



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Official Committee Hansard

**HOUSE OF  
REPRESENTATIVES**

STANDING COMMITTEE ON CLIMATE CHANGE, WATER,  
ENVIRONMENT AND THE ARTS

**Reference: Climate change and environmental impacts on coastal communities**

THURSDAY, 10 JULY 2008

CENTRAL COAST

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES



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**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STANDING COMMITTEE  
ON CLIMATE CHANGE, WATER, ENVIRONMENT AND THE ARTS**

**Thursday, 10 July 2008**

**Members:** Ms George (*Chair*), Dr Washer (*Deputy Chair*), Mr John Cobb, Mrs D’Ath, Mr Dreyfus, Mrs Irwin, Ms Livermore, Mr Bruce Scott, Mr Wood and Mr Zappia

**Members in attendance:** Mr Dreyfus, Ms George, Mrs Irwin, Ms Livermore and Dr Washer

**Terms of reference for the inquiry:**

To inquire into and report on:

Climate change and environmental impacts on coastal communities. The committee will inquire into and report on issues related to climate change and environmental pressures experienced by Australian coastal areas, particularly in the context of coastal population growth. The inquiry will have particular regard to:

- existing policies and programs related to coastal zone management, taking in the catchment-coast-ocean continuum
- the environmental impacts of coastal population growth and mechanisms to promote sustainable use of coastal resources
- the impact of climate change on coastal areas and strategies to deal with climate change adaptation, particularly in response to projected sea level rise
- mechanisms to promote sustainable coastal communities
- governance and institutional arrangements for the coastal zone.

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**Committee met at 10.49 am**

**ALLAN, Mr Nigel Paul, Board Member, Community Environment Network**

**HANNAN, Miss Vanessa Ami, Senior Officer, Aquatic Resource Management, Wyong Shire Council**

**JONES, Mrs Jocelyn, Private capacity**

**JONES, Mr Peter Graham, Private capacity**

**MOMTAZ, Dr Salim, Senior Lecturer, University of Newcastle**

**PENNINGS, Mrs Marlene (Rae), Chairperson, Coastcare-TEN**

**THOMSON, Mr Craig, Member for Dobell, Commonwealth Parliament**

**WIGGIN, Mr John, Vice-President, Central Coast Branch, Australian Conservation Foundation**

**CHAIR (Ms George)**—I would like to officially declare open the public hearing associated with the inquiry that the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Climate Change, Water, Environment and the Arts is undertaking. The committee is inquiring into climate change and environmental impacts on coastal communities, and we had the opportunity with Mr Thomson, the member for Dobell, to have a couple of site inspections this morning. As a precursor to the contributions, we will hear from roundtable participants.

Both the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts and the Minister for Climate Change and Water have asked our committee to examine the environmental impacts of coastal population growth, as well as the impact of climate change on coastal areas, and strategies to deal with climate change adaptation, particularly in response to projected sea level rise. The committee will also look at existing policies and programs related to coastal zone management, mechanisms to promote sustainable coastal communities and, very importantly, governance arrangements for the coastal zone.

I would like to welcome representatives from the Central Coast region to this public hearing. Although the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, I should advise you that hearings are legal proceedings of the parliament and warrant the same respect as proceedings of the House itself. The giving of false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as a contempt of parliament. Maybe if we move from the left to the right: do you have any comments to make on the capacity in which you appear?

**Mrs Pennings**—Yes. I am a resident at The Entrance North, and I live on the coast, and I am also Chairperson of Coastcare-TEN, which is the Landcare Coastcare group for The Entrance North.

**Mr Jones**—I am here as an individual but representing a new proposal that we are putting up for a climate change discovery centre.

**Mrs Jones**—Like Peter, I am representing this proposal.

**CHAIR**—Thank you. Before we begin, I understand that some of you will have submissions and some have already been handed up to the table. If a witness provides a document, you need to understand that the committee will consider the material at its next meeting and resolve its formal status, so you are free to speak to your submissions but they do need to officially be tendered to the secretariat and they will go into the transcript of proceedings of the committee. I take it, Mr Thomson, that the invited guests are here at your invitation and that you probably have arranged for time allocations to hear opening submissions.

**Mr Craig Thomson**—Yes. We were going to go around the table with some preliminary comments and then hopefully be able to engage in a more informal discussion, albeit on the record, with the committee.

**CHAIR**—That sounds fine. We will begin again from the left and go around the table. I invite each of you to make a brief opening statement and then we will proceed to questions and discussion between us.

**Mr Craig Thomson**—It might be appropriate if I make the first statement, if that is okay with the chair.

**CHAIR**—Yes, that is fine. Thank you.

**Mr Craig Thomson**—Then we can move on from there. Firstly, I would like to welcome members of the committee to the Central Coast. You have seen this morning why Central Coast residents are so proud of the Central Coast and its beautiful and spectacular coastline, and I am glad that you were able to come on those two site visits with us and drive around the edge of part of Tuggerah Lakes.

With the population of the Central Coast set to increase by around 100,000 people over the next 15 to 20 years, it is important that we now set in place the correct planning policy to deal with not only the growing population but the challenges that climate change brings to this region. With most of the population along the coastal strip and clustered around the lakes and creeks, the impact of higher sea levels, storm surges and extreme weather events that come with climate change impose on us as decision makers a very real imperative to plan carefully for the future.

The Garnaut draft report released last Friday highlights some of the impacts that climate change will have on some of our most iconic places—the Murray-Darling Basin, the Great Barrier Reef and Kakadu National Park. These are, of course, incredibly important because not only are they nationally important in economic and environmental terms but these places define us as people, both at home and overseas. However, it is areas such as ours on the Central Coast, where the bulk of Australia's population live and work in similar coastal environments, where the real challenges are for planners and policymakers. We know that there are coastal suburbs that are already vulnerable to climate change. Rising sea levels and bigger storm surges have the potential to seriously damage property and fragile environments. In June of last year we had floods on the Central Coast. Over 1,000 people were evacuated and many of the suburbs that you

drove through today were under water. In fact, in the submission that I have made, and that you have, there are quite a number of photos from that particular time.

The Central Coast has a long history of severe flooding. Heavy rain in the catchment can send massive amounts of water down the Wyong and Ourimbah creeks, causing enormous damage. Localised severe storms can cause heavy flooding and beach erosion, which has occurred over the last few decades. It is appropriate that policies to mitigate the worst impacts of climate change be put in place by our national government. The bulk of Australians who want action on climate change are looking for leadership on these issues, and it is on that basis that we do truly welcome you here today and are very grateful that this is the first site visit that you have made as this committee.

To conclude my opening remarks, as you could see from this morning's trip, the Central Coast has a very unique environment, with a lake system in the interior and a coastal strip on the edge, which puts the population in this particular area at far greater risk than most others. We also have issues relating to the fact that we are one of the few growing areas in New South Wales. As I mentioned earlier, it is expected that in the next 10 to 15 years there will be an additional 100,000 people here, and if we do not plan properly for the way in which our environment is going to have to meet the challenges of climate change, we are potentially putting people into a situation where their houses and their lifestyle will be at greater risk than need be the case, so it is vitally important for us on the Central Coast that the role that you are performing in your committee is one that comes up with some concrete solutions and plans to make sure that those issues are addressed. I welcome you here today and leave it open to some of our other contributors to move on from those comments.

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much, Craig, for those opening remarks. Of course, the reason why we are here is that Craig made a very early submission to the House of Representatives committee and, being a very effective local representative, he has managed to also get other people with expertise in the area to come along and engage in this roundtable. Having the opportunity to visit some of the precarious sites this morning, I think, gives us all a good appreciation firsthand of some of the issues that I know we will go on to discuss this morning. Thanks, Craig.

**Miss Hannan**—In representing council, I work in the natural resources unit, so my major focus is on implementing the Tuggerah Lakes Estuary Management Plan and assisting in the development of the coastline management plan for our area. For each of those plans, climate change is a critical issue.

In terms of the estuary, and managing the estuary, as Craig mentioned, we have a lot of development right around the periphery, but we also have natural elements which are potentially impacted by climate change, including the fringing vegetation around the outsides of the lakes and the wetlands higher into the catchment, and also the water supply, if the sea level were to rise to the levels that are predicted. We have had drilled into our heads over recent times that the sea level rise by 2100 for the Central Coast will be a maximum of 0.91 of a metre, which is quite significant, and that is based on the previous IPCC report and so is likely to increase with the revised research that is coming out of the next report.

We have a coastline management plan which was developed over 10 years ago and we are currently revising that plan. We are developing new hazard lines with new sea level rise information and new storm surge information and that will result in a change in the hazard lines and a change in the way that we manage our coastline. That is currently being prepared, and we expect it will take about 12 months to complete that document. That has implications for a number of the properties that you have been to today and also properties which are further inland from that area, so council really needs to take a proactive stance on these issues. We also need to think about how we manage these areas sustainably, rather than, for example, at Cabbage Tree Harbour, where we are talking about building a structure which is going to cost council money to continually maintain, and to build in the first place. We should think about what is the most sustainable option for managing these properties, whether that be buyback or moving away from these areas which are in danger from the impacts of sea level rise.

**Mrs Pennings**—One of the things which, as a resident, I think is very important is that we need to have a better understanding of the impact of climate change where we live. I think there tend to be a lot of panic type statements made. There is also a lack of understanding by people who live there about the overall impact and I think we need that better understanding. We also need to have some sort of disaster management plan in place. It is no good waiting until we have a massive storm which erodes our beaches and puts houses at risk to say, ‘Let’s start panicking and moving people.’ We need a plan in place now—sooner rather than later—so that people know what to do if we do have major storm events and major coastal erosion.

As I showed you this morning, some of that can happen overnight and we can have fairly large cut-outs. My concern is not so much the one-in-50-years storm; it is when we get two one-in-50-years storms one after the other, or three or four of them one after the other. That constant erosion will continue to occur. I am also, from a North Entrance perspective, concerned about the lake, because as sea level rises it will impact the lake probably more than the coast in the short term and, as that happens, we are going to find a lot of properties at risk around our lake. Again, we need management plans for people to deal with that situation and not to get into a panic situation.

I think our ancestors taught us a lot of good things. If you look around our lakes and along our coast, we have a lot of caravan parks. Why do we have caravan parks? So that, in the event of floods and storm events, you can pick up those caravans and take them away. We now see those sorts of facilities being changed. Instead of being kept as a caravan park, proposals are being made to build three- and four-storey buildings in these types of areas. I think we need to have a look at overall planning to see, for any future planning, the implications of sea level rise climate change on where we are proposing to rezone property. Thank you.

**CHAIR**—Thank you. Mr Jones?

**Mr Jones**—I will let my wife talk to it because this is her proposal. I am here as technical support.

**Mrs Jones**—Marlene is right: when we see newspaper reports with the headline ‘Adapt or perish’ or the Garnaut report, everybody gets scared—and the people are scared. The people need information as well. There are a lot of people working really hard at a local level but, like the icon of Questacon in Canberra, which teaches the complexities of science but in an

entertaining and engaging way, we are proposing a climate change discovery centre as a place where people can come, look, see and feel what climate change is, and also come, look, see and feel what they can do in their own lives in order to embrace the future in a positive and confident manner. We do not want the generation that is growing up at the present moment throwing their hands in the air and going, 'Well, what's the point? I may as well go and get drunk. I may as well go and use drugs because what's the point? There's no future.' Everybody keeps telling us there is no future at the present moment, so we need to dispel the myths and teach people, but in an entertaining and engaging way.

The discovery centre is to be the core of a much bigger precinct that encompasses education, tourism, business, retail, technology, research—for my university colleague!—innovation and the arts, that all focus on climate change and the environment. And, from TAFE's point of view, it will be a place where we can teach our current blue-collar workers to be green-collar workers so that they can get out there and help the community with their knowledge and also improve their own credentials and their own chances for employment.

We can engage scientists and designers from the university to promote research and innovation and to develop new technology, new products and new services but, unless we have somewhere we can actually demonstrate those things, there is very little or no chance of people taking up these new technology products. We can create things but we also have to adopt the technology—take it up and use it—and that is where you need people to have it in their face: show them how to use it; demonstrate it.

The centre would also be a great tourist attraction, of course. Silicon Valley in the USA created a core for the computer industry. We want to create a core for climate change on the Central Coast that can help people lead the world in creating a healthier and sustainable future that they can see and be positive about. We are in the really early stages of this project. We are looking for endorsement, but also we are going to need seed funding to get the project up and running, to make sure that it actually happens. Thank you.

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much. Dr Momtaz, would you like to make a statement?

**Dr Momtaz**—Yes. I teach at the University of Newcastle and my research interest is in the area of social sustainability, sustainable research management, and at the same time I am representing the University of Newcastle here. I will briefly say a few words about the impact of climate change and what we need to do to prepare ourselves for what is going to happen to us as a result of this.

We see these big organisations—we have this global IPCC, we have the Garnaut report now about the impacts of climate change—but the question I ask of everyone here is: how much really do we know about the impacts of climate change on the community, on local living at Ourimbah, Terrigal or North Entrance? How much do we know about how it is going to affect the people: how they live, how they relate to each other, how they go about their everyday activities, and things like that? We do not know. We do not know much about these small things that are going to change as a result of the impact of climate change.

We are talking about environmental impacts, and I hope that when you talk about 'environment' you include the social environment as well, because that is a very big aspect of the

environment. If we look only at the ocean and coastal damage and things like that, it is not really going to help us much. We need to also include the community and how we can prepare the community to deal with the consequence of climate change.

I really did not prepare any submission as such; I was reading our MP's, Craig's, submission. Most of the things are there in a broad sort of sense, and he made a very important comment there. What he is saying is:

... a comprehensive study would need to be performed.

That is what we need to do to know exactly how the climate change is going to affect us—the communities, the people who live here. We are scared, but that is not good.

People are making us scared and people are panicking, but without actually knowing what is happening. I do not think that it is a good idea to scare people. What I would suggest is that we need this study that our MPs are proposing. We need to conduct study and we need the centre that my colleague is proposing. We need something like this where we can conduct our research to look at the small things that are going to happen and that are going to change. To do that, we need research funds. Without money, we cannot do anything.

At Newcastle university we are conducting some research through the funding of ARC. That is happening at our main campus at Newcastle, but here at Ourimbah campus, although we are conducting some small studies, we would not have the funding to conduct any sort of big study to look at these impacts. I would urge the government to provide more funding into climate change and what is going to happen to local communities. I think our university is in a good position to support these studies, including the centre.

As a result, what we need to do is to prepare ourselves. We need to have more information, to be more aware of what is going to happen and to prepare ourselves. It has to be long term. It is not like fiddling around the edges and doing something here and something there. It has to be a holistic approach to look at the impacts and how we can deal with those impacts. Thank you.

**CHAIR**—Thank you.

**Mr Craig Thomson**—Madam Chair, just so that the committee knows, the University of Newcastle has a campus at Ourimbah on the Central Coast here. The Ourimbah campus is one that is subject to quite frequent flooding too, so they have a particular interest in this that goes beyond what you might normally expect.

**Mr Wiggin**—I do not have a prepared statement. If I can, I will make a brief comment under 'Community statements' at the end.

**CHAIR**—Sure.

**Mr Allan**—I have a few points. Firstly, there are the energy issues that relate to Australia generally, but the whole energy issue is tied in to the climate change debate. Right now there is a lot of discussion around the rising cost of fuel and the potential for fuel to get up to \$2 a litre. This is a significant issue for the Central Coast where we have 30,000 commuters going into

Sydney every day. A lot of them drive in vehicles with, a lot of the time, just one person per vehicle. As the cost of fuel is going to rise, that will have a significant impact on this part of the population. Whether they are going to pay more for fuel or start to look for opportunities that exist on the Central Coast rather than commuting into the city is worth looking at—and what opportunities exist here.

I liked some of the points that Jocelyn Jones made, especially as they relate to looking at the opportunities that exist down the road. Instead of just talking about climate change, doom and gloom and people giving up, we need to look at what opportunities exist in, say, making a move towards a low-carbon economy, especially as we are heading towards the emissions-trading scheme in 2010 and then, hopefully, after the Copenhagen conference at the end of 2009 there is going to be an international scheme. I think that on the Central Coast we could be looking at how we capitalise on these different opportunities that are going to come about. These are things that we need to look at and explore.

Also, there is the whole development and planning thing on the Central Coast. As our MP mentioned, we are going to have 100,000 more people in the coming years. We cannot have this 'business as usual' approach to development and planning. The word I often hear when we talk about climate change and the changes that we need to make is 'transformational'. The changes at local government level will need to be transformational. Climate change is a threat magnifier. Whatever threats to our environment we currently have, climate change is going to magnify them, so from the perspective of the Community Environment Network we will certainly be interested in continuing to strengthen a lot of the conservation regulations and those kinds of things that we have on the Central Coast so that we build up that resilience in, say, our biodiversity. The same idea also applies to other areas: building up resilience for the society as well as industry and all the different aspects. Thank you.

**CHAIR**—Thank you, Nigel. Does that complete the introductory witness statements? Thank you. I have a question to Craig and probably Vanessa. From a private briefing that the committee had with Professor Bruce Thom yesterday, our understanding is that the New South Wales department of climate change recently undertook a study of potential impacts, particularly here on the Central Coast. Would you like to make some comments on that study in general terms and maybe, Vanessa, from the point of view of the council, what consideration has been given and what the planning for the future might be. We will start with Vanessa.

**Miss Hannan**—As I understand it, the research has been done by the Department of Planning, and they did a LiDAR assessment, which is an aerial laser survey of the whole Central Coast region, which can create a digital elevation model, which gives you more precise levels of land. From that, they have identified, at various different levels, infrastructure and property at risk and those sorts of things. That has all been documented in a report that was put out by the Department of Planning. As far as—did you say Department of Environment and Climate Change?

**CHAIR**—I thought it was the department of climate change, but it might have been the planning department.

**Miss Hannan**—That is the only one that I am aware of.

**CHAIR**—That must be the one.

**Miss Hannan**—Otherwise, there is the federal Department of Climate Change which is doing a national first-pass assessment, looking on a broad scale. They have chosen six case study areas, one of which is the Central Coast and Hunter region, where they will look at some of the implications of adaptation versus no adaptation in terms of economic impacts.

**CHAIR**—I had the wrong department. I think you are right, Vanessa; it was planning.

**Mr Craig Thomson**—Yes, it is planning. What it showed—again, it is what the witnesses here today have spoken about—is the vulnerability of the Central Coast and that we have to have plans and make sure those plans come to fruition; that by doing nothing, we are leaving many of our areas vulnerable. There are some structural challenges for us on the Central Coast. We have two councils in this area and we do not always get agreement structurally between the two councils.

Often we cannot even get agreement between our two councils on how to manage our water and we are an area that has had severe effects of the drought. We were just under 10 per cent water capacity on the Central Coast until the rain of last year started to break that particular drought. There are some structural issues in how we deal with these sorts of things when you have two local governments that may take different approaches that can cause confusion and have different results for the same area, particularly at the intersection where the council boundaries meet. The example of our difficulties with the way in which the councils have not been able to reach agreement about how to deal with our water crisis highlights the sorts of problems that we are going to face with climate change, as we progress, when we try to deal with those problems under the structures that we have at the moment.

**CHAIR**—From the statements this morning, and from submissions received, it seems that the whole issue of access to information is a pretty critical one.

**Mr Craig Thomson**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—And in that regard you should be aware that the minister has recently made allocations of grants to develop a high-resolution digital elevation model, particularly looking at the most vulnerable areas; an interactive website, web based tool to help planners incorporate projections of high sea level events into their planning regime; and also funding to look at the impact of climate change in terms of offshore wave characteristics. From what we heard from Marlene this morning, some of the impacts at North Entrance were the result of what was going on in the water—the rips and the surges. So we are getting the message very clearly that the federal government has an important role to play in the information provision. Are either of the councils recipients of grants—I know two of mine are, to the extent of about \$50,000 each—to help do a risk assessment and to begin some adaptation strategy?

**Miss Hannan**—We are currently looking into that through the Urban Sustainability Program, as a joint project between Lake Macquarie and Gosford councils. I do not have all of details, but it is, essentially, to do a natural and infrastructure asset based risk assessment for those areas. That is in development at the moment, but I do not think we have yet received any grant funding.

The other thing that we would be seeking funding for is to incorporate climate change into our flood studies. Many of our flood studies are 20 years old—quite old and quite outdated—and there is no inclusion of climate change in those, so those really need to be updated for us to be able to understand the lake system and how it might respond to flooding, and including climate change and sea level rise in that. That is very important.

The other thing I wanted to add to what Craig said earlier, in terms of the councils not necessarily working together, is that I attended a conference recently down at Pittwater Council and the general consensus is that the councils are seeking some guidance from either the state or the federal government to give us some uniform planning guidelines around how we manage climate change. Lake Macquarie council recently adopted a one-metre sea level rise by 2100 and whilst that is, I suppose, a step in the right direction, to be able to do it uniformly across the region or, even more so, across the state, would be much more beneficial in terms of everybody moving in the same direction with planning reforms.

**CHAIR**—Thank you.

**Mr DREYFUS**—When we were going around this morning with Mr Thomson and the mayor, we had a number of sites pointed out to us that have very restrictive planning controls that relatively recently have been imposed on these sites. This is a general question for all of you: do you think that the current planning regime that is applying in the Wyong shire is adequate in terms of the presently known risks?

**Miss Hannan**—In a lot of the areas that you went to, those developments were approved prior to having a coastline management plan and now that we have more current information I do not think that the planning controls are adequate. I know that you mentioned earlier liability of the council in relation to those properties which were approved for development. Council is exempt from liability, under section 733 of the Local Government Act, for decisions which were made with the best available information at the time. In terms of planning how we manage those, I do not think we are going to have the capacity within council to be able to pay for some of the decisions or recommendations which come out of, for example, the coastline management plan which will say that the most sustainable option is to buy back or retreat with those properties, so either move the houses back further onto the land so they are in a safer area or buy back those areas. There is not a chance that council is going to have the money available, and neither is the state government, so we are in a really tricky predicament with how we manage those, and also, as mentioned, there is a social element which goes along with that.

**Mr Craig Thomson**—I think one of the key problems we have is the interaction between the three levels of government and how that operates, or that it has not operated successfully, without there being any apportionment of blame in terms of that. But there is local government, with the vast majority of the planning laws, and there is also the role that the state government plays. The figure of the 100,000 increase in population comes from a state government plan for the area and that plan, while various stakeholders were invited to play some role, was largely a state government initiative done in isolation from most of the stakeholders on the Central Coast. Then, federally, we have our government committing \$20 million over five years to Tuggerah Lakes—a study of a breakwall at The Entrance—and \$80 million to securing the water supply here on the Central Coast, where we are working with local council. Again, there is not a seamless plan or strategy there, and what is very current at the moment in this area, as I am sure

it is in most areas around Australia, is that the various groups come up with their plans and that sounds like great forward planning, but I think we probably have about half-a-dozen, if not more, plans for the Central Coast that are out there from various groups at the moment, including a 2020 plan from ourselves. There needs to be some way in which there is greater national coordination of the responses that we have to the issues of climate change planning and how we are going to meet those particular challenges. That is what has not characterised the history of this area over the last 30 years.

**CHAIR**—This afternoon we are going to be hearing from some community groups about development applications that have been called in by the state government. Are there any in this area that are now the subject of state government consent?

**Mr Craig Thomson**—The most famous one—or infamous—is the new town centre at Warnervale, which caused the local council six years of deliberation on how that would go ahead, and then it was called in after six years because that is an excessively long time. But the state government have now spent close to two years in relation to how they will deal with that development. Warnervale was spoken about during the Whitlam government's period of time as being one of those areas for decentralisation. Instead, what we have found is that, rather than having the planned expansion of suburbs in this area, it has been more developer-driven on a small scale, so we see new developments come up and around, but Warnervale was meant to be the master plan for the development in the northern part of this electorate and the key component for the Wyong shire.

**Mrs Pennings**—There are a couple at The Entrance that have been called in under SEPP 71—anything that is greater than four storeys and within a kilometre of the coastline. There is one at what they call the quay side of The Entrance, which is down at Ocean Parade, and there is also, although it is in limbo at the moment, the Klumper development, which is along the foreshore of the lake between The Entrance Bridge, right around to Picnic Point. One of the issues we are seeing in the Wyong shire is that we have this pressure from the state government to put extra people into the area. The council is trying to address those concerns but, from a community point of view, we do not see some of the ways that it has been proposed to be addressed as appropriate. The community feels very strongly that we should not have four-storey buildings with basement car parking around our lake. We saw, with the June floods last year, people trapped in their properties. You would have passed those apartments at North Entrance. People were trapped in there for three or four days. That is a relatively new block of apartments.

Down at Tuggerah Parade at Long Jetty, people were trapped for over a week, and they were stringing electricity cables from one building to the other across flooded land, just to get power into people's places. They had to canoe in an ambulance person to one of the people who were trapped in their properties. So amongst the general community there is a feeling that we should not be building things around our lake and on our coast where people, in the event of a major storm event, are trapped and isolated, and that we should look at more sensible approaches to where we put these developments, and the pressure from the state government to put people in these areas is putting a lot of pressure onto council.

**Dr WASHER**—Yes. Basically, 100,000 people moving into an area is something we face in WA, of course; we have a lot of people living there. But let me assure you that this sounds very odd and very different. The state government has to take total responsibility for this. When we

build infrastructure over there—and I will illustrate—rail would have to come with this public transport, and road systems would have to be adequate and flood proof. You would need job opportunities, so self-sustaining societies with job opportunities on site. In fact, those developments will not be approved unless the developers first develop business sites that cater for the public when they come, so you do not have transport or dormitory suburb problems—a whole range of problems that I am sure you know about beyond environmental problems.

I can see you have got the energy, and the water infrastructure would have to demonstrate that it could survive difficulties. All of that would be put in and that can only be done at a state government level. So my question is: what is your state government doing? You cannot put 100,000 people out here unless we create jobs for them plus the 30,000 people who are moving here now. Unless that happens, you should not bring them here.

**Mr Craig Thomson**—I will try and answer part of that, but I am obviously not here to defend the state government.

**Dr WASHER**—I know that. I do not mean to pick on you.

**Mr Craig Thomson**—The member for Wyong was a late apology. He did mean to be here today as well. The issue is not so much that the state government does not have a plan; it is how that plan fits with what local council is planning and what the federal government is planning. The state government has got a plan for how they want to develop the area in a sustainable way, but it is about how those plans interact with what council's vision is, what the federal government's vision is. That is where I think at a national level we can play a far greater role in terms of the regional coordination of those plans and priorities to make sure that we are not assuming something is being left to the local council to do or we are not assuming that in the plan it is being left for the state government to do. What seems to have happened in my short time as an MP is that they come knocking on the door of the federal government saying, 'We don't have the money for these particular projects. Can you help us out with the money?' even though they are not responsibilities that a federal government would normally take on. I think it is about the coordination of those three levels.

The reason we are talking about 100,000 people here is that it has gone up from 60,000 because of the commitments that we made at the last election about securing the water supply. So they have readjusted their plans, saying, 'Well, now that the water supply looks like it's going to be secured because of federal funding, we can increase the population that's here.' So they do have some planning; they have done some work on it, but it is about (1) whether the community agrees with it and their involvement in it and (2) the other levels of government, as to how they interact with those particular plans, which traditionally are the problems we have here. An additional problem is that, in an area that has 300,000 people, it sees itself as a distinct region. We have two local councils that often do not agree as well. That adds almost another layer to the three layers that we already have there.

**Mrs Pennings**—And we have got the CMAs.

**CHAIR**—Often, mistakenly, people think the federal government has the power to intervene to stop what they consider to be inappropriate development along the coastline, but the powers

of the federal government currently are constrained to the issues of national significance under the act.

**Mr Craig Thomson**—That is right, yes.

**Mrs IRWIN**—This growth that we are looking at is, I think you said, 100,000 people within the next 10 to 15 years.

**Mr Craig Thomson**—To put that in perspective, 70,000 in this electorate.

**Mrs IRWIN**—That is what I was going to ask. It is 70,000 in this electorate?

**Mr Craig Thomson**—Yes.

**Mrs IRWIN**—Which is covered by Wyong shire?

**Mr Craig Thomson**—Wyong shire and—

**Mrs IRWIN**—And the rest are Gosford?

**Mr Craig Thomson**—Gosford, but only a small proportion of it is Gosford council. This electorate covers both council areas, but the people on the Central Coast see themselves as from the Central Coast; they do not see themselves as part of Wyong shire or Gosford shire.

**Mr Jones**—Absolutely.

**Mrs IRWIN**—Has anyone got any practical suggestions for dealing with this problem?

**Mrs Jones**—Amalgamate the councils.

**Mrs IRWIN**—Amalgamate the councils? I will get shot down by somebody I know. When I am a private individual, I can say it.

**Mr Craig Thomson**—In relation to amalgamating the councils, that was one of the major recommendations that came out of our local 2020 summit: that having two councils was providing blockages for key areas.

**CHAIR**—Has there been any push by the state government to look at planning on a regional rather than a local government boundary position?

**Miss Hannan**—The difficulty when you plan at a regional level is that you lose the finer scale of information that is available at the local level. So as the plans keep moving further and further up they are more and more coarse and it makes the planning decision seem quite sensible, but when you get down to the nitty-gritty detail you think, ‘Well, there are all of these factors which go against that decision.’ I think there is a difficulty in doing that and taking it up higher and making the decision more regional or state-wide; you lose some of the information that is available at the local level.

**Mr Craig Thomson**—I do not agree with that view, by the way.

**Mr Wiggin**—I would like to point out that in the last two weeks the state government released what is called a Central Coast Regional Strategy. This is a follow-up to one which was released about three years ago. The unfortunate thing is that there has been little funding for infrastructure covered in this report. If there is continued growth, if you want to put 100,000 people here, there is very little funding for public transport, which on the Central Coast is negligible at the best of times. If we can get any federal funding, we would be most appreciative.

**Mrs Pennings**—When we did the 2020 summit, transport was the biggest issue. We also have a Wyong shire strategic vision committee and transport has been the biggest issue for both of those. Transport has been the biggest issue up here.

**Ms LIVERMORE**—Picking up on that, are you talking about transport between the Central Coast and Sydney or transport between the communities?

**Mrs Pennings**—Both.

**Mr Craig Thomson**—Both. It goes to a whole range of issues; even affordable housing. In The Entrance, two-thirds of the apartments are empty for most of the year because you are an extra half to three-quarters of an hour from the freeway for commuting and there is no connection between the two. The railway line and the freeway are in the interior but a lot of the older development on the Central Coast is on the coast, so there are questions for transport both within the Central Coast and also two major regional centres.

**Ms LIVERMORE**—What is the role of the catchment management authority—if someone could comment on that—and the relationship between that body and the council and the Landcare groups operating in the region?

**Miss Hannan**—The local CMA is the Hunter-Central Rivers CMA. They cover areas extending from Gosford up to, I think, around the Taree area, so it is quite a big area. They developed a catchment blueprint which was converted into the catchment action plan, which essentially looks at how we manage our environment. Funding that is administered by the CMA is given to local Landcare groups and, I think, mostly non-government organisations, to do works on their land—on private land mostly. They also take into account some of the work that is done by councils, so they have targets for management, for example, of stream-bank rehabilitation. They have a certain amount of stream-bank that is to be rehabilitated each year, so funding is directed towards landholders for those sorts of projects.

In terms of council's interrelationship with the CMA, the CMA sits on a number of the committees that the council has, like the Tuggerah Lakes Estuary Management Committee, so they have a role in that. There is also consultation in a lot of the projects that we do with the CMA.

**Ms LIVERMORE**—What are its priorities? Is it looking at, say, water quality?

**Miss Hannan**—Yes.

**Ms LIVERMORE**—And biodiversity?

**Miss Hannan**—They have management targets and there are at least 20, 25 management targets. They cover a broad range of things: water quality, riparian revegetation, natural vegetation, regeneration.

**CHAIR**—Specifically dedicated to coastal?

**Miss Hannan**—I think that there is, but I am not particularly familiar with that. Do you know, Marlene?

**Mrs Pennings**—Only that one of their targets is managing highly erodible soils. That is where the coastline comes into it. They have responsibility for the three-kilometre out-to-the-ocean strip and have been doing a series of education type things. The Hunter CMA tends to have spent most of its money up in the Hunter in the past, because that is where it came from, and to have had very little involvement with the coast until the state government—and I think they now come under DECC, don't they?

**Miss Hannan**—I am not sure.

**Mrs Pennings**—But, effectively, they are another authority under the state government, and I think from a community point of view we just see them as another level of government. To give you an example, they were funded for NHT. We see that the money went from the federal government to the state government to the CMA and, eventually, to the community and to the council, so we just see it as another level of government. Their funding process is usually by competitive funding, so in the example of North Entrance, which is one of their priority targets for highly erodible soils, that project would be compared to another one, which might be a river type project; so they are quite different.

**Mr DREYFUS**—Could I go back to the projected population rise of 100,000. We have seen in this area, at firsthand I suppose on our site visits this morning, which were kindly arranged by Craig Thomson, just how environmentally sensitive this area is. Does anyone have any comment about the present planning regime in terms of what it directs in relation to the form of development that might take place in this area if 100,000 people are to be accommodated, and the location of that development in this area if 100,000 people are to be accommodated? There are really two questions: both the form of development and where it is to be located. One hundred thousand would be a 25 per cent increase on the number of people that live here now.

**Mr Jones**—Being a commuter into North Sydney every day for the last 7½ years, I think development in the first instance has got to be along that transport line. I think one of the areas identified was Warnervale. We are seeing high-density living, town houses and so forth, develop in the Wyong and Gosford areas and I think that needs to continue, because there is a reality of getting infrastructure costs to put railways along the coastal line, which is obviously not particularly practical, considering what we are dealing with here today in terms of rising sea levels. I think that is the first logical approach.

**Mr DREYFUS**—To follow that up, you would see the location for development being the most intensely developed areas on the Central Coast, which are Wyong and Gosford?

**Mr Jones**—Yes, with the further development of Warnervale and up to Wyee. Those areas have got substantial land areas.

**Mr Craig Thomson**—Inland, west of the lake, north of Wyong.

**Mr Wiggin**—They have introduced a CBD plan for really increased density in the centre of Gosford, 15- to 20-storey buildings, which we have been sort of fighting because the current planning laws do not allow for buildings of that height.

**Mr DREYFUS**—What is the highest building in Gosford now?

**Mr Wiggin**—I think it might even be the Gosford council building itself and, when that was built some years ago, that was well above the height levels allowed under the planning laws. But there are proposals. Central Coast Leagues Club, I believe, has a proposal for 15 to 20 storeys; they wanted to go as far as 25 to 30 storeys some years ago. The other proposals are for larger storey buildings in Gosford.

**Mr Craig Thomson**—There are plans that have been approved—subject to DA application, but they will be approved because they conform in Tuggerah—in this area for 10- and 12-storey towers at Mardi, which is a suburb on the railway and on the F3. There is talk from developers about 20-storey towers but they have not been approved at all yet and, again, they are at Tuggerah, near Westfield's shopping centre, and the developer there is Westfield, which is looking at developing that particular land. But the issue, in talking about Gosford, is that for that part of the Central Coast they are looking at only the 30,000. The 70,000, the vast majority of the growth, is in this end rather than down there.

**Miss Hannan**—And Gosford really only has the opportunity to do infill development because it has no greenfield sites left, whereas the Wyong shire has the extensive areas up around the Warnervale area to the top of the lakes that Craig mentioned. That is why they are trying to target the 70,000 people up there, and I think really the keystone is the Warnervale town centre and tying that in. We also have a Wyong employment zone. I am not sure where that is up to in terms of planning approvals, but that is essentially an industrial area which is aimed at providing more jobs and avoiding people having to commute to Sydney for their work. There is an integrated plan for that area so that there will be a central town centre with all of the facilities, but currently the development is going ahead without any of that social infrastructure, which is a real problem.

**CHAIR**—One of our terms of reference is looking at mechanisms to promote sustainable coastal communities, so some of the issues we have just been touching on will form part of our consideration about where we go in the future on that specific reference. You mentioned earlier that about 30,000 people commute out of the area. Do we know what proportion commute by car compared to public transport and can you tell us a little bit about your public transport links to the city?

**Mr Craig Thomson**—We can. It is an educated guess as to how many commute. I have heard figures between 30,000 and 50,000. There is no hard data on the actual numbers that do that. The F3 is constantly clogged and is at the moment being upgraded to three lanes both ways. There have been calls over the years to have a second freeway between Sydney and Newcastle for this

area, as well. We have a train system that operates and a large number of those commuters would also go by the train system there. Again, it is a train system that is not faster than driving, which is the key problem with it. If it is quicker and more convenient to jump in your car, then you are going to do that. Also, a lot of the communities are not based around a train station, so you have to drive your car in any event, or find some way of getting to the train station first, leave your car and then get a train to Sydney.

**CHAIR**—Do you have public bus services locally?

**Mr Craig Thomson**—We have private bus services.

**Mr Allan**—The private bus service, for example, from my home to get to the local train station, which is about four kilometres away, costs \$3. I was thinking about it the other day and comparing that to actually driving my vehicle. The only reason I would catch the bus right now is because of, I guess, an environmental point of view. From purely an economic point of view, the cost of fuel would have to go up quite a lot more before it would even be feasible for me to do that.

**Miss Hannan**—Similarly for the train travel, because from Warnervale station, which is only a couple of stations away from Wyong, where I work, the ticket is \$9 or something, so it is easier and quicker to jump in the car and drive to work. But, yes, it is that environmental consciousness that gets you on the train instead.

**Mrs Pennings**—But also look at The Entrance. As Craig said earlier, two-thirds of the units over there are empty, and we have probably more retired people, because if you lived at The Entrance and had to catch the train, it is a good hour by bus to get from The Entrance to Tuggerah station and then you have got your two-hour train trip to Sydney. We are not encouraging people to live permanently here, because we do not have the transport.

**CHAIR**—So the nearest train station to where we were at the Waldorf Apartments, Craig, would be an hour by—

**Mrs Pennings**—By public transport it is an hour.

**Mr Craig Thomson**—Half an hour by your own car.

**CHAIR**—No, by the private bus.

**Mrs Pennings**—At least an hour.

**CHAIR**—An hour to get to the train station. How frequently does the bus run?

**Mrs Pennings**—In peak hour, once every half an hour, but, out of peak hour, probably once an hour.

**CHAIR**—So you have got an hour to get to the station by bus and then two hours, 1¾ hours, to get to Sydney?

**Mr Craig Thomson**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—All being well.

**Mr Jones**—The train system is remarkably good. Given the number of times in the last 7½ years that the train system has let me down compared to the F3, I would rather be on the train system.

**Mr Wiggin**—If I could just comment about the university. It has about 12,000 to 13,000 students, full and part time, and the service to Ourimbah station, I believe, goes every hour and they very rarely fit in with the times that students start, so the capacity for parking at the university is clogged at the best of times and I think there is a need for areas like the university, with all those students, to have a better rail service from Ourimbah. But this cannot always be done, because there are the major stations like Gosford, Tuggerah and Wyong, and if you had to change it to Ourimbah then you would have to take out one of those other stations, so the rail service does not have the capacity to stop at the university as often as it should.

**CHAIR**—Are there any employment opportunities—apart from the obvious in tourism, accommodation and retail—in light industry in the area?

**Mr Craig Thomson**—We have some manufacturing industries here on the Central Coast, but the biggest employer is retail, which tells you the sorts of jobs that we have here and which is why so many people do commute. We have some quite big employers in manufacturing here. We have the Woolworths distribution centre in the electorate as well, which employs 400-odd people. Mars and Sanitarium are here too. But, despite all of that, every second family has at least one person who commutes to Sydney or Newcastle for work. We also have one of the highest unemployment rates in the country, at over eight per cent, which has not changed dramatically at all with the tightening of the labour market in other areas.

**Mrs IRWIN**—I am going to ask a question. Marlene commented on this, but I would also like to get more of Marlene's views and Vanessa's and even Craig's. What shocked me was when you were talking about a need to have a—I took the notes down here—'disaster management plan' in place, because we had the 2007 floods. I think Craig's submission mentioned those horrendous fires in 1994 when the rail and transport was virtually closed for a number of days. Is there such a plan in place or not?

**Miss Hannan**—There is a Displan, which is a disaster plan done by the SES. Council has a role in contributing to that in terms of the coastline management. We will be providing advice to update the disaster plan and to produce an emergency response plan, because that is one thing, as Marlene mentioned, that we really do not have, and every time we have a large storm there is an ad hoc response to that. That is something that will happen as part of the coastline management plan. It is the state government through the SES that manages the disaster plan.

**Mrs IRWIN**—It is very important that we have a good plan in place.

**Mrs Pennings**—We saw it happen at Curtis Parade where you were this morning.

**Mrs IRWIN**—That is right.

**Mrs Pennings**—And in February-March we had some storms—not big storms, but we had those rips I was talking about—and the cut-outs were coming back to where those fences were. If we had walked a bit further this morning, we would have seen some of those fences that have actually come down. I was up there when one of the council staff was there. He was standing on this slab of concrete, a wave came up, and the next thing the slab of concrete was on the ground and he was just hanging onto the fence. That was how quickly that happened.

The residents then started panicking: ‘How much closer is the ocean going to come to our yard?’ You do not know. There was not that response to say where you go and what you do if this starts happening. It is sad. People start panicking. There was a man trying to shovel sand up in front of his place and this type of thing. We need some sort of response in place that says that, if you get a major storm event or these major rips, once it gets to this point then you start looking at maybe putting sand on the beach or try to use geotextile bags or something like that, or saying to people, ‘Now is the time you’ve got to move out of your house.’ Somewhere along the line that response has to be there and we do not have it along the coast. We do not really even have it, I think, with the floods, but there are various plans.

People did not know at what stage to start pulling their cars out and moving out of their houses. I know a couple of people who lived around the lake and they said, ‘We didn’t know that we should get our caravans out. We could have got our caravans out earlier rather than had them floating.’ Getting furniture up higher and those types of things is information we need to communicate to the people who live here, not just to the SES or to somebody sitting in council. We need to let the average man on the street know what to do if we have an emergency.

**Miss Hannan**—I think the June long weekend floods and storms was a big wake-up call and that response, like I said, was very ad hoc, so there has been—

**Mrs IRWIN**—It is sad that you have got to have a wake-up call to do something, isn’t it?

**Miss Hannan**—It is. I think we had been in blissful ignorance because we have been in drought and have not had these sorts of events happening. Everything was going along smoothly and there was no money going towards it and there was no drive for that sort of management to happen. Absolutely. But there are things happening now through the SES and through council to look at a more cohesive plan for managing these sorts of emergencies.

**Mrs IRWIN**—But it still has to be communicated to the man on the street, the resident.

**Miss Hannan**—That is absolutely right. Education is one of the most critical things with all of these issues of climate change and everything. Educating people as to why we are doing these things is really critical.

**Mrs IRWIN**—Talking about education, Chair, can I ask my one last question?

**CHAIR**—Yes.

**Mrs IRWIN**—I want to go to Jocelyn about this. I am very impressed with this vision of a climate change discovery centre which is, as you were saying, similar to Questacon. I have visited Questacon down in Canberra and it is just great for educating the young ones. This would

be brilliant. How far have you got with this? Is this in the early stages? Have you got sponsors? Have you got a site in mind?

**Mrs Jones**—There are several sites. Site would be critical. It came about originally from a couple of streams for me, one of which is Mount Penang. We have state government owned land at Mount Penang which was a boys home originally. It is 256 acres. It is up at Mount Penang when you come off the F3. It is at that spot. We have now got a commercial tourist site up there. We had an event—

**Mrs IRWIN**—A great garden show once a year. I went there last year.

**Mrs Jones**—Yes, the Flora Festival. The state government has spent \$6 million on the gardens up there, but they are a white elephant. So I was looking at what we could do with this whole site and that is originally how this came about. Also, I have sat on many community boards, grappling with the problem of employment and transport. We send everybody out of the Central Coast. We do not want to. That is not sustainable and it is not environmentally friendly. It is not good for climate change. We want to keep people on the Central Coast. But the problem is that we do not have large manufacturing. Liverpool, west of Sydney, is where the big, heavy industry is based. We have to look at employment opportunities which are in niche areas. Our big Albany paper manufacturing on the Central Coast is about to move. They are going overseas. We have got to replace that. If you walk into any industry, any industrial units, you have this wonderful energy of small businesses creating things and they also employ at least two or three people. That is a really great centre of energy and also it means that people can work locally, get transport locally, commute locally, then go to the beach.

Why are they on the Central Coast? Because we have such wonderful facilities. I have TAFE students who leave home at four o'clock in the morning, get on the F3 and go down to Sydney every day, and get home at six o'clock. What an opportunity! They are spending so much money on fuel et cetera. We want to keep them on the Central Coast. When we started looking at it, we saw that the whole concept of climate change has opportunities for business, as well, to develop products. But we need our university. We need our researchers, our designers, people like that. We need to talk to each other all the time. Unfortunately, I have never met Salim and he has never met me. If we only had a centre where things could come together, where people could come together. We are desperate to create conferences, workshops et cetera that can take advantage of climate change—not to frighten people but to excite people about the future; excite them about the fact that there is a future, for a start, and that we have something to give to it, to contribute. Sorry, it is the passion!

**Mrs IRWIN**—You are passionate. It is quite obvious that you are very passionate.

**Mrs Jones**—I do have a normal voice normally! But that is where it came about. When you talk to Horst Endrulat, who is our head of tourism on the Central Coast, he is crying out for reasons to bring people to the Central Coast, to show them what we have got. But let us educate them at the same time. Let us not educate them in a scary, boring way; let us educate them by entertaining them as well so that they can learn and take that back into their own lives. It is a really exciting project, but obviously at this stage, yes, we have no money. Everything comes down to money, doesn't it?

**Mr Jones**—That was one site, but what is important is that this is where we have a high concentration of people. You have to have a reason. It has to be accessible because this is as much for Sydney, Wollongong or Newcastle as for bringing people in as an iconic place that is fun and entertaining. It was a concept that we had but it is not necessarily fixed to that site.

**Mrs Jones**—We looked at the university as well, which has potential, except that it is in a flood plain—ask the library, which regularly becomes a river—so we do have other opportunities. The project itself has merit to stand alone, wherever you might put it. It is just that we come from the Central Coast and the steering committee are all based on the Central Coast.

**CHAIR**—Is it Wyong council or Gosford council?

**Mrs Jones**—Wyong or Gosford? It does not matter. It is Central Coast, so I have no bias one way or the other.

**Dr WASHER**—Just listening to that, it seems apparent to me that a major problem in this area is lack of employment opportunities—that is critical—and why you have such high levels of unemployment. Another thing is that that leads to social disintegration ultimately.

**Mrs Jones**—Yes.

**Dr WASHER**—If you have dormitory suburbs, they do not work. I am sure the city can vouch for that. There are a lot of problems because of that. But a secure built environment has to be essential, as Mark said. You cannot have things built in areas where you know full well there are going to be problems like flooding or sea erosion, and to build on primary dunes, the first dunes, is frankly loopy. You do not have to be a rocket engineer to say that that is a lousy idea. Around the whole country, anyone who builds on a primary dune is in for trouble. So, John, just quickly, what did the state government say about employment opportunities, seeing that they want to move 100,000 people up there? What are their plans to employ 100,000 people—just in a nutshell?

**Mr Wiggin**—I read that in Gosford they are expecting an extra 35,000 employment places within the next 20 years.

**Mrs Jones**—In what?

**Mr Wiggin**—Is that right?

**Mrs Pennings**—I think it was 45,00 or 54,000 employment opportunities over the life of this plan. It was not, 'In 20 years time we would have an extra 45,000 jobs;' it was during the life of the plan, which would include the construction.

**Mr Craig Thomson**—They spoke about the economic zone and trying to encourage employment. They did not go to the specifics of what areas.

**CHAIR**—It may be useful for the committee's purposes if you put in a supplementary submission, just having a look at the projected population and employment opportunities.

**Mr Craig Thomson—Yes.**

**CHAIR—**Are there any other burning questions? We are running over time already and we have another group coming in at 12.30.

**Mrs Jones—**Could I add, very quickly, that the federal government through the ACC, the partnership program, have been targeting the Central Coast for environmental product development. That was through David Bacon, who is our representative on the Central Coast. One of the targets for employment on the Central Coast is not big manufacturing; it is niche product, environmental climate change reduction et cetera, so the federal government have been working. That is how we became involved with David in the first place.

**CHAIR—**We will conclude this session by my thanking on behalf of the committee all the witnesses who have been to the hearing today. Our secretariat will send you a copy of the transcript from Hansard for any corrections that need to be made. I would be grateful if you could also send the secretariat any additional material that you have undertaken to provide, as soon as possible. That being the case, seeing we are now over time, I will suspend proceedings. We will resume with submissions from Catherine Hill Bay, Lake Macquarie City Council, Gwandalan/Summerland Point Action Group and community statements.

I particularly want to thank Craig Thomson for his efforts in bringing a very interesting group of community council representatives and academics along to help inform the committee with the terms of reference and aspects of the particular problems facing the community here at the Central Coast. It has been a very worthwhile experience this morning, not just the site visits but amplifying statements that we have heard from members of your group this morning, so thank you very much, Craig, for the efforts that you have made. Thank you.

**Proceedings suspended from 12.04 pm to 12.33 pm**

**LAING, Mr Barry, Associate Member, Catherine Hill Bay Progress Association and Dune Care Inc****WHYTE, Mrs Suzanne Margaret, President, Catherine Hill Bay Progress Association**

**CHAIR**—I would like to welcome the representatives from Catherine Hill Bay Progress Association and Dune Care to this public hearing. Although the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, I should advise you that the hearings are legal proceedings of the parliament and warrant the same respect as proceedings of the House itself. The giving of false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as a contempt of parliament.

The committee has received your submission and it has already been authorised for publication. I would invite you to make a brief opening statement, if you so wish, before we proceed to questions and discussion. Thank you.

**Mr Laing**—Thank you, committee members, for giving us the time to talk with you. We will give a brief opening statement first and then we will be very happy to answer questions and so on. In terms of our link to the place, I have a long association with Catherine Hill Bay, and the reason that I am here today is that I am very passionate that—particularly as of last week—in terms of the effect on coastal communities of climate change, a milestone has been passed and we are in a really bad state

I have been involved in the Catherine Hill Bay community since 1965, as a kid, and my parents have lived there all that time. My mother still lives there. She is now approaching 90, and she is typical of a lot of people who live there. I had some photos to show you which, for various reasons, I cannot do. In each of the three photos I was going to show you about my connection with the place; the place where I am standing will be badly affected simply by the physical effects of climate change. One of them is a place down the coast called the Ghosties, where we used to go as kids. There are caves under the cliff. The way to get in there is through a little low-roofed cave. The high-tide mark currently is about two metres below the top. According to the Quaternary Association of Australia, within probably 50 years there will be enough sea level rise to virtually cut that area off, so we will not be able to get in there at high tide. That is pretty dramatic in less than a lifetime.

The second photograph was of me with my kids in a place called the Bogey Hill in the north part of the township, which is on a headland. With the increased storm surges that the engineers and the Quaternary Association are predicting, that area will be scoured out and it will no longer be a swimming hole. The third photograph is in front of some of the housing in the town. It is on a dune area which is virtually on the high-water mark, and within the next 20 or 30 years, according to predictions, it will recede and go back through the houses on the edge of town. So we are not talking about something that is academic and something that is out there; we are talking about what is actually affecting real people in a real town right now. My kids will not be able to stand on the places I could stand on; that is how rapid the change is going to be.

My background is in geology and geography. The Quaternary Association's submission to me, although it looks very pale and is an academic exercise to some extent, is very scary because

they say that there has been 120 metres of sea level change in the last 6,000 to 7,000 years. This change that we are seeing now is happening within one generation, which is like a split second in geological time, and they say they do not really know what the effect on coastlines will be. So how can we properly plan? When we see something that is happening in a split second compared to something that happened over 7,000 years, we are talking about something we have not experienced before on this planet. We are facing something which is dramatic and which is very fast.

So why am I worried now about the impact of the development that was approved last week?

**Mrs IRWIN**—Is this the Rose Group development?

**Mr Laing**—We were notified last Tuesday that it is going to be approved. Yes, it is going to be approved.

**Mrs Whyte**—Probably today or tomorrow.

**Mr Laing**—That immediately means that the wetlands north and south of the town centre will be under threat. The key factor will be that there will be a change in the watershed. It is a tiny area. It does not have a hinterland. It only goes back a kilometre to the crest of the hill where the Pacific Highway runs. Anything that happens back there, like putting in a big development—and they propose to move 750,000 cubic metres of earth—is dramatic and is going to have untold effect on the wetlands.

As far as we are concerned, this has all been dealt with in the courts and in the local government. It was only when part 3A came in in New South Wales that the whole thing fell apart, because it had been clear that the coastal policy prevented this from happening; the place was declared a national park; it was already zoned for conservation. We thought that, with over 30 years of community consultation in developing these protections, it would be okay. But the problem is that part 3A allows the current planning minister to make a decision like that with no regard to any advice. He can call a project in as state-significant with no fetters to it.

We have a problem where federally it may be interesting and useful to bring up policies and proposals to change what is going to happen to Catherine Hill Bay and other communities like it but locally the state planning minister can ignore absolutely everything and just say, 'Yes, we'll do that,' regardless of whether it fits any coastal policy. Having all the policies and all that stuff will not mean a bit, because part 3A gives the planning minister absolute authority to call a project in.

The point is not that there is no community consultation; it is that he can call a project in and examine them in a totally non-transparent process. He can make that decision. Local governments all up and down the coast may object and federal statutes may be used try and control things, but in fact, under 3A, once a decision is made to call in any development project it is up to the minister alone, regardless of advice. We are now in a situation where it is being demonstrated by the current planning minister that he does not give a stuff about the control process. Part 3A gives him the licence to bring in anything he likes along the coast. It is not that personality that is the problem; the problem is the statutes that allow him to do this.

**CHAIR**—To be clear, are his decisions appellable through the New South Wales Land and Environment Court?

**Mrs Whyte**—No.

**Mr Laing**—No, they are not.

**Mrs Whyte**—You cannot attack it on merit. It can only be attacked on process, and it has been challenged a couple of times on process by different groups that have been hit with these 3A decisions. What happens is that the planning minister just backtracks, ticks it off and moves ahead.

**Mr Laing**—Over 95 per cent of the projects which come in under that decision—that they become state-significant—have been approved. Very few of them are not approved. There is a whole other issue around political donations, which colour the picture as well. The fact that the two companies that have developments in Catherine Hill Bay have made large donations to the ALP in the last three years is probably a useful thing to understand when you see what the decisions are that are being made.

What we have is a situation that as far as I am concerned is out of control. As a geologist, I am worried that as a nation we have lost the ability to control what happens to our coast—we have lost it in New South Wales. The planning minister is demonstrating that right now. Last week, he demonstrated that quite conclusively.

Our submission points out that we have been trying for years to protect this coastline. We have been trying for a long time to have the areas which are regarded as of high conservation value protected. You can see from the maps that we have included in our submission that there are not only environmental considerations but also heritage considerations around why this little coastal community developed and why it should be protected as such that have meant that people have regarded it as totally protected. The National Trust is fighting the battle to save this place on the grounds of its heritage value.

Jack Munday was standing on the beach with us only a couple of months ago to make the point that there is only one way this can be stopped now, and that is by the same kind of groundswell which caused the green bans in the sixties. It has got that bad. We are at the point where, as locals, we are having to fight a fight which should be fought federally. As locals, we are struggling. I have work. I have a real job; Sue has a real job. Our lives are full and yet we are having to fight a battle to preserve something which should be fought for nationally.

What I hope is that this committee is able to move with speed and produce the impact that is needed. From our point of view, someone needs to be able to control coastal processes so that under climate change we have got some control over what is happening. It is hopeless if you have got climate change happening and you do not have control over what happens along the coastline. That is what is being demonstrated in New South Wales. That is the impact side. We need a federal impact. In the submissions, so many people are saying, 'We need clear federal control over this,' and I would agree totally. But the federal control should be supporting the local government, because Lake Macquarie City Council has had this preserve for years and

years. They fought in the Land and Environment Court and won against these developers. That is why they became part 3A.

The second thing is speed. We are talking change which is, like I said, split-second stuff in geological time. This is not slow. To us, it might seem that a sea level rise of half a metre in a lifetime is a tide. We think: 'Oh, yeah, okay. It is a bit like a tide.' Geologically, it is astounding. You do not get that sort of thing happening overnight and, if you do, you get massive planetary extinctions. The dinosaurs did not die out for no reason. There are massive planetary extinctions when you put something out of kilter so quickly. What is needed nationally and internationally is a speedy response. We do not have weeks and months to waste on this.

So, for me, the committee's role is to try and help the speed of response. It is no good having people say, 'We can wait three years,' which currently is what one of the political parties is saying. They are saying, 'We can wait for the implementation of a carbon-trading scheme.' No, you cannot wait, not with a half-metre rise in 50 years. That is drastic. So the committee's role from our point of view is to get some urgency back into this problem, so that people respond with the urgency that is needed. Sue is going to say a few things about the struggle that we have had.

**Mrs Whyte**—I will be brief. I am going to try and fill in a few blanks. We talk about Catherine Hill Bay as being significant. It is. Nationally, they want to put us on the heritage list. This is a little village. It will no longer be a little village if 900 new houses are built. We will lose the reason why people come. One of our biggest problems—and I would like to talk about this—is that these developers are high-end developers, high-level developers, who want to build quite exclusive enclaves. We have had to fight so hard to make sure public access has been established. In some of the concept plans, they dot the access road in on national parks and wildlife land; they hang the coastal walkway off a cliff that is eroding.

We were given an independent hearing by an assessment panel of very well-respected people. They came to us and said, 'Well, it's up to you to tell us what's wrong.' To have to go to that length and provide really in-depth and well-resourced submissions—the like of this and this and there is another one—and then do presentations to the panel as well has taken a lot from this small community. The panel has listened, but the panel has been constrained, because it was not given in its terms of reference the ability to look at the quantum of housing. All that the panel was allowed to do was to look at things like where, on the allotted footprint, those houses could be placed. So, even though we were given this panel—and we had to work so hard even for that—the real problem of overdevelopment exists.

The panel sat down with the developers and told them how they should plan according to coastal policy and coastal design guidelines, and yet we still had the developers ignoring this and pushing forward. If we had not been able to be there and to do this, we would have got a development which would have brought a lot of money, I suppose, to that developer but which would have been disastrous. We think that 600 houses will be disastrous, but we have managed to push them back off the cliff by 25 metres. I can show you photos here of where they have got their boundary fences. This is one of their concept plans: boundary fences right to the edge of the cliff. If we had not worked so hard, this would not have been pushed back.

How many communities along the coast have got the time, the effort and the resources to put into this? The pressure from developers and from population growth is enormous on the New South Wales coastline. We have got 45 per cent of our coastline already locked up in national parks and there is not a lot of land left right on the coast for these developers, and they are pushing very hard to get access to areas that are under conservation zonings and also coastal acquisition zonings. We have been told by one of the top environmental groups that the cost of land that is under conservation on the coast of New South Wales has actually risen to full commercial rates because the developers see a way around the zoning. We believe that our present government finds it very hard to withstand this pressure, for various reasons, and we really think that the only way it is going to happen is if the national government can add another layer on top.

**CHAIR**—Were you able to gain any support or assistance through the Environmental Defender's Office? Were you in touch?

**Mrs Whyte**—The Gwandalan group were dealing with them first. Then when we approached them they said: 'Well, look, it's a bit of a clash of interests. We will deal with them and they will pass information on to you.' We have had some support from them, but the Gwandalan people will be able to give you a much greater understanding of that.

**Mr Laing**—The issue is not establishing the need to conserve it; that is totally established. The problem is that all those considerations can be overridden so easily. We have got everyone's support to conserve and protect this area, including federal support for endangered species stuff and endangering processes, but they can all be overridden.

**Mrs Whyte**—The government's own planning office said that no development should take place at Catherine Hill Bay. There is no water; there is no sewerage; there is no transport; there are no schools; there are no shops. This is an area that should not be developed because of the resources that would have to be put into that. Originally, this area belonged to Wyong council, and on that first meeting the then mayor Bob Graham said: 'This is ridiculous. We've got to bring garbage trucks all the way up here. On one side of the road we've got level 4 water restrictions; on the other side there's none. Just give it to Lake Macquarie,' which is really what happened. But the amount of resources that will have to be put into this area is outrageous. Really, it should be just under conservation, which it is already.

**CHAIR**—Thank you. Any questions from committee members?

**Dr WASHER**—Barry, was there an explanation given as to why the minister made that decision?

**Mr Laing**—Not that we are aware of. He is not required to give any explanation when he makes the decision. In fact, the minister usually simply reflects back to the most recent advice from his department. In this case, he has had an independent hearing and assessment panel process for each of these developments, and in each case the panel's advice would have been, 'Don't do it.' But they are not able to give that advice. What they have been trying to say to him is, 'You need to cut back the quantum and you need to do this in a more respectful way,' but in this case, as far as we know, he has ignored that.

**Mrs Whyte**—They were never able to talk about quantum. The panel came back with its final report with seven recommendations, recommendations such as providing public access—making them pull back off the cliff and making them put in access. It is going to go under ‘community title’, and under community title you can close the roads whenever you like. They are very small roads, which will stop people going through that development to access Moonee Beach.

Catherine Hill Bay beach is the only patrolled beach on the entire peninsula and not only do we have people from the surrounding villages and towns but Morisset is going to be the major area and we are the closest beach, so to lock things off in community title roads will prevent people going there. One of the recommendations was that at least one of those roads had to be a public road. He has looked at all those seven recommendations and he has addressed most of them. About 90 per cent of those recommendations will be put onto the developer, but it was never in question that that quantum of 600 houses was going to go through once that MOU was signed in June 2006.

**CHAIR**—Barry, you are aware of the limited jurisdiction that the federal government has in areas of contention about what people perceive to be inappropriate development.

**Mr Laing**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—What kinds of powers, ideally, would you like the federal government to have or to try and acquire for the future? I say that because I do not want the progress association to think for a minute that there is something that we can do in an immediate sense to resolve the development that we are talking about at the moment. But, in the future, if we were to have a more proactive role, what would you see that role being?

**Mr Laing**—I think the precedent was set, but it was dismantled by the previous government, in that they intentionally gave resources and power to local government to work with their communities to develop local environment plans and so on. There was the Coastcare program and so on. Because those things have been dismantled, to me an easy way for the federal government to get to work straightaway would be to reinstate those community organisations and those resources, which would help people mobilise at a ground level to get these things changed. I am aware that no-one can come in federally and just jump up and down and say that it has got to be done in a certain way. On the other hand, as I said in my submission separately, I think we need to mobilise in a much greater way than we did under Howard against terrorists because this threat is much greater than anything a terrorist could do to Australia, and yet we are sort of coasting along.

There could be new federal powers which take over the control of sensitive areas on the grounds that, unless you have a national approach, climate change will overwhelm and destroy them. The extent of community knowledge of what is going on is really deficient, and people just do not have a clear enough understanding of what climate change is doing to us. If they knew, then they might be able to better support politicians to take more draconian measures. The Pittwater Peninsula, for instance, is going to be cut off and you cannot do much about it. When the *Pasha Bulker* ran ashore at Newcastle, people sort of rushed around and thought, ‘Isn’t it marvellous how strong nature is?’ But the Pittwater area will be cut off because that little isthmus of sand is going to be washed away within some of our lifetimes—the younger ones amongst us. It will happen in that time.

That needs draconian measures when you have thousands of people living in an area which will become an island. That is drastic. So in that context I think there is going to be a need for new federal powers. In order to get it, you are going to need an educated population who can accept that we have got to give the pollies this amount of power. We have got to let them legislate, the same as Rudd is now legislating for emissions trading and so on—well, he is not legislating; he is working towards it. There has got to be the same thing overall in our climate change process and the federal role for that, I think, is pretty easy: just do it.

**Mr DREYFUS**—Barry, are you able to say whether the Catherine Hill Bay Progress Association has made any attempt to invoke the federal legislation, the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act?

**Mrs Whyte**—The EPBC, yes.

**Mr DREYFUS**—How did you go?

**Mrs Whyte**—We have been told that possibly some of the hamlets might fit in with that. With hamlet 5, they have found some rare orchid and the developer has said, ‘I will not develop that area for five years to give them a chance to look for it somewhere else.’ You know, bulldozers will go in there one night. The EPBC people have been up. They have been looking at it. The tick-off could not have happened unless that federal group had said that it could go ahead, so there was obviously some agreement between the state and the federal body before that happened.

**Mrs IRWIN**—Who are the developers?

**Mrs Whyte**—One is called Rose Group.

**Mrs IRWIN**—Yes, I know it is the Rose Group.

**Mrs Whyte**—And the other one is Coal and Allied, which is a subsidiary of Rio Tinto. Coal and Allied are the second-largest landholders in the Lower Hunter. They finished coalmining, underground coalmining, in the Lower Hunter and they just want to get rid of the land. A lot of the land they have just been given in the past. They have already taken their wealth out of it with very successful underground mining. Now they want to get rid of it. They had always said, to this community, to our community—and often many of the developments they put in were only on this condition—that when mining finished it would be rehabilitated and returned to the public for recreational use. It was on paper and verbally and yet, to show how good they are—Coal and Allied—they have brought in a project manager from Landcom who has now said: ‘Yes, let’s develop this land. We will give X amount back to the state government but we want development rights.’ No development rights existed there, but they have been given that because the state government have seen that they can get land for nothing to put into conservation. But it is already in conservation.

**Mrs IRWIN**—So they have brought in 300?

**Mrs Whyte**—They are bringing in 300, but in the whole—

**Mrs IRWIN**—Rose Group, 600.

**Mrs Whyte**—That is right.

**Mrs IRWIN**—That is 900, plus there are 100 homes there already. Is that right?

**Mrs Whyte**—Yes, that is right.

**Mrs IRWIN**—So you would be growing from 100 to 1,000?

**Mrs Whyte**—One thousand, yes.

**Mr Laing**—Yes, 10 times.

**Mrs Whyte**—And it is totally surrounding the village, as you can see. I mean, these are heritage villages. If you have that visual impact from new housing, you lose all your heritage value.

**CHAIR**—Is it listed on the state heritage register?

**Mrs Whyte**—We have been on the minister's desk for much too long. He keeps dangling it and saying to us: 'Do you really want heritage? You know, heritage is not really good. It stops you doing lots of things. Well, I might give it to you after this.' It is just not good enough. So now the National Trust has gone to the national level.

**Mr Laing**—One point I could make about the Coal and Allied development is that a large part of that would be affected by storm surge. Within the next 10 to 20 years, on the predictions made by Engineers Australia, for instance, in their submission, it is going to be uninsurable. Insurance Australia's submission points that out. We have got to be able to run profitable businesses and the subtext of that is that there are going to be a lot of places that will be uninsurable. So they are going to put in 300 houses which are, at the most, about four metres above sea level, and they are in an area which runs straight into the wetland.

**Mrs Whyte**—That is one of their areas, yes.

**Mr Laing**—It is reckless stuff. But there is no local government power to stop that. That is one of the other issues: the local government does not have that power to be able to say, 'In 20 years it is going to be inundated so we won't allow you to develop it.' We don't have the research base to be able to substantively say to them, 'You can say that to people and therefore prevent development.' We need the data. We need it clearly established.

**CHAIR**—That is one of the many challenges we will be grappling with during the course of this inquiry.

**Mr DREYFUS**—To reiterate, Barry, your submission makes the point very eloquently that the two proposed developments at Catherine Hill Bay are contrary to the existing zonings, contrary to gazetted policies of the New South Wales government, contrary to the Lake Macquarie City Council local environment plan, which is endorsed by the state government and

contrary to the advice of the Department of Planning, which recommended no development should occur. Should we expect that there will be any public statement by the minister about why the development has been approved, or is about to be approved? Where would we go, as a committee, to look for information about why the state minister has taken that decision?

**Mr Laing**—We do not know whether he will say anything. He is not required to say anything under the legislation. It is as simple as that. We just do not know.

**Mr DREYFUS**—The legislation puts this kind of ministerial decision beyond review, other than for process—

**Mr Laing**—Absolutely.

**Mr DREYFUS**—and does not require reasons.

**Mr Laing**—It does not require reasons because his decision to call a project in as state-significant is the non-transparent part. Everything that follows is transparent but that decision is the non-transparent bit. He makes the deal with a mate.

**Mrs Whyte**—Not quite so transparent. The panel report is supposed to be on the website within two weeks. We knew the panel report was in last December. We waited and waited but could not get it. It did not come, so we applied under freedom of information. We were then told that because the minister had not made his final determination no-one should be looking over the shoulder of the minister while he is making his decisions.

Then there was a call for papers in the state government. It was really for a specific period in 2006 but, lo and behold, there was the panel report. Somehow it had got in there. So they were cross because we then saw that, yes, the panel had recommended this, this and this and we could hold them to it to a certain degree. Mind you, the minister does not have to take their recommendations on board, but in this climate in New South Wales it is not wise to try to disregard that totally, and it has not been totally. What they do is to put forward the benefits of this as the land that they are getting back into state ownership.

**CHAIR**—So it is like a land swap?

**Mrs Whyte**—It is a land swap, a land offset. That is where the big thing is now. Rio Tinto or Coal and Allied are being allowed an enormous development up near Minmi. The offsets are down where we are and they are being allowed 1,000 houses at Gwandalan. They are being allowed enormous benefits for these land offsets. Seriously, it is just going into conservation and you really do wonder what the advantage is.

**CHAIR**—Thank you, Barry and Sue, for coming along and sharing your concerns with us. We have given consideration to the written submissions you have made, which are now on the website. I am sure your contribution will help inform the progress of the committee's work. Thank you for coming in.

**Mrs Whyte**—Can I just ask one question: are we allowed to put our submission on our own website?

**CHAIR**—Yes.

**Mrs Whyte**—Okay.

**CHAIR**—It is a public document.

**Mrs Whyte**—Thank you.

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much for attending the hearing. The secretariat will send you a copy of the transcript being done by our Hansard staff; you will get that for any corrections that need to be made. I would be grateful if you could also send the secretariat any additional material that you have undertaken to provide as soon as possible. Thank you.

[1.06 pm]

**BARTON, Dr Kate, Environmental Risk Officer, Lake Macquarie City Council**

**FARMER, Mr Neale, Sustainability Actuary, Lake Macquarie City Council**

**CHAIR**—I would now like to welcome representatives from the Lake Macquarie City Council to our public hearing. Although the committee does not require that you give evidence under oath, I should advise you that the hearings are legal proceedings of the parliament and warrant the same respect as proceedings of the House itself. The giving of false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as a contempt of parliament. The committee has received your submission. I compliment you on its quality. That submission has now been authorised for publication. I would invite you to make a brief opening statement, if you so wish, before we proceed to questions and discussion. Thank you.

**Dr Barton**—Thank you for this opportunity on behalf of council staff to comment on this issue which Garnaut has recently described, and we would agree with his calling it a diabolical problem of climate change. My presentation will first of all talk about mitigation and adaptation issues about climate change, to which council gives equal weighting, and then move on to governance issues.

I would like to highlight that Lake Macquarie council has been proactive in taking measures in both of these areas. For example, we are dedicated to a three per cent emissions reduction in CO2 equivalents for the next 30 years from a 2008 baseline, which is in line with IPCC recommendations, and we have adopted a planning level of 0.91 metres in line with the sea level rise prediction of 0.91 metres up to the period of 2100 to address council's duty of care responsibilities.

We would also like to mention that we support strongly the global equity issues tied up in climate change. Obviously as Australians we are causing a lot of the problems that other countries are currently experiencing and we support the idea of contraction and convergence: that we need to contract our consumerism to converge on a common, global output for emissions.

In the field of mitigation, we need support in planning and implementation of programs. In particular, we need funding to seek out best global practice and apply it, to quantify different mitigation options which will allow prioritisation and selection of those that are appropriate to our own jurisdiction. In particular, we believe it is important to develop partnerships with industries and businesses now, particularly within the transport sector.

A large component of our work will involve outreach to the public through awareness and education campaigns, but also through community empowerment programs, so the community has some sort of ownership over these programs leading to sustainable realised outcomes. We need widespread publicity to underpin all of this, and foundational survey work on current attitudes and behaviours so that any schemes and programs that we come up with can be pinpointed and targeted and effective.

On an implementational level, I could not agree more with the last gentleman who spoke, who said that we need to act very fast on this. We cannot afford to dally. We need funding for key partners such as developers and those involved with alternative renewable energy generation. It is fundamental that we can give example demonstrations of innovations to the public so that they can realise that any of these proposed solutions to the problem do not impinge on their quality of life, and so enhance their likelihood of uptake. It is going to require the mass will of the people to drive this change.

We are trying this through our local government, through programs of stakeholder partnering and community empowerment. Particularly urgent projects that we have identified are the development of renewable and distributed energy and development of attractive public transport schemes; widespread education to reduce general consumption, especially of goods that have high embedded energy costs; extended producer responsibility of goods that will lead to green innovation and design for environment; addressing land clearing for urban development and retention of native vegetation; and supporting public ownership of sensitive coastal areas.

On the adaptation front, again we need rigorous analysis, preferably quantitative in nature, to enhance our understanding of the vulnerability that we will face. So we need local modelling of flooding, wind storms and extreme weather events, bushfires, heatwaves, estimated rises in mental health problems that are going to occur, vector-borne transmitted diseases and sea level rise. We have already completed a sea level rise study that upholds our 0.91 planning level. We need to concentrate on the loss of endangered, vulnerable ecological communities and massive extinctions which could occur in terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems. Our problem is, of course, that we have limited funds and resources for these studies.

The characteristics of plans that we would advocate coming up with are that they should operate in a proactive manner, plan for worst-case scenarios, consider the legal liabilities that councils might face and consider community wellbeing. As to implementation of these plans, one of the most useful methods, we feel, is to partner with key stakeholders from wide-ranging sectors and to empower the community in a sort of participative democracy process. By getting people on board, they are more likely to engage in programs, act responsibly, defend projects that are underway and make them more sustainable.

From the point of view of governance, our No. 1 recommendation from our report was the need for strong, bold governance. That becomes politically attractive when it is not compromised by the short-termism of politics, and if climate change mitigation and adaptation policies are going to be more attractive to the voter then we need broad-scale community involvement and empowerment. We need these initiatives to become more palatable for politicians, and that is going to be by involving the community, educating people and getting them all on board, because we are not going to manage to tackle this alone. Following from that point, no bowing to powerful industry or lobbying groups.

We would also strongly recommend a review of policies at all levels of government so that they are cohesive and complement each other. We feel there has been a lack of support for integrated and sustainable management from the New South Wales state government.

In particular, there has been disbanding of the coastal council, which has not been very helpful. There has been no coastal management plan manual for seven years. We have been

awaiting an update on that. There is a lack of recognition of coastal issues in the catchment action plan, which makes it difficult to direct funding to coastal programs. Currently, the Hunter CMA directs most of its resources towards agriculture, which means that the problems along the coast are underrepresented.

Generally, a lack of funding and support is particularly problematic in dealing with climate change problems, because they require behaviour change, so any programs need to be sustained and long term in order to get people's habits to change. Local government here has a critical role to play, because we are at the interface with the public, and we would be very strongly advocating direct support from the federal government directed at local councils to help address these issues. Thank you.

**CHAIR**—Neale, is there anything that you would like to add?

**Mr Farmer**—No, nothing to add at this stage.

**CHAIR**—Turning to some of the proposals you have under the heading of 'Governance'—7.1 in your submission—could you explain in a little more detail the *Coastline Management Manual* and whether that is the process through which the hazard line along the coast is defined by state law, the reasons for the delay in the updating of that manual and the lack of recognition of coastal issues in the standard LEP template. Could you shed a bit more light on those two issues, please, Kate.

**Dr Barton**—I will do my best. From what I understand, the tools to help local government with coastal management are the coastal management plan and the estuary management plan. From what I understand, in relation to the coastal management plan, the manual gives directives for all councils to follow a common process, and the councils have been waiting for the manual to be released by the state government for the last seven years and it has not appeared. I do not know of any reasons why.

**Mr Farmer**—My understanding from informal discussions with officers from those relevant departments is that there has been a manual in the wings for some time that looks at integrating both coastal and estuary management planning issues. Our particular council has been proactive in both the coastal management process and the estuary management process, but those particular documents now are almost a decade old and have not been particularly responsive to the emerging issues associated with climate change. About the time of the disbanding of the New South Wales coastal councils and the uncertainty around coastal planning, there was talk of an integrated manual. The manual has not seen the light of day.

**CHAIR**—The standard LEP template does not take coastal matters into consideration. For the benefit of the committee, can you explain that.

**Mr Farmer**—I am sorry, I am unable to expand on that for the committee.

**CHAIR**—Maybe take that on notice and provide the committee with further advice on both those issues. That would be very useful, I think.

**Mr DREYFUS**—Can I ask a follow-up question in relation to the draft *Coastal Zone Manual*. What are the implications for New South Wales coastal councils of that manual not having been finalised?

**Dr Barton**—I think a lot of councils—and this has come to light with the problem of sea level rise—are waiting for some common guidance from the state government as to where, for example, to pin their judgement on planning levels. From what I understand, we are one of the first councils that have adopted a level of 0.91-metre rise. A lot of other councils are wondering what to do but do not want to take any action, because of course it is much more beneficial to have a common standard for all councils. Otherwise, it is going to become more attractive to develop in one area than another.

**Mr DREYFUS**—Do you know if there are attempts being made to adopt some standard?

**Mr Farmer**—No. All information that we have received from the New South Wales Department of Environment and Climate Change has indicated that a particular announcement on that is not forthcoming.

**Mr DREYFUS**—I take it from what both of you have just said that you think that nationally agreed sea level rise projections would be of assistance. You have both spoken of it on a state level.

**Mr Farmer**—That is certainly the case. Some of the calculations that have gone into the Lake-Macquarie specific figure for preparedness for projected sea level rise towards the year 2100 have been based on IPCC recommendations, combined with ice melt figures and localised figures in relation to latitude, taking into account localised conditions, and it brings us to a figure of up to 0.91. One could argue that that figure would not be nationally appropriate—there might be some finetuning necessary at particular locations—but some national guidance in that area, in partnership with particular localised modelling, would be of great benefit around the Australian coastline.

**Dr Barton**—On the localised modelling, we have been involved with the New South Wales Department of Planning, with four other councils, in high-resolution terrain mapping of the Hunter and Central Coast in order to look at some of the problems that would precipitate from sea level rise: loss of land, loss of roads, drainage, railways et cetera. I will leave you with this copy of the report.

**Mr DREYFUS**—At page 9 of your submission you said:

According to Council's mapping in June 2007, based on LiDAR data—

which is this laser scanning technology—

there would be approximately 4,700 lots inundated adjacent to the Lake Macquarie waterway foreshore in the event of a 0.91m sea level rise, as projected for 2100.

Having done that mapping process about a year ago, what, at least initially, is your council doing in response to that finding in relation to 4,700 lots being inundated?

**Dr Barton**—The first thing was to get that level accepted by council, and that will have impacts on things like floor levels for planning. Basically, it is like every year until 2100 there is going to be a one-centimetre increase in the floor level for buildings. It is an enormously tricky problem, because obviously there is the question of who is liable for compensation for land that was previously purchased that will then be under water. What do we do for a lot of properties that might go under water? People still want to live there, but then they will require the services: roads, drainage systems. It is a tricky minefield.

**Mr DREYFUS**—Has council got any preliminary views about the compensation issue you have just referred to?

**Mr Farmer**—Council officers' response was to prepare a report to council examining the impacts of, particularly in this instance, sea level rise. Council publicly exhibited that planning level, and the period of public exhibition closed in mid-June. There was a very high level of support amongst the submissions for that preparedness figure of 0.91 metres and a number of those submissions did, in fact, raise the issue of public and private funding of adaptation measures, as well as the balance between structural and non-structural adaptation measures, including such strategies as planned retreat, adaptational construction and defence, as it were.

Council officers are in the process of preparing a subsequent report to council on the public submissions and framing a sea level rise policy for the organisation that, as Dr Barton indicated, would be used as a framework for addressing not just future planning decisions around building locations and zonings and the like but also some of the hazard identification, risk assessment and vulnerability assessment studies that will need to occur over the next two to four years and subsequent costed options around some levels of planned retreat. We have not as an organisation addressed the issue of compensation.

**Mr DREYFUS**—Are you intending to?

**Mr Farmer**—Certainly within the risk assessment and vulnerability assessment we will need to look at that, once again in partnership with the community.

**Mr DREYFUS**—When do you anticipate that this policy document—what is it going to be called?

**Mr Farmer**—At this stage it has a planned title of *The Lake Macquarie City Council sea level rise policy*, in draft.

**Mr DREYFUS**—‘Sea level rise policy’.

**Mr Farmer**—Yes.

**Mr DREYFUS**—Do you have an anticipated publication date?

**Mr Farmer**—Certainly within the next one to two months.

**Mr DREYFUS**—Quite soon.

**Mr Farmer**—It is scheduled for submission to council in the month of August.

**Mr DREYFUS**—Thank you.

**CHAIR**—What has been the response from the average citizen to the 0.91-metre sea level rise projection in the public display?

**Mr Farmer**—As indicated, it has been quite favourable. At the time that the LiDAR data and the earlier analysis was released and discussed at council, the media and public response was perhaps in some instances alarmist and in some instances an attempt at humour. Council was at one stage accused of holding onto data that it did not have the authority to release. In fact, the New South Wales Department of Planning released the data some period after the report was prepared. It was held in confidence for some period of time.

Once that data was made available to the public and some of the implications were shown—for example, where the mapping showed areas of potential inundation under what is essentially still-water conditions; we need under our risk scenarios to look at other aspects such as storm surge coupled with flooding and other scenarios such as more intense and more frequent storm events—there were workshops offered in a number of locations around the city and in a number of public venues. There was general acceptance by the community that this is something that we need to take seriously and this is something that we need to start planning for now, and the time has come to do that. We did not receive any submissions to the public exhibition that argued against the 0.91 figure. We had one submission that argued a figure of five metres over the next 90 years. So there was a general acceptance.

**Mrs IRWIN**—An excellent submission. Thank you very much for putting it in. On page 11 under ‘Governance’—and I know that you have already mentioned the state government dismantling the New South Wales coastal council—you then go on to say that you are concerned about the:

... length of time it has taken the State Government to finalise the review the current Coastline Management Manual. The draft Coastal Zone Manual is a revision of that existing NSW Government Coastline Management Manual and has been in draft form for several years.

Have you any idea when this manual will be finalised?

**Dr Barton**—No, I am afraid I am unable to comment on that right now but I can certainly get back to you after talking with the relevant officers at council.

**Mrs IRWIN**—If you could do that.

**Dr Barton**—Yes.

**Mrs IRWIN**—A supplementary question to that: what are the implications for New South Wales coastal councils of this document not having been finalised? That is something that we really need to know, if you can take that on notice as well. I will write that out for you.

**Mr Farmer**—Thank you. If I may add to that also: local councils have perhaps in the past been quite unfairly labelled as being perhaps parochial. There is plenty of evidence, particularly

in more recent years, to indicate a high level of cooperation and a wider view in terms of approaching some of these issues which are in fact not just local but of regional, national and global significance. A number of local government areas have cooperated, certainly from a Sydney basis. The Sydney coastal councils have been particularly proactive in commissioning the Environmental Defender's Office to produce a legal summary that has been of assistance and is mentioned in the submission.

The other regional body of note is the Hunter-Central Coast councils group, particularly the environment division within that and the Hunter and Central Coast Regional Environmental Management Strategy, who have recently provided a document to Newcastle and Lower Hunter and Central Coast councils that has given in-principle support to Lake Macquarie's figure and encouraged Lower Hunter and Central Coast councils—that is, from the north, Taree, Great Lakes, Port Stephens, Newcastle, Wyong and Gosford; I think I have covered the main councils of interest there—to give consideration to council's planning figure and to give it in-principle support. That collective cooperation between councils is of significance.

**Dr WASHER**—If we have sea change to tree change, bushfires are a problem. I guess the council is now looking at that. If we are going to develop in the higher country, and I guess that is going to be timber, do you have plans to mitigate the risk to new developments in what we would call 'tree change'?

**Mr Farmer**—Certainly one of the issues around relocation, or if a strategy of retreat or relocation of people is embarked upon, as will be the case over the next 100, 200, 300 years and beyond—which is what we are looking at—there will be relocation of people that will influence not just communities but the environments into which they are moving. So the ecosystem impacts in terms of vulnerable communities, salt marsh, littoral forest and bushland is of significance. There are some planning measures at a state and local level that will accommodate that, particularly in relation to some of the bushfire legislation on preparedness. Tree clearing is one of the areas that is mentioned specifically in our submission under strategies like the New South Wales metropolitan strategy and planning instruments. There are significant numbers of people planned for the Lower Hunter area, and there will need to be firm direction—hopefully from the federal government—for protection of bushland areas that may well not have adequate protection under state legislation.

**Mr DREYFUS**—A previous group who came to talk to us this morning, including the local MP, Craig Thomson, spoke to us about a projected population rise on the Central Coast of 100,000 people over the next 10 to 15 years, which is, as I understand it, the state government policy projection. Does your council have a response to that projected rise in population, which is about a 25 per cent rise over the next 10 to 15 years, in terms of either the form of development or the location of the development that will be needed to accommodate that kind of population increase?

**Dr Barton**—At our council, we are expecting a 0.6 per cent increase per year over the next 25 years, so that is an additional 36,000. We are really looking at densification of urban areas rather than encroachment into existing conservation areas.

**Mr DREYFUS**—So you are looking at higher densities in existing urban areas.

**Dr Barton**—Yes.

**Mr DREYFUS**—Which would, in turn, dictate a form of development that is probably higher than what we see presently.

**Dr Barton**—I think we have to look at the integration of transport systems into all of this. It is certainly going to be a big factor because of the emissions from those transport systems. This is where help from a federal level will be particularly pertinent because, of course, transport systems cross barriers and it is very difficult to negotiate those things.

**Mr DREYFUS**—When you say ‘help from a federal level’, what sort of thing do you have in mind, other than money?

**Mrs IRWIN**—Or a wish list.

**Dr Barton**—Yes, money would be one. Support, expertise, consultant studies to determine what is the best way to do this. It is not rural, Lake Macquarie, but people are living far enough away from where they work that it is not possible to walk, and there is just enough money to maintain the current roads, let alone expand. Council is even playing with the idea of relocating itself next to a place, Glendale, which will be a hub where there will be a railway running through—it is a big employer; there are about 850 employees at council—to work in with those sustainable transport strategies. If we could have any expert guidance and help from academic studies, funded partially through federal programs, that would be very beneficial.

**Mr DREYFUS**—Thank you.

**Dr WASHER**—To follow what Mark asked, Dr Barton, that puts the essence of what we discussed earlier: the absolute need to create much greater employment opportunity in the region. If we are going to take people in, we do not want them moving around. Do you know what I mean? We should be able to employ them within the region. That is part of the whole complex. If we have to relocate them to travel, you are going to have high unemployment, the whole dormitory suburb problems that you know well, in terms of crime problems, poverty et cetera. Surely the council must say, ‘If we are going to take this number of people on, we need to be increasing the employment opportunities, or maybe they shouldn’t come.’

**Dr Barton**—The one thing I will add before Neale speaks is that the distances that we are looking at people commuting are not very far at all. Our own surveys have shown that at council people are having problems mainly associated with dropping off and picking up children, which would be easy enough to do if there were acceptable bus and train routes. The way that the council is set out—the jurisdiction is with a big lake in the middle—it is quite difficult with the road systems, and we are right next to Newcastle. So, although many people are commuting in and out of Newcastle town for work, it is not really very far. It is a 10- or 15-minute commute but, because it crosses those boundaries, that makes it more problematic to negotiate deals across different council boundaries. Neale, would you like to add about Lifestyle 2020?

**Mr Farmer**—That particular issue that you are referring to in relation to holistic interpretation of living and employment opportunities was certainly something council considered very seriously towards the end of the last century. In the late 1990s we embarked

upon a process entitled Lifestyle 2020 where we had a thorough engagement with our community across all demographics, looking at particular growth areas in the city, areas that were suitable as major growth centres, such as Charlestown and Glendale, that are currently the subject of some higher density development, and the creation of employment opportunities—commercial, light industrial, small to medium enterprises. Traditionally, the city was a centre for some fairly large, let's say dirty, industries around quite a famous lead smelter at Pasminco. It has since closed down.

Much of the industry now, within the city, is tending towards small to medium enterprises, much cleaner in nature. We have Cardiff industrial estate, for example, that employs over 6,000 people over 1,000 businesses. So it is decentralised, smaller, cleaner. There are perhaps great opportunities in our city to juxtapose some of the coalmine and electricity generation industries that are currently the source of some of these issues that we are grappling with here today. We could juxtapose some of those centres with smaller industries, looking at green technologies, renewable energy and becoming quite a centre for those employment opportunities within the city, nearby our residential areas.

**Dr Barton**—The employment issue could be quite tricky if coal is phased out. In a recent Hunter Valley Research Foundation survey that I will also submit, respondents agreed that the benefits to the region of the coal industry outweigh the negative impacts from climate change, so there obviously is quite a bit of support in the region still, from personal points of view and employment, for the coal industry.

**CHAIR**—In relation to the submission we heard from the Catherine Hill Bay Progress Association, did the independent panel or the minister, in any formal sense, seek the input of the council to the proposed development at Catherine Hill Bay?

**Dr Barton**—Yes, I believe so.

**CHAIR**—So there was a process where the independent panel came and talked to the council about why it had certain policies?

**Dr Barton**—The state government panel?

**CHAIR**—Yes.

**Dr Barton**—I could not—

**CHAIR**—You do not know. Could you take that on notice?

**Dr Barton**—I can do.

**CHAIR**—In that regard then—the questions that were raised in relation to the management manual and the LEP template—if we could we glean some further advice from you, that would be useful. Is there anything else?

**Mr DREYFUS**—I have got a formal question about Catherine Hill Bay. We asked the Catherine Hill Bay Progress Association about the applicability of the Environment Protection

and Biodiversity Conservation Act of the Commonwealth, and you may not know unless you have had direct involvement with the council's dealings with that project, but I am interested in knowing what was the application that was made, if there was one made, to the Commonwealth department of the environment under the EPBC Act, and what happened to it at a formal level. Was there consideration of whether or not this could be regarded as a controlled action and what then happened? I am not expecting you to know.

**Mr Farmer**—I am afraid I am unable to answer that.

**Dr Barton**—I will take it back to our planning department and respond to you on that. I think in general there are feelings very similar to the last respondents' that you had about this problem with this part 3A planning process. There is also a new state-backed program of biobanking which we have similar concerns about because, again, it takes out a component of community comments on any proposals. Again, it is buying offsets in one area to compensate for development in another area. It potentially represents another mechanism by which developers can bypass any local comment on development. It also, unfortunately, values degraded land higher than pristine environment, which does not give people much incentive to retain those habitats.

**Mr DREYFUS**—Just for the assistance of your planners who are going to answer this question, very many of the submissions to this committee for this inquiry have made suggestions about a greater role for Commonwealth involvement, just as indeed your submission has done and you have done today, Dr Barton. One of the things that the committee is going to be looking at in its inquiry over the coming months is just what additional role there might be for the Commonwealth and, in examining that, it is of interest to us to know where the EPBC Act, which is the only present clear mechanism for Commonwealth involvement in environmental decision making, stops and why it stops. In other words, what is the present reach of the Commonwealth legislation?

**Dr Barton**—I will investigate that and get back to you with comments.

**Mr DREYFUS**—Thank you.

**Dr Barton**—We would also be very happy to get back to you with more specifics about how we envisage federal involvement directly with local government.

**CHAIR**—On behalf of the committee, thank you, Dr Barton and Mr Farmer, for your comprehensive submission in written form. The secretariat will send you a copy of the transcript of this afternoon's proceedings for any corrections that need to be made. As well as that, there are a number of matters on notice that we put to you, and we would very much appreciate your early response to those issues. I thank you most sincerely for the time and effort you have put in to help the committee's deliberations on these very important issues. Thank you for coming.

**Dr Barton**—Thank you very much for your time and for listening.

**Mr Farmer**—Thank you.

[1.45 pm]

**SPENCER, Mr Kevin James, President, Gwandalan/Summerland Point Action Group Inc.**

**CHAIR**—Welcome. Although the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, I should advise you that the hearings are legal proceedings of the parliament and warrant the same respect as other proceedings of the House itself. In that regard, the giving of false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as a contempt of parliament. The committee has received your submission and it has been authorised for publication. We would now like to invite you to make some opening submissions and to engage in answering questions and discussion on the points that you raise, thank you.

**Mr Spencer**—Thank you. I would like to point out that I am a retired accountant, so I feel a bit out of my depth with all these experts here today. We are a very dedicated community and we are very concerned about some of these issues, and I would like to convey some of our thoughts to you. Is it permissible that I answer one of the questions that was asked of the last group about the EPBC Act?

**CHAIR**—Yes, of course.

**Mr Spencer**—Our group is in contact with the EDO, and there has been a submission lodged with the federal department in relation to the Rose Group development. I believe that has not been responded to yet, although the state appears to be close to giving a decision on this. The EDO also wrote on our behalf to the minister, Mr Garrett, about the Coal and Allied development. These submissions are both in relation to Gwandalan and to Catherine Hill Bay. We are covering both areas, and there are threatened species in both areas.

The EDO wrote to the federal minister about the Coal and Allied development, who then wrote to Coal and Allied, who said they would lodge a submission, but I do not believe it has been done as yet. We are still waiting to see some action on that one. It has been some months since it was initially raised. We are hopeful that the federal government might be able to weigh into this exercise, because we are concerned that the state government probably feel that they might be able to whitewash it, and we want it to be given proper consideration because we feel it is a pretty serious issue.

**Mr DREYFUS**—Would it be for heritage reasons or for threatened species reasons?

**Mr Spencer**—Threatened species; specifically, in both areas, *Tretratheca juncea*, if you are familiar with that one, and they had an orchid at Catherine Hill Bay which was discovered, a *Diuris praecox*, which I think is common to the whole area but they do not flower very often and they are very hard to find. We have a great number of orchids and all sorts of plants in the area, plus I think some animals. Most of these are covered by the state Department of Environment and Climate Change, who are supportive of the MOUs raised by the planning department. So we do not really expect too much support from the state government in that regard, and we are hopeful the federal government might be able to look after it for us. Our local member, Jill Hall—

**CHAIR**—Who sends an apology. She is not well today.

**Mr Spencer**—has made an approach to Peter Garrett, and hopefully we will get some help from that area.

**CHAIR**—So that I am clear, Mr Spencer, is it the same two companies wanting to develop here as are wanting to develop at Catherine Hill Bay?

**Mr Spencer**—Exactly right, yes. There is an MOU for each of the companies and it groups Gwandalan and Catherine Hill Bay, even though we are 10 kilometres apart by the shortest route. We are very different communities, but we have been grouped together. Also, Gwandalan is part of the Central Coast. I keep saying we are part of the forgotten far north of Wyong shire. We are almost in no-man's land between the Central Coast and Newcastle, and a lot of people do not know where we are. We have been shanghaied into the Lower Hunter's strategic plan because we are part of the Central Coast, not Lower Hunter, and because they mentioned us in the Lower Hunter strategic plan they are using that as justification for the development proposal in our area.

**Mr DREYFUS**—Can you explain why that is so, Kevin?

**Mr Spencer**—I do not know. I think it was because the planning minister wanted it. I cannot see any other justification, because we are on the border between Wyong shire and Lake Macquarie shire and between the Central Coast and Newcastle. We are on the border but we are certainly not part of the Lower Hunter.

To give you a bit of background, there are two villages, Gwandalan and Summerland Point. The total population is around 5,000. We are on a peninsula that juts into Lake Macquarie. It has one road in and one road out. These development proposals look at putting another 887 houses in our area. The Rose Group one is not too surprising, because it was foreshadowed that that land might be used for development by Wyong council some time ago, although Rose is trying to move it ahead. This is land that was originally owned by Ray Williams of HIH fame, who I think everyone knows about.

The purpose for which my group was formed was to oppose these developments—to oppose the developers and the state government, because the state government is pushing for this development. The only reason we can see for them wanting to do the development here is because they have done a deal with the developers that they will get some land for conservation purposes. They are not talking national park; they are talking conservation reserve, which still permits some other uses, including coalmining underneath.

We believe the development in our area is totally inappropriate. The Coal and Allied development would destroy 80 hectares of important bushland containing old-growth trees, threatened species of plants and animals and a significant wetland and habitat, including many terrestrial native orchids. The area has significant biodiversity and should be preserved. That area for Coal and Allied is on the shores of Crangan Bay, which is the last undeveloped bay in Lake Macquarie. For where it is, it has the best water quality in Lake Macquarie, which I think is well known these days in environmental circles. Lake Macquarie has been improved over the years, and we believe that bay is important.

We also believe it is a fish breeding area, so there are a number of significant things. It also has good seagrass beds which again are being recognised now as important to the environment. So we believe that land is environmentally very significant and it should not be developed. We believe most of the area should become national park because of the biodiversity that is in the area.

The principle of destruction of bushland, when there are cleared areas available in locations more appropriate at this time of global warming and soaring fuel prices, is important. They want to create a suburb of 887 additional homes in an area which is car dependent with no significant work opportunities nearby, no public transport to speak of and a lack of infrastructure, including health and education. It is an underprivileged area, there is not much doubt about that. Most of us went there because of the lifestyle and the environment, because we like the nearness of the beaches, the bush and the lake.

Lake Macquarie is a beautiful place and we do not believe it should be spoilt. We believe the public should be able to use it but we do not believe it should be spoilt by intensive development. There are areas which could be inundated by rising lake and ocean levels with the possibility of tidal surges becoming more likely. In my submission I also did mention an area down near Budgewoi, which I am reasonably familiar with, where I believe that, with a sea level rise and tidal surges, the ocean could breach the road that goes along between Tuggerah Lakes and the ocean. You could see some serious flooding in Tuggerah Lakes if that ever happens.

We believe it is wrong that the state government should be permitting expansion of coalmining operations at a time when coal is a major contributor to global warming. That is another serious issue which is happening. I am not sure how relevant it is to this exercise, but I have a personal issue about water tanks and the fact that governments are not making them seem as important as they should be. The BASIX principle allows new houses to have a 2,000-litre water tank, which I think is nowhere near enough.

Speaking from a personal basis, we constructed a house 2½ years ago. We have a 10,000-litre water tank, which is underground, and our usage of town water is minimal: down to about 39 litres per person per day. I believe water tanks are the solution to the water problem. I do not believe a new dam is necessary for the Central Coast. Between the missing link going up to the dams and a link from the Central Coast to the Hunter, if there were enough extra water tanks put in I believe we could resolve all the water problems in that area. I think governments are not doing enough to push the water tank issue. It needs to go a lot further. That is really all I have to say at this stage.

**CHAIR**—Thank you. There may be questions from the committee.

**Ms LIVERMORE**—Mr Spencer, could you clarify if this is a similar situation to the Catherine Hill Bay one where what the developer wants to do is contrary to the council's planning guidelines but the state government is using part 3A?

**Mr Spencer**—Yes, exactly. It is all 3A. Wyong council has been supportive. The planning minister does not like Wyong council, I can tell you that much. Yes, it is a part 3A exercise. I do not believe Wyong council ever saw this sort of development happening in Gwandalan. They are certainly not happy about it, no doubt about that.

**Mr DREYFUS**—Mr Spencer, I am sorry for my lack of local knowledge but I now understand Wyong council has Summerland Point and Gwandalan and Lake Macquarie has Catherine Hill Bay. Is that right?

**Mr Spencer**—Exactly, yes. That is it.

**Mr DREYFUS**—Despite their closeness? Does the municipal boundary go between the two?

**Mr Spencer**—Yes.

**Mr DREYFUS**—Along the line of the Pacific Highway or somewhere near there?

**Mr Spencer**—It comes from the coast across the Pacific Highway and then follows the shore of Lake Macquarie.

**Mr DREYFUS**—So the bit of land between the Pacific and Lake Macquarie is Lake Macquarie council, but your peninsula—

**Mr Spencer**—No, the line comes from the coast across towards the lake, travelling east to west.

**Mr DREYFUS**—And your peninsula remains in Wyong shire?

**Mr Spencer**—Exactly.

**Mr DREYFUS**—Thank you.

**CHAIR**—Further questions?

**Ms LIVERMORE**—Are the houses that are proposed to be built by Coal and Allied actually being built by the company to house Coal and Allied staff?

**Mr Spencer**—No.

**Ms LIVERMORE**—No, so it is a completely different—

**Mr Spencer**—I am not even sure that Coal and Allied want to persevere with the development. I believe, because their primary business is coalmining, they will very likely sell the whole thing once they get approval. They have said that they are not sure whether they will go on with it or not.

**CHAIR**—But it is zoned for residential and commercial?

**Mr Spencer**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—It is not a mining town that is being developed?

**Mr Spencer**—No. Catherine Hill Bay is different. It is a mining company town and a lot of their issues are heritage, but they do have environmental issues as well. Ours are all environmental biodiversity. One other point that I did not raise was that, in the lower Hunter strategic plan, the government mentioned these developers who are meant to be developing in areas like ours and gave them a dispensation to ignore the sustainability criteria, which I thought was rather significant.

**CHAIR**—Any further questions or comments?

**Mrs IRWIN**—You might have answered this in your opening statement, and I apologise that I had to leave the room for a short time, but in your submission to this inquiry you comment:

The large population increase due to these developments would introduce many more car dependant residents in areas that have little infrastructure, few work opportunities and no significant public transport.

**Mr Spencer**—Yes.

**Mrs IRWIN**—What practical suggestions do you have for dealing with the problems of coastal population growth? If you do not want to answer it now, you could take it on notice and get back to us.

**Mr Spencer**—No. I think growth should be restricted on the coast anyway at this stage. Maybe more should be made into national parks so it is public use land rather than development land. I think there are more appropriate areas to build houses for residential purposes. There is obviously a big demand for people wanting to do sea changes, to get close to the water. I have to plead guilty to that one as well. We know the area because we have been going there since 1981 and we decided to retire there from Sydney because Sydney was becoming untenable as far as we were concerned anyway. But, yes, I think there has to be restriction, and development has to be in areas that are cleared rather than knocking down bush. I think it is wrong to clear bush at any time, but at this particular point in time it is criminal.

One point perhaps I did not make is that we have engaged EDO to support us and give us advice on this one. There is still a possibility of taking legal action although, as was pointed out, we cannot take action against the quantum. We can only take action against the process and the minister can then go and redo the whole thing, which would take time and money, but it is possible to do that. That is an option that is still open on both of these.

**CHAIR**—All right. Thank you very much, Mr Spencer, for coming along to represent your community and giving our committee a greater appreciation of some of the issues that face not just your community but the Catherine Hill Bay community as well, and we thank you for helping to guide our directions in terms of what the federal government might do about this and related issues into the future. Thank you for coming along.

**Mr Spencer**—Thank you very much for listening.

**CHAIR**—The secretariat will send you a copy of the transcript from our Hansard staff. You can make any additions and corrections to that. If you have any additional information, you could provide that to the secretariat as well.

**Mr Spencer**—Will do.

**CHAIR**—Your submission has now been accepted as a public document and it appears on our website.

**Mr Spencer**—Thank you very much.

[2.04 pm]

### **Community Statements**

**CHAIR**—I now would like to call anybody in the audience who would like to make a community statement of up to five minutes. Would they like to come forward to the table and give their name and organisation and make their statement to the committee. Anybody from the community that would like to make up to a five-minute contribution is welcome; there will not be questions and discussion. It will just be there for the record.

**Mr Wiggin**—I am with the Australian Conservation Foundation, the Central Coast Branch. I would like to speak in support of the Australian Conservation Foundation's submission to the committee which they sent on 16 June. I believe you will have that on your website. I want to speak to the recommendations put forward in the submission. The first recommendation is the integration of planning, protection and management across the ocean-coast-catchment continuum. The second recommendation is the strengthening of environmental assessment and approvals processes. These are not all the recommendations in the submission; these are just ones selected from them. All levels of government should allocate sufficient resources to build community capacity to engage in coastal and marine planning. There is a key role in coastal and marine planning and management for Indigenous Australians. An intergovernmental agreement on coasts and oceans should be signed between federal, state, territory and local governments. It also recommends that the federal government form a partnership with local governments to deliver local responses to the impacts of population growth and climate change, that the federal government develop a national oceans and coastal policy and that the federal government initiate national legislative reform to significantly improve ocean and coastal planning, protection and management.

If I can just make one further comment relating to this area, we are most concerned here on the Central Coast by the social impacts and costs involved in the event of extreme climate change events, especially in the low-lying urban areas on the coast, such as the Woy Woy Peninsula, which would possibly entail the large-scale relocation of the population. There are roughly 20,000 people on the Woy Woy Peninsula. This could happen in a number of areas around Australia. So that is from this point of view. Thank you.

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much, Mr Wiggin, for providing your comments, which appear to lead to the end of our public hearing. In concluding today's proceeding, I thank Kate Sullivan and the secretariat for their assistance. To our Hansard staff: thank you very much for being with us. To all the members of the committee who have travelled to the Central Coast: thank you for your participation in the site visit and our deliberations.

Resolved (on motion by **Dr Washer**, seconded by **Mrs Irwin**):

That this committee authorises publication of the transcript of the evidence given before it at public hearing this day.

**Committee adjourned at 2.08 pm**

