

## DIRECTOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT SERVICES REPORT

14<sup>th</sup> December 2004

<b>DSDS9</b>	<b>WETLANDS MANAGEMENT</b>
<b>FILE: FM-500</b>	<b>RBP</b>

### SUMMARY:

Reporting on options for developing a Management Plan for wetlands within the Shire.



### Background

At its meeting of 12<sup>th</sup> October 2004, Council resolved:-

*“That the Director of Environmental Services prepare an estimate of cost for the appropriate Management Plan for the Wetlands within Kempsey Shire.*

*That the cost of such Management Plan be included in the Draft 2005/6 Budget for Consideration.”*

Coastal wetlands provide valuable wildlife habitat, nursery areas for fish, wet pasture grazing and have other benefits such as flood flow regulation, sediment control and nutrient retention. The NSW Government has released a Wetland Management Policy, the goal of which is the *“Ecologically sustainable use, management and conservation of wetlands in NSW for the benefit of present and future generations”* and it gives directions for wetland management that can be adopted by Kempsey Shire Council.

### Existing Controls

In 1985 the Coastal Council identified the majority of coastal wetlands in NSW and they were then protected under the State Environmental Planning Policy No 14 - Coastal Wetlands. This policy restricts the clearing, construction of levee's, draining or filling of land within identified areas.

There is a total of 129.84km<sup>2</sup> of SEPP 14 Coastal Wetland within the Kempsey Shire of which 17km<sup>2</sup> is located within National Park. The majority of remaining Coastal Wetlands are located on privately owned land. There are further significant areas of wetland located on the Macleay floodplain and adjacent to the Macleay River that were not identified as SEPP14 Coastal

Wetlands and consequently do not have the protection that SEPP14 areas have.

Council's LEP includes Zone 7 (a) Wetland Protection Zone, the objective of which is "*to protect water quality and supply so that the controlling operation of wetland ecosystems is not jeopardised*". There are currently only two sites within Kempsey Shire zoned as 7(a). However, all other wetland areas are affected by Clause 56 which requires consent for works likely to disturb Acid Sulfate Soils with the broader management principles contained in DCP 30.

## **Wetlands Management**

There are large areas of degraded wetlands not covered by SEPP 14 which require rehabilitation to restore their previous hydrology and in some cases to allow regeneration of native vegetation.

There is no mechanism to compel the owners of these areas to carry out restoration works. In many cases haphazard rehabilitation work may actually result in environmental harm and conflicts with adjoining owners.

The success of the Macleay River Flood Plan Management Project and the Acid Sulfate Soils Hot Spots Program is largely attributable to a cooperative approach whereby rehabilitation programs are negotiated with landholders on a case by case basis.

Having regard to variable circumstances associated with the rehabilitation of wetlands, any broader Wetlands Plan of Management is likely to be generic and relate to prioritisation and general management principles.

The Northern Rivers Catchment Management Association (NRCMA) will soon be commencing the "Sustainable Wetlands on NSW Coastal Landscapes Project" for the area between the Hunter River and Tweed Heads, and this includes;-

1. Mapping, Classification and Prioritisation of Wetlands.
2. Development of Wetland Conservation, Protection and Investment Tools.
3. Delivery of on-ground works for the improvement in the condition of a minimum of 10,000ha of wetlands of which 3,000ha will be protected by a suitable agreement or legal instrument.

The mapping component is due to be completed by March 2005 and there may then be funding opportunities from Part 3 of the Project for wetland improvement.

The North Coast Environment Council has produced a Macleay Wetlands Management Plan (1999) that identified wetlands within the Macleay floodplain based on wetland "soil landscapes" and vegetation mapping. The Plan identifies general options for wetland management such as acquiring or leasing wetland areas and altering current hydrological conditions.

Rather than consider the preparation of a Wetlands Plan of Management at this time, Council would achieve greater results by retaining a staff member to:-

- Establish a database of wetland areas within Kempsey Shire for its Mapinfo GIS system, from existing data held by Department of Environment and Conservation, North Coast Environment Council and the new mapping to be completed by the NRCMA.
- Review possibility of identifying significant wetlands that are not protected by SEPP14 and rezoning them as Zone 7(a) to provide them with adequate protection.
- Develop a Council Wetland Policy based on the State Wetland Management Policy and define what activities are permissible in wetland areas. (See Gosford City Council Wetland Management Policy)
- Contact NRCMA and inform them of Council's proposed wetland policy and desire to participate in their Coastal Landscapes Project to protect and improve condition of wetland areas within Kempsey Shire.
- Investigate individual wetland areas and establish current wetland condition, land tenure and other relevant information. Consult with landholders to see if they would be willing to participate in wetland improvement works.

Council may be aware that with the conclusion of the successful ASS Hot Spots Program, the important role currently undertaken by Mr Tim Morris was due to cease in mid February 2005 as this position is grant funded.

So as to continue this role until June 30 2005, an allocation of an additional \$20,000 is required which is available under the ASS Program funded from the Environmental Levy.

Should Council be successful in obtaining grant funding for the position, the cost to Council would be offset.

### ***Economic Implications***

***The continued management of the Shires Wetland areas will improve the productivity of aquatic ecosystems providing economic benefits via increased tourism and fish stocks.***

### ***Environmental Implications***

***The positive benefits from managing and rehabilitating the Shires wetlands would continue.***

***Social Implications***

***Minimal.***

***Financial Implications***

***There are no financial implications of this recommendation as the program will continue to be funded by Council funds, however, the \$20,000 would not be used for on-ground works.***

**RECOMMENDATION**

- A That Council give consideration to funding a full time position of Wetlands Project Officer in the 2005/06 Estimates.**

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**R B Pitt**  
**DIRECTOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT SERVICES**