

## 14.8 Southern Estuaries Coastal Management Program

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| <b>Date of Meeting</b>     | <b>27 May 2026</b>                                                          |
| <b>Authorising Officer</b> | <b>Rachel Pleasant - Executive Manager Sustainable Development</b>          |

### Summary of Report

The purpose of this report is to present the submissions received during the public exhibition of the draft Southern Estuaries Coastal Management Program (SECMP), including State agency comments. Minor revisions to the draft program have been made to respond to and accommodate comments and submissions. Adoption of the SECMP is now sought from Council to forward the program to the NSW Government for certification.

### Recommendation

That Council:

1. Adopt the draft Southern Estuaries Coastal Management Program provided in Attachment 1.
2. Forward the adopted Southern Estuaries Coastal Management Program to the Minister requesting that it be certified.
3. Authorise the General Manager to make minor amendments to the Southern Estuaries Coastal Management Program to address any minor certification requirements.
4. Publish the certified Coastal Management Program in the gazette, in accordance with section 17 of the Coastal Management Act 2016 once it is certified.

### Financial / Resource Implications

The CMP includes actions that Council and its partners will undertake to protect and enhance the environmental, social, cultural and economic values of the Southern Estuaries over the 10-year life of the plan. A detailed business plan outlining the actions and associated costs has been prepared for and included in the SECMP. Once gazetted, actions in the certified plan will generally attract State Government funding at a ratio of 2:1 (State:Council) through the Coast and Estuary Grants Program.

The total cost of implementing the draft CMP is \$25.9M. Council's contribution is \$5.6M over 10-years.

The total cost of the plan also includes \$8.3M of commitments for State Government agencies.

Council is not obligated to deliver the actions identified in the CMP if anticipated funding is not available.

## **Legal Implications**

A CMP is a statutory document under the Coastal Management Act 2016 (CM Act). A certified CMP provides legal protection to Council within the provisions of the Act.

## **Risk Implications**

The Southern Estuaries CMP actions are designed to mitigate the risks to the environmental, social, cultural and economic values of the MidCoast estuaries and address the objectives of the CM Act. A CMP identifies management issues in the State Environmental Planning Policy Coastal Zone and Coastal Use Areas. These include identifying risks and proposing actions to address those issues and risks over the 10-year period. A detailed risk assessment was undertaken in Stage 1 of CMP preparation and is attached as an appendix to the CMP.

## **Background**

NSW councils are required to prepare coastal management programs (CMPs) for State Environmental Planning Policy Coastal Zone. The Coastal Zone includes areas of Littoral Rainforest, Coastal Wetlands, estuaries and open coast environments. CMPs set the long-term strategy for the coordinated management of the coast, with a focus on achieving the objectives of the CM Act. They are strictly regulated by the CM Act and the Coastal Management Manual and ultimately certified by the Minister.

CMPs identify coastal management issues and propose actions to address those issues in a strategic and integrated way. They detail how and when those actions are to be implemented, their costs and proposed cost-sharing arrangements and other viable funding mechanisms. A CMP is a 10-year plan, after which time a new CMP will be drafted.

The Southern Estuaries CMP will address estuarine areas for the Wallis, Smiths and Myall Lakes, Black Head Lagoon, Khappinghat and Kore Kore Creek, North Arm Cove and Karuah River catchments.

The Manning River CMP has been certified and is being implemented, The Old Bar / Manning Point CMP has recently been adopted by Council and an Open Coast CMP is also in the process of being prepared for the land adjacent to the coastline (Coastal Margin) (Figure 1).

At its 25 February 2026 meeting, Council resolved to exhibit the draft SECMP for 25 days in accordance with Councils Community Engagement Strategy.



Figure 1: Spatial distribution of Coastal Management Programs within MidCoast Council

During public exhibition the draft was forwarded to the following State Government Agencies for consideration and review, Local Land Services (LLS), National Parks and Wildlife (NPWS), Transport for NSW (TfNSW), Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEE) and Crown Lands.

## **Discussion**

During the public exhibition period, twenty-three (23) submissions were received. This included seventeen (17) submissions from the community via the Have Your Say consultation platform and six (6) submissions from agency partners.

Overall, the submissions were supportive of the actions proposed in the SECMP.

The schedule of submissions at Attachment 2 summarises the feedback received from the community and State agencies, Council's response to each submission, and any changes made to the SECMP as a result. Where submissions raised similar issues, the summary and response have been combined.

Most submissions provided feedback across multiple actions and themes. These themes have been identified in both the submission summary and Council's response.

Of the seventeen community submissions received, nine (9) were unrelated to the SECMP. The remaining eight (8) submissions from the community covered issues such as:

- Increased boat speeds in estuaries,
- Dredging in Wallis Lake and Myall River Estuaries,
- Changes in sedimentation,
- Managing root causes of foreshore erosion,
- Wetland management,
- Prioritising protection and restoration of natural assets,
- Entrapment of wildlife in fishing rubbish,
- Research and monitoring on sediment processes,
- Community consultation, and;
- Funding arrangements.

The community also provided feedback on Councils' operations, raised questions about the actions, offered advice on how to implement actions and some submissions were out of the scope of the SECMP.

Community submissions were addressed by clarifying the intent of actions and roles and responsibilities, highlighting the SECMP actions that will address the issues raised in the submissions, explaining community consultation methods and making administrative improvements to the CMP.

All agency partners were in support of the actions identified for them in the SECMP, three recommending administrative changes. Changes included minor corrections to mapping, reference to recent guidelines, additional funding sources and agency support and updating prioritisation to reflect agencies operational priorities.

Overall, changes made to the program after public exhibition were minimal. None of the amendments altered the intent of the identified actions, they only improved them.

## **Consultation**

Extensive consultation has been undertaken to inform this CMP.

A Community Reference Group was established for the project and have been instrumental in the development of the Southern Estuaries CMP, in particular informing the management issues and options.

During Stage 1 community and stakeholder engagement was undertaken through on an online community survey, and discussions with stakeholders to obtain feedback on key values of the Southern Estuaries, their use, risks, threats as well as opportunities for the Southern Estuaries. This information was included in the Stage 1 Scoping Study.

Given the nature of Stage 3, which focused on identifying, assessing, and refining management options, this phase of the CMP required a wide-ranging program of community and stakeholder engagement. Engagement was deliberately designed to be multi-modal, ensuring that all sectors of the community, industry, and government could participate in ways that suited their needs and capacity.

Activities combined in-person and online formats, including drop-in information sessions, targeted stakeholder workshops, interactive mapping tools, online surveys, and direct liaison with key interest groups. This approach allowed the CMP team to reach a broad cross-section of stakeholders, from State agencies, Aboriginal community, industry groups, through to residents and recreational users.

In March / April 2025 the Southern Estuaries CMP management options were presented to the community for input and feedback. Staff engaged with the community encouraging them to fill in a survey to indicate if they supported, didn't support or were neutral for each of the management options. The survey also offered the opportunity to provide specific input about where we should focus our efforts for some 'location specific' options. Staff attended 7 pop up sessions at key location along the Southern Estuaries foreshore and high traffic community locations and, three community events were held resulting in face to face contact with 239 people. An additional 5000 people reached by direct mail. A total of 448 surveys were filled in and results indicated that all actions had at least 84% support.

The CMP was exhibited in accordance with Section 16 of the Coastal Management Act 2016 and the Coastal Management Manual. The Manual requires the draft CMP to be exhibited for a minimum of 28 calendar days. An extended period of 25 working days was undertaken in accordance with Council's adopted Community Engagement Strategy.

## **Community Impacts**

The MidCoast community has a strong attachment to the Southern Estuaries, which provide extensive waterways for oyster farming, tourism and recreation. Generations of Gathang-speaking Aboriginal people have maintained their connection to the estuaries and hold knowledge of those places along the river with special meaning.

The Southern Estuaries CMP establishes a ten-year program to meet our community's aspirations for a healthy estuary that supports economic, social, cultural and environmental values. It will enable community members to build knowledge, understanding and skills to look after the estuary, and presents opportunities for mobilising existing partners such as Hunter Local Land Services and

MidCoast 2 Tops Landcare, National Parks and Wildlife Services, community and industry groups to help look after these valuable natural assets.

## **Alignment with Community Strategic Plan**

### **Community Outcome – Wellbeing**

*W-1 – Improve public safety and our community's ability to prepare and respond to emergencies*

*W-2 – Support the physical and mental health and wellbeing of our community.*

*W-4 – Acknowledge, respect and learn from our Aboriginal community to build trust and move forward together.*

### **Community Outcome - Natural Environment**

*NE-1- Protect our native flora, fauna and local ecosystems.*

*NE-2- Protect and improve the health of our coastlines, waterways, wetlands and water catchments.*

*NE-5- Manage risks to our environment and communities from climate change and natural disasters.*

### **Community Outcome - Our Places & Infrastructure**

*PI-3 – Respect the unique character, history and cultural heritage of our towns and villages, significant places and the natural environment.*

### **Community Outcome – Leadership**

*L-2 – Build our ability to deliver community outcomes through capacity building, growing partnerships, and advocating for funding, services and enabling infrastructure.*

## **Timeframe**

The SECMP is expected to be adopted by May 2026.

## **List of Attachments**

The following attachments are available on the meeting page of Council's website under the 'Attachments to Agenda' heading. The copy of Attachment 3 on the website has had the personal information redacted to protect the privacy of the members of the public providing the submissions.

1. Southern Estuaries CMP - final [**14.8.1** - 315 pages]
2. Southern Estuaries CMP - Submission summary [**14.8.2** - 8 pages]
3. Southern Estuaries CMP - Submissions REDACTED [**14.8.3** - 90 pages]