3 COMMUNITY AND STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION

3.1 Scope of Consultation Undertaken

Consultation with the community and local stakeholders commenced during the preparation of the Killick Creek Estuary Processes Study (MHL, 2002). Further consultation was carried out during the course of this Estuary Management Study, and included:

- Distribution of letters to key stakeholders and community groups outlining the scope of the works and requesting feedback regarding the existing estuary values and issues requiring future management;
- Distribution of a questionnaire in the local newspaper (Macleay Argus) regarding the study, and again requesting information on estuary values and management issues;
- Follow-up conversations and on-site (face to face) meetings with several community members and stakeholders;
- Workshops with the Estuary Management Committee and with the wider community regarding the issues requiring management and potential options to address them;
- Public exhibition of the draft Killick Creek Estuary Management Study and Plan document;
- Public meeting during the public exhibition period to present the draft report to the wider community.

Appendix C contains a copy of the letter sent to stakeholders, a copy of the information published in the local newspaper, and a summary of the formal responses received from the initial round of consultation.

3.2 Issues raised through formal community and stakeholder input

Outlined below are the main issues that were identified through consultation with community and stakeholder representatives. The following comments do not necessarily reflect true and accurate records regarding the estuary, nor do they necessarily reflect the opinion of the study team responsible for preparing this Estuary Management Plan.

NSW Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources (now Department of Natural Resources)

- Should Killick Creek remain part of the Macleay Flood Mitigation Scheme? If there are sufficient environmental gains, it could justify removing the Creek from the flood mitigation scheme.
- Entrance management issues associated with mechanical realignment of the entrance to correct the meander of Killick Creek and protect the dune from erosion during most summer school holidays.
- Does the current planning framework adequate protect the Killick Creek environment?
- Clearly define how we can improve the long term health of Killick Creek

NSW Fisheries (now DPI)

- Management options for Killick Creek must take into account management of the Connection Creek floodgates. The health of Killick Creek is related to floodgate management, water quality and continued over-drainage of Belmore Swamp.

Beranghi Co-operative

- Killick Creek should be restored towards its state prior to the construction of major drains. Specifically, Connection Creek should be disconnected from the Killick Creek Estuary.
- Water quality of the drain linking Belmore Swamp and Killick Creek. Quality should be sufficient for the drain to be used for recreational activities. The southern end of the Killick Drain should be blocked off and waters redirected to Connection Creek where natural processes could potential have a cleansing effect. This would thus make the floodgates obsolete.

Crescent Head Ratepayers Association

- E-coli entering Killick Creek from drains. E-coli might indicate a potential health threat and contamination in the Creek. Water quality in Killick Creek should be improved using engineering solutions and other softer options.
- Issues associated with the need for dredging to allow sufficient tidal flushing and the impact this may have on the safety of swimmers at the creek entrance.

Residents and Community Members

- Maintenance of ecological processes and control of potentially threatening development. Past planning and development has been ad-hoc, often resulting in expensive remedial work or environmental degradation. Zoning should be used to protect the local ecology.
- Issues regarding the management of water flow in Killick Creek. Dredging is needed at or above Muddy Arm, with the material dredged to be used to renourish the beachfront. Also, the neck of the creek needs to be straightened, near the boat ramp, to keep a direct flow of water against the rock surface.
- Degradation of the freshwater swamp land by allowing saltwater inundation through Killick Creek floodgates. The existing gates are leaking, either through tampering, jamming or general lack of maintenance. During dry periods, saline water from Crescent Head migrates through the floodgates and into the agricultural drains (at Upper Belmore Swamp). When freshwater is released into the drains from Belmore River via Scotts Drain, the mix of fresh and saltwater that inundates the land degrades the swamp vegetation.
- The problem is exacerbated by a block across the Scotts Drain. Although the block prevents the upstream migration of saltwater from Killick Creek (thus protecting Belmore Swamp), it could be relocated further towards Crescent Head, so that the saline waters do not migrate as far upstream, and have potential implications on private property when freshwater is introduced from Belmore Swamp. Relocation of the block to a position about 400 – 500 metres upstream of the Killick Creek floodgates would be ideal. It would act as a spillway during flood times, and therefore the height of the structure would need further consideration. (Since the preparation of this report, the block in Scotts Drain has subsequently been removed, pers comm. R. Kemsley, KSC, 2005).

- Replacing the Killick floodgates with a permanent concrete weir. Fish kills have been due to Belmore swamp floodgates being opened to lower flood levels in the river. More freshwater should be let into the swamps from the Belmore River during dry time.
- Continuing siltation of the middle and upper reaches of the creek. Between the lower reaches of the creek and Muddy Arm, the creek is very narrow and shallow. Sandbars and channels are also subject to regular movement.
- Water quality and stormwater management, because of the potential impacts on recreation in the creek such as swimming.
- Biodiversity and habitat for both aquatic and land based flora and fauna.
- Entrance management may affect the safety of the creek during large (king) tides, especially at Christmas.
- Water quality sampling was carried out at the top end of Belmore swamp, and that salinity in Killick Creek affects the upper Belmore area.
- There is a high iron content and low oxygen level in the water, and that a balance needs to be struck between landholders in the Belmore Swamp area and the general estuary users.
- There may be some scope to fill in some of the drains, especially Scotts Drain.

3.3 Outcomes of Community and stakeholder Workshops

An Estuary Management Committee workshop regarding Killick Creek was held on 14 October 2004, while a second workshop involving invited members of the community, was held on 1 November 2004. Community members invited to the second workshop where those who responded to previous inquiries regarding future management of Killick Creek.

Prior to the workshops, an Issues and Options Paper was distributed to participants to ensure that everyone had a solid understanding of the project and the context in which they were being consulted.

During the workshops, the participants were lead through the Issues and Options Paper, which outlined identified management issues, suggested Management Objectives, and a range of potential options aimed at addressing the issues and meeting the objectives. Participants were encouraged, and provided, additional items for discussion and inclusion in the final documents. Participants of the Estuary Management Committee workshop were also involved in ranking the Management Objectives (see Section 5.7 for detailed outcomes).

3.4 Outcomes of Public Exhibition of the draft Estuary Management Study and Plan

The draft Killick Creek Estuary Management Study and Plan was placed on public exhibition from 24 January 2006 to 21 February 2006. During this time, the public was invited to review the draft document and to make comment on the document through written submissions. In concert with the public exhibition of the document was a public meeting, held at Crescent Head Surf Life Savings Club on 14 February 2006. Over 40 community members attended this meeting to give comments and community perspectives on Killick Creek (see Figure 3-1). The meeting audience included a range of permanent residents, frequent caravan park visitors, and upstream agricultural landholders.

Figure 3-1 Public meeting at Crescent Head Surf Club, 14 February 2006

One of the key take home messages received from the public meeting related to the accumulation of marine sand in the lower reaches of the estuary, and the impact that this sediment has on water quality and recreational values of the creek. It was reported that the caravan park received numerous cancellations during the summer holiday period due to concerns for the recreational amenity of Killick Creek. Other issues discussed at the public meeting included water quality of Killick Creek and the need for improved stormwater management in Crescent Head, and the dilapidated condition of the entrance rock training wall, with rocks being dislodged by stormwater discharges.

Twelve (12) formal submissions were received by community members, stakeholders and government departments (including Department of Lands and various departments within Council) in response to the general public exhibition of the draft Killick Creek Estuary Management Plan. These submissions covered a range of topics, from the need for entrance dredging, to agricultural land management and access issues.

The formal submissions and the informal feedback from the public meeting have been considered within the scope of this project, with appropriate issues, objectives and strategies adjusted accordingly in this final version of the Estuary Management Plan to redress perceived shortcomings of the draft Plan.