



5th Western Australian State

COASTAL CONFERENCE 2009

*Whose Coast Is It?
adapting for the future*

Advancing the Australian Coastal Society

PRESENTER:

Dr Beverley Clarke

Australian Coastal Society

CONTACT DETAILS:

Phone: +61 (8) 8201 2760

Email: Beverley.clarke@flinders.edu.au

Postal Address: PO Box 65, Flinders University, Bedford Park, SA 5041

2A:
Coastal
Management
and Effective
Partnerships:
11.45am–12.15pm
Thursday 8th
October 2009
Pleiades Room

Introduction

Decision making in the coastal zone is highly politicised because of the increasing value of coastal lands and the competitive and often conflicting views about how coastal resources should be utilised. Coastal management in Australia has for some time been noted as fragmented and many problems endure since the 1993 Resource Assessment Commission Inquiry. There is still the need for science-based policy development; rational decision making; and for integration. Coastal champions and an effective advocacy plan, both within and external to government provide an avenue for progressing such matters. 'Advocacy, however, remains an immature and somewhat neglected aspect of many ICM discussions' Lazarow *et al.*, (2009: 10). The Australian Coastal Society, which formed in 2008, recognises the need for a strong national coastal champion, external to government. The efforts of the Society to date have been primarily focussed at the national level but now there is a move to encourage the formation of state branches. Western Australia is encouraged to consider the formation of a state-based chapter or branch, of the Society. Visit the website of the society: <http://www.australiancoastalsociety.org/> to access news updates, the membership application form and other facilities such as the discussion forums and professional development links.

This paper explains the purpose and function of the ACS, its role and activities; gives an overview and update of the ASC membership and explains the process by which the Queensland branch was formed.

Background

During the 1990s the coast served some time in the political lime-light and received federal funding towards the development of significant coastal programs under a National Coastal Action Plan. Two key programs that went some way to serving the purpose of communication, coordination and education were the Marine and Coastal Community Network and Coastcare, a community-based grants program and (initiated in 1993 and 1995 respectively). During its lifetime the MCCN provided a nation-wide service of communicating coastal news and providing stakeholder connections, reaching an audience of 10,000. After campaigning long and hard MCCN funding was cut and ceased to operate its funded program after 2008. MCCN Ltd remains with a Board of Directors but loss funds has removed its functional capacity. The transformation of Coastcare into the NRM regionalisation framework since 2002 has served to dilute its original potency and slowed the momentum and reduced capacity for targeted community support.

Nationally there has been an absence of a mechanism for formally communicating concerns of interest groups in a structured way. It was the gradual loss of the specific coastal focussed and dedicated enterprises that led to a spontaneous appeal for action at a national coastal conference in 2004 and triggered the

formation of the Society. The following 2006 conference garnered further support and the possibilities of the Society's structure and function were mapped. The Australian Coastal Society was formally inaugurated in 2008 at the Coast to Coast in Darwin complete with constitution and office bearers.

International examples of coastal societies

The concept of national societies is not new. Below is a brief overview of two longer-lived international societies, one from the US and one from New Zealand. The value of their operations has been demonstrated over time and both maintain active and considerable membership.

The United States Coastal Society (TCS)

The United States Coastal Society (TCS) commenced as a non-profit organisation in 1972. Its mission is to:

actively address emerging coastal issues by fostering dialogue, forging partnerships, and promoting communication and education. (The Coastal Society 2009, unpaginated).

Its membership includes private sector, academic, government (state and federal) professionals and students. Since its inception the Society has been successful and continues to provide an 'effective platform for informed debate on the most vexing coastal issues' (The Coastal Society 2009, unpaginated). Benefits to members of the TCS include reduced rates to its biennial conference, copies of the Journal 'Coastal Management', weekly news provided via a list-serve facility that offers notification of coastal management jobs, upcoming conferences and special educational and fun networking opportunities and news briefs on coastal issues. The main communication tool of the Society is a quarterly bulletin (<http://www.thecoastalsociety.org/bulletin.html>) which includes articles about key current coastal management issues and reports on coastal related legal developments, regional news, and alerts readers to conferences and meetings.

The New Zealand Coastal Society (NZCS)

The New Zealand Coastal Society (NZCS) was inaugurated in 1992; it commenced with the intention of 'provid[ing] a forum for those with a genuine interest in the coastal zone to communicate amongst themselves and with the public' (NZCS 2008, unpaginated). The current membership of the NZCS is approximately 400 individual members (<http://www.coastalsociety.org.nz/>). A number of activities are generated through the NZCS including: an annual conference, regional meetings, coordination of coastal information, networking between individuals and professional groups, lobbying for resources for research and study, linkage with universities and research organisations, review of international trends and change, review of legislation, and the production of a periodical: Coastal News. The Society has a number of regional coordinators to provide localised support and contact to the Society throughout New Zealand.

Their networking, communication and advocacy roles are prominent.

What is the ACS?

Formally established in 2008, the mission of the Australian Coastal Society (ACS) is to be 'a voice for the Australian Coast—dedicated to healthy ecosystems, vibrant communities, and sustainable use of coastal resources.' The intention of the Society is to provide a mechanism of support for coastal advocacy, communication between coastal managers, academics and interested parties, and to provide ongoing professional education for coastal managers.

The organisational structure of the Society comprises a Chair and a Board of Directors. The current Board of Directors are drawn from Victoria, South Australia, New South Wales and Southeast Queensland. Between them the current Directors share considerable experience both working and researching coasts and coastal management. Their combined networks have been used to launch the Society and propel it forwards. The membership at time of writing had reached 152, a combination of organisational, individual and student memberships, which also constitutes a large and broad body of corporate knowledge. This body will assist in shaping the future directions of the Society.

What is its purpose?

As an independent organisation not controlled by government the ACS has the potential to take on any number of causes in a science-based and rigorous manner. The Society can provide the mechanism for formally communicating concerns of coastal communities, networks and interest groups in a structured and supported way.

Figure 1. Objectives of the Australian Coastal Society.

The ACS has the following objectives:

- a. To promote knowledge and understanding of the environmental, social and economic value of the Australian coast;
- b. To provide a forum for the exchange of ideas and knowledge among people involved in the management, planning and development of the Australian coast;
- c. To contribute to international, national, state and local debates on coastal issues so as to foster rational, open decision-making in order to achieve sustainable use of coastal resources and responsible stewardship of coastal assets;
- d. To improve public, government and industry understanding of the value of the Australian coast for individual and social well being, the need to maintain and improve coastal ecosystems, and to ensure the use of ecologically sustainable development practices;
- e. To encourage the protection and conservation of sites of environmental and cultural significance on the coast and in coastal waters;
- f. To facilitate increased knowledge and skills of people working and studying in coastal natural resource management, planning, development and other relevant industries along the Australian coast;
- g. To serve as a link between various Australian organisations and individuals with interests in the Australian coast;
- h. To support national, state and local coastal conferences; and
- i. To do all things necessary for and incidental to the advancement of those objects. It is the goal of the ACS to develop a State-based chapter structure over time.

What has happened to date?

The ACS is self-funded on the basis of membership fees. Activities of the Society to date have been a focus on growing the Society and establishing communication systems (e.g. website, discussion forums, email bulletins). The new focus is to encourage the development of state based nodes to further grow the Society.

The Society is gaining some momentum with membership, the development of a web page and discussion forum. (See the link <http://www.australiancoastalsociety.org>). The ACS is providing: an advocacy role; national networking; and a forum for the open debate of coastal issues. Most recently a Queensland 'branch' of the ACS was established, the idea having been voted in at the Queensland conference in May 2009 as the most attractive option for progressing Integrated Coastal Management in Queensland. There is building momentum in other states towards the progression of their own ACS branches.

Intention/benefit of state branches

The organisational structure of the Society provides significant opportunities for the development of strong State-based branches. State branches of the ACS may provide a neutral space for the regional bodies; Local Government Authorities; Indigenous organisations; and coastal practitioners from industry, government and the not-for-profit sector to progress a range of ICM issues and promote the importance of ICM. Such an organisation may also take on the responsibility of running the State Coastal Conference. This conference provides an opportunity to promote the concept of a Western Australian branch to be championed by enthusiastic coastal managers in this state.

Queensland's approach to developing a chapter

At the Queensland Coastal Conference, in April 2009, a decision was reached to form a Queensland Branch of the ACS. At the conference, delegates participated in a workshop designed to identify ways to encourage a more integrated approach to coastal management in Queensland. The various options presented during the included:

- The formation of a dedicated Queensland Coastal Council or authority. However, this was deemed a political challenge because the Queensland State Government has moved to dissolve its existing Coastal Protection Advisory Committee (QLD CPAC) at the end of members' current term in 2010.
- Strengthening current mechanisms such as the Australian Coastal Society, the Queensland Coastal

Councils Group, and a proposed Australian Coastal Alliance.

At the workshop delegates reached a decision to support both the Queensland Coastal Councils Group (as a mechanism specifically to support local government) and the formation of the first state branch of the Australian Coastal Society.

Following the workshop, over twenty five delegates (some representing their organisations) put their names forward to support the ACS and were encouraged to join the Society.

The decision was taken to the Directors of the ACS in May who gave their permission to further progress this Queensland Chapter. The first step in the development of a Queensland state branch required the formation of a Steering Group—made up of 6-8 current ACS members. Current Queensland members of the Society who were interested in serving on the Steering Group sent their details to the secretary of the ACS and the ACS Directors approved the nominations. The formal election process for office bearers and establishing the branch's operation is in process.

Conclusion

The Australian Coastal Society is a relatively new initiative; it is gaining momentum and meets a recognised need. It provides a platform and structured mechanism by which coastal communities from around Australia can share information, discuss key matters, learn from each other and provide lobbying support. The formation of state branches of the Society will contribute to its capacity and potential, providing a truly national perspective. This Western Australian coastal conference provides an opportunity to promote the concept of a Western Australian branch to be championed by enthusiastic coastal managers in this state. Membership forms are accessible through the Society's web site: [//www.australiancoastalsociety.org](http://www.australiancoastalsociety.org).

References

Lazarow N., Wescott, G., Withycombe, G., and Walker, M. (2009) *Scoping Paper: Promoting Coastal Management in Queensland* May 2009 For consideration at the Queensland Coastal Conference, 12–15 May 2009, Sea World Resort, Gold Coast.

New Zealand Coastal Society (2008) 'About NZCS' Accessed July 23, 2009. <http://www.coastalsociety.org.nz/About.htm>.

The Coastal Society (2009) 'History of the Coastal Society', TCS, Accessed July 23, 2009. <http://www.thecoastalsociety.org/history.html>.