review options for the potential dredging the estuary.

- ***Social***

This incidence impacted on the local community through a loss of tourism activity. Local businesses and residents reported a loss of income during this event, some tourists left as a result. During this period there were numerous calls of complaint to Council and other government departments requesting action be taken. The business community of Crescent Head relies on tourism as a major source of income.

- ***Economic (Financial)***

The Killick Creek Estuary is an important component of the tourism industry and corresponding businesses at Crescent Head. The appeal of the creek as a family holiday location is critical to the economic viability of the local community. Funding is required to progress the management plan.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the information be noted.

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R B Pitt
DIRECTOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT SERVICES