



Director, Environment and Building Policy  
NSW Department of Planning and Environment  
GPO Box 30  
SYDNEY NSW 2001  
Via email [coastal@planning.nsw.gov.au](mailto:coastal@planning.nsw.gov.au)

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Dear Director

### **RE SUBMISSION TO COASTAL MANAGEMENT SEPP**

Hunter Wetlands Centre Australia is a community-owned and managed wetland restoration project at Shortland, Newcastle.

The 43 hectare site has been primarily restored by volunteers over its 30 year history, and now counts amongst its assets and achievements:

- Being Australia's oldest and first community-owned wetlands centre;
- Operating a Visitors Centre;
- 400 members, and growing;
- Planting more than 250,000 native trees, shrubs, grasses and sedges;
- Conserving and actively restoring five coastal endangered ecological communities;
- Supporting threatened species including Magpie Goose and Freckled Duck;
- Declaration as a Wetland of International Importance in 2002, forming part of the Hunter Estuary Ramsar Site;
- Attracting an estimated 30,000 visits per annum, including 7,000 students via the Wetlands Environmental Education centre;
- Raising \$10M over 30 years to invest in wetland conservation, environmental education and eco-tourism; and,
- Attracting staff, Directors and volunteers with extensive expertise in wetlands science, restoration and protection.

Based on our collective expertise and, in particular, the involvement of some of our members and volunteers in developing and implementing SEPP 14 wetlands since the 1980s, we provide the following comments and suggestions in respect of the Coastal Management SEPP:



1. HWCA welcomes reforms in new mapping:
  - a. Upgrades to mapping;
  - b. Creation of 100m buffers around wetlands; and,
  - c. The Sydney region is now included.
2. The list of vegetation types included as characterising coastal wetlands should be broadened, including wet heath, degraded saltmarsh, all swamp forests, and wet meadows. The original mapping relied on delineating wetland vegetation using aerial photographic interpretation (API), which placed undue reliance upon mapping tree canopies, which are not always a reliable descriptor of wetlands (e.g., some species of *Melaleuca* or Paperbarks occur in both wetlands and upland drier forests). Instead, understorey species should be mapped by ground truthing to delineate more accurate boundaries of wetlands. Councils should be required to invest in such ground truthing of wetland vegetation boundaries within clear timeframes to accurately map wetlands.
3. The new coastal mapping is constrained by the original definition of wetland vegetation due to political sensitivity to landholder restrictions upon certain land uses, e.g., cattle grazing on wetland margins. The new mapping was intended to introduce only relatively minor changes in wetland boundaries, and hence prevent a substantial increase in protection for coastal wetlands.
4. Small wetlands should be included in mapping, particularly small isolated wetlands that were excluded from the original mapping produced in the 1980s. Wetlands <0.5 hectares in area were originally excluded, partly due to now-irrelevant technical challenges (e.g., width of pencils used to draw lines on maps made finer-scale mapping very difficult).
5. The definition of the coastal zone is based upon an arbitrary distance from the sea. This should be amended to be based upon an ecological boundary, such as the inland extent of mangroves or westward progress of salt wedges in estuaries.
6. A more regular, systematic approach to updating maps to include excluded wetlands is required.
7. Stronger procedural protections are needed to prevent developers seeking to adjust wetland boundaries to their benefit.

We urge the NSW Government to build upon the significant progress in upgrading mapping of SEPP 14 wetlands by incorporating these proposed changes.

Should you wish to discuss these comments and recommendations, please do not hesitate to contact me on 0403209805 or [ceo@wetlands.org.au](mailto:ceo@wetlands.org.au)

Yours sincerely



Dr Stuart Blanch  
CEO

**Hunter Wetlands Centre Australia**

