

Notes from meeting with Shoalhaven City Council and Conjola CCB

Meeting Date: - 18 Dec 2018, Manyana Conf Room, SCC Offices, Nowra

Purpose: - To table and discuss Conjola Community Association (CCB) proposal to revise the Interim Lake Conjola Entrance Management Policy 2013

Present: **NSW State Govt MP** – Shelley Hancock (SH)
Shoalhaven City Council (SCC) – Amanda Findley (AF), Kaye Gartner (KG), Mitchell Pakes (MP), Bob Proudfoot (BP), John Wells (JW), Patricia White (PW), Russ Pigg (RP), Gordon Clark (GC) , Shane Pickering (SP)
OEH – Danny Wiecek (DW)
Conjola CCB – Robyn Kerves (RK), Dirk Treloar (DT), Mike Brungs (MB), Bill Hackett (BH)

Apologies

General Discussion Points

The meeting opened with SH referring to:-

- concerns she has received from the Conjola community regarding the current status of the Lake Conjola water level, and
- concerns raised with her by the Conjola Community Association (Conjola CCB) that despite several attempts by the CCB to table a proposal (*re: Proposal to include Channel Optimisation and Entrance Clearance Works in the Lake Conjola Interim Entrance Management Policy 2013*)to revise the current Lake Conjola Interim Entrance Management Policy 2013 (EMP), SCC have continued to ignore their requests.

SH asked the CCB (DT) to brief the meeting on the proposal.

CCB Proposal Summary

Based on empirical evidence described in the proposal, the current policy is not working; the key points are:-

1. **Scientific Recommendation** - The report proposes a channel optimisation and entrance clearance works based on upon the scientific findings and actions prescribed in the Pattison and Britton Partners 1999 Entrance Study, and detailed in Manly Hydraulics Lake Conjola Entrance Management Plan (MHL1159) 2003;
2. **Reactive Management** - The current policy and implementation by SCC is reactive and ignores recommendations by several recognised authorities and agencies – eg EMP developed by Manly Hydraulics Lab (MHL) in 2013 (MHL1159);
3. **Interim Policy not supported by Community** - The current policy is an Interim (Draft) Policy that has never been endorsed by the community. Statements by SCC that the community have been consulted are correct, but SCC have disregarded community feedback and the Policy remains in draft;

4. Planned Trigger Level Ignored - SCC continue to ignore the Policy's planned trigger level of 1.0m for intervention – according to CCB records, all interventions since 2011 have been executed at the Emergency level of 1.2m resulting in 9 floods in 5.5 years (2011-2016);
5. History - According to Patterson Britton & Partners 1999 Report, in the years 1938-1998 the entrance was closed 8 times in 60 years. Between 1999 and 2018 the entrance has closed 13 times in only 19 years – remembering that the Lake was open for 12 of these years between 1999 and 2011. So since 2011 the entrance has been closed 13 times and flooded the community 9 times;
6. Open Entrance and Heavy Rain - In March 2017 the entrance was open, and despite over 400mm of rain no flooding was recorded – the water level peaked at 0.78m;
7. Entrance Scouring - SCC state that a 1.2m level is required to scour the entrance. At 1.2m many properties and infrastructure are flooded, plus the water table has risen and causes damage to properties that are above the water level. The Aug 2015 flood which reached a level of just under 2.0m removed 100,000m³ of sand to just beyond the surf line. Within 4 months the sand had returned and the entrance closed. The 2016 dredging removed 15,000m³ and the entrance remained open for 18 months. The results prove that scouring is unsuccessful at 1.2m, and if so, why persist with that policy?
8. Entrance Management Decision Tool - Decision tools to assist SCC to manage the entrance are largely ignored – eg the M2 Tidal Coefficient tool developed by MHL, supported by over 20 years of data;
9. Water Quality - If the water quality is not impacted by a closed entrance, why do SCC increase the frequency of testing to weekly when it is closed;
10. Impact of Closure - From scientific data contained within the report *Shoalhaven Entrance Sensitivity Project Stage 2 BMT WBM Pty Ltd June 2011* it is apparent that when the Conjola entrance is closed, in any given year there is a 50% chance that lake level will rise above 0.95m while when the entrance is open, typical lake level is 0.29m;
11. Wave Surge Flooding – There is some concerns that Wave Surges will cause flooding whenever the entrance is open – since 2000 there have been 2 instances of flooding from the ocean – 2006 and 2012 – compared to 8 from rainfall in the catchment;
12. NSW Managed Entrance Examples - Several NSW Coastal Councils with estuaries similar to Lake Conjola have implemented proactive Managed Entrance Policies supported by the NSW Government Office of Environment and Heritage – Narrabeen Lagoon and Tuggerah Lakes.

Discussion

The following points were raised:-

1. AF – There is opposition in the Conjola Community to a managed entrance policy as described. *Comment* – the CCB is the elected representatives of the Conjola Community and are presenting the proposal on behalf of the community.
2. SP – There were mixed messages in the briefing – eg. If entrance closures are part of the natural processes identified in Lake Conjola, how is it Emergency Openings have exacerbated the number and frequency of entrance closures? *Reply:* being that Emergency Openings have not addressed the problem of clearing a blocked entrance nor the alignment of the southern ebb flow channel (which Planned Openings do, in part) necessary for an open entrance for an extended period of time.....

3. SP – A review of the Lake Conjola and St Georges Basin Entrance/Estuary Policies are at the top of the priority list. Expect to take up to 2 years before the Review is finalised due to legislation changes, and the process to engage in consultation and establish the relevant management committees.
4. JW – Seems there are 2 polarising views - Status Quo, or a Managed Entrance as proposed. Suggested SCC and the CCB work together to establish an agreed policy.
5. BP – Are we saying we cannot do anything before 2020? Is there another option? The community has an expectation for a successful outcome – How can we circumvent any “red tape”?
6. SH – The Review must involve the community, and SCC needs to listen to the CCB.

Next Steps

SCC and the CCB will work together to review the proposal tabled .

Post Meeting CCB Suggestion

In the 2 year Interim to finalise a revised Policy, the SCC and CCB to agree to commit to a plan to proactively manage the entrance – – in the short term execute intervention plans whenever the lake water level reaches 0.8m with the long term view of a managed entrance. This will have the following benefits:-

1. Preference Planned Openings at 1.0m AHD to more effectively mitigate frequency and number of low-level flood events – serves as a trial of sorts for the Community preferred and scientifically backed option of a Managed Entrance. The safety and security of the community, and private and public assets will be protected during the Review
2. Provide valuable data on the behaviour of the entrance for consideration in the Policy Review.