



Policy on Coastal Planning and Infrastructure Reform: July 2010

The coast is important for all Australians now and into the future as a place where we work, live and play.

Our coast is undergoing twin pressures of climate change and population growth. Given that coastal planning and management crosses many institutional lines in all three levels of government, it is urgent that the nation develop new ways to mainstream and coordinate the management of these vital natural and built assets, including our ports and airports.

Progressive and cooperative reforms are needed to address the pressures of a growing coastal population and the inevitable challenge of sea level rise. Land use and infrastructure planning and investments must be linked to the management of both catchment and coastal natural resources. Improved understanding of institutional impediments reinforced by continued research on coastal vulnerability, community attitudes and infrastructure resilience, and assessment of adaptation options, must remain a national priority.

Continuation of the current program for Climate Change Adaptation in the Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency, including in the medium term the continuation of an Interim Coasts and Climate Change Council, is critical. **ACS recommends** that the following three steps should be introduced as a matter of urgency within the Government's next term if the Australian community is to successfully meet the challenge of sustainable use of natural and built assets around the Australian coast:

1. Formulate a **National Coastal Policy** in consultation with the states and local government through COAG, and formally supported by an **Intergovernmental Agreement on Coasts** that defines the national need for information and investment in public infrastructure that underpins the provision of facilities vital to securing the services required for the economic and social well-being of coastal Australia in the context of environmental changes and impacts.
2. Establish a **National Coastal Information System**, similar to NOAA in the USA, that will ensure sustained R&D in coastal biophysical and social sciences; in the development of user-oriented decision support systems; in the coordination of diverse state and local government information on risk to the adverse impacts of climate change; and in communicating the national adaptation options to communities, the professions and businesses.
3. In order to secure these steps it will be necessary to form a **National Coastal Commission**. This Commission should be empowered under a federal **Coastal Commission Act** to: (1) review the effectiveness of those actions and investments in coastal planning and management that relate to the long term sustainability of natural and built assets across all levels of government; and (2) provide advice to all levels of government on initiatives needed to secure adaptation and improved management of coastal ecosystems, infrastructure, social welfare needs and regional economies.

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