



New Leadership.



# Caring for Our Coasts

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## **Overview**

Most Australians live on or near our coastline. Around 85 per cent of our population lives within 50 kilometres of the coast, and a quarter lives within three kilometres.<sup>1</sup> Almost six million people live in coastal areas outside the capital cities.<sup>2</sup>

Coastal communities are dealing with unprecedented levels of population growth, driven in large part by the 'sea change' phenomenon.

Climate change, rapid population growth and catchment degradation present significant risks to the health of Australia's coastal environment.

The Prime Minister's Science, Engineering and Innovation Council (PMSEIC) recently suggested that over 700,000 coastal addresses are potentially at risk from long term sea level rise and large storm surges.<sup>3</sup>

After 11 years of Howard Government delay, denial and inaction, Australia has no national coastal policy or program, and our coasts and coastal communities are unprepared for the potentially dramatic impacts of climate change.

New leadership is required to address the challenges of coastal growth and climate change.

A Rudd Labor Government will:

- Establish a \$100 million five year, Community Coast Care Program to better protect our precious coastal environment from unallocated Natural Heritage Trust Phase Three funds.

- Invest \$200 million in a five year Great Barrier Reef Rescue Plan to help secure the Reef from climate change and declining water quality from unallocated Natural Heritage Trust Phase Three funds.
- Provide \$25 million over five years to help prepare coastal communities for the impact of climate change using funds already provided to the Australian Centre for Climate Change Adaptation.
- Embark on a national consultation with coastal councils, coastal Natural Resource Management (NRM) groups, capital city mayors, academics, community groups and State and Territory Governments to develop a blueprint for coastal cities and towns to meet current and future climate challenges.
- Update and improve the Australian Disaster Mitigation Package to take into account severe weather and storms due to climate change.
- Seek World Heritage listing for Ningaloo Reef in Western Australia.
- Hand over Point Nepean and Malabar Headlands to the Victorian and New South Wales Governments for protection as national park and public open space.
- Invest up to \$3 million to assist every Surf Life Saving Club in Australia to install a rainwater tank as part of Labor's *National Water Security Plan for Towns and Cities*.

A Rudd Labor Government will provide national leadership and work with local communities to address the challenges of coastal growth and climate change.

## Caring for Our Coasts in Australia

No one jurisdiction is responsible for protecting Australia's long and diverse coastline, and coastal regions from the impacts of population growth, inappropriate development and climate change.

The National Sea Change Taskforce – made up of coastal councils from around the country – has recommended the development of a collaborative, national approach between all levels of government to:

- Manage population growth in non-metropolitan coastal Australia.
- Enhance existing sources of funding for local government to include a specific coastal focus.
- Better coordinate regulatory and investment decisions.<sup>4</sup>

Local, State and Federal Governments are all involved in coastal management alongside regional NRM groups. This arrangement, however, makes it difficult for regional NRM groups to plan and invest in coastal outcomes.

National leadership is required to develop and encourage best practice coastal management across Australia's coastal communities.

Research conducted for the National Sea Change Taskforce has highlighted a number of Australian examples of what it considers to be good practice coastal management:

- Regular reporting against sustainability indicators (such as the *Newcastle City Sustainable Report Card*).
- Sustainability decision making assessment tools, such as those used in the Wanneroo Smart Growth Strategy and the Mornington Peninsula Sustainability Framework.
- The Maroochy Plan 2000 that integrates policies and policies across six environmental outcomes: environmental management; social equity and liveability; economic sustainability, transport and accessibility; community and cultural development; urban design, heritage and character; and development infrastructure.<sup>5</sup>

It is clear that the challenge associated with coastal growth, compounded by the impacts of global warming, should be a national priority, with Federal Government leadership and cooperation between all levels of government.

## The challenges for Australia's coasts

Our coasts are facing major challenges from climate change, catchment degradation and rapid population growth and it is clear there is a need for greater cooperation to tackle these challenges.

The Howard Government has failed to show national leadership on coastal protection, and our coastline and coastal communities are suffering as a result.

## The challenge of climate change

Climate change will have a dramatic impact on our coastal communities.

Projections released by CSIRO and the Australian Bureau of Meteorology in 2007 suggest<sup>6</sup>:

- Annual warming over Australia of about 1°C by 2030, and 3.4°C by 2070.
- Likely substantial increases in the frequency of days over 35°C.
- Up to 20 per cent more drought months over Australia by 2030, up to 40 per cent more drought months in eastern Australia by 2070, and 80 per cent more drought months in south west Australia by 2070.
- The number of days with very high and extreme fire danger ratings increasing by up to 25 per cent by 2020, and up to 70 per cent by 2070.
- A likely increase in the number of intense cyclones, and a possible decrease in the total number of cyclones.

One of the most significant consequences of global warming will be rising sea levels. In February 2007, the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) projected a sea level rise of between 18 and 59 centimetres by 2100.<sup>7</sup>

Using a range of projected sea level rises of between nine and 88 centimetres, modelling by the University of Sydney concludes that in the Sydney region alone<sup>8</sup>:

- By 2050 the beach at Narrabeen could disappear.
- Within 100 years, Sydney Harbour could advance by as much as 43 metres from the eastern side of the Spit, covering the southern approach to the bridge.
- A 50 per cent chance of the beach at Manly Wharf eroding 11 metres, thereby cutting off access to the ferry terminal from the Esplanade.
- Erosion at Nielsen Park at Vaucluse could threaten the foundations of Halbert Pavilion, a heritage listed building.
- Doyles on the Beach restaurant in Sydney would be threatened by a nine metre shoreline advancement at Watsons Bay.

Since the IPCC report was released, a number of scientific reports have suggested the UN Panel may have underestimated the possible level of sea level rise as a result of melting glaciers and polar ice sheets.

The United States' leading climate change scientist, James Hansen, and five other leading scientists have suggested that sea levels could rise by several metres by 2100.<sup>9</sup>

It is generally accepted that the coastline will retreat horizontally by 50 to 100 times the size of any vertical sea level rise.

Leading Australian climate scientist, Dr Barrie Pittock, argues:

*"...there's a crude rule of thumb which applies theoretically to a straight sandy beach, which suggests for every metre rise in sea level, the coastline will retreat or go inland by 100m".<sup>10</sup>*

Similarly, Dr John Church of the CSIRO has suggested:

*“...for every one centimetre of sea rise, you get one metre of coastal erosion”.*<sup>11</sup>

The 2007 PMSEIC report *Climate Change in Australia: Regional Impacts and Adaptation – Managing the Risk for Australia* nominates ‘cities and coastal communities’ as one of six key sectors at risk in Australia.<sup>12</sup>

The report identifies five priority coastal regions for particular attention:

- Brisbane–Gold Coast–Tweed Heads (south east Queensland into northern New South Wales).
- Newcastle–Sydney–Wollongong.
- Melbourne–Geelong.
- Adelaide.
- Perth.

The PMSEIC report also identified three coastal biodiversity hotspots requiring particular focus for climate change adaptation – the Great Barrier Reef and Wet Tropics, Kakadu and the mega-diverse south west region of Western Australia.

The report stated that over 700,000 coastal addresses are potentially at risk from long term sea level rise and large storm surges.

The Howard Government’s 11 years of delay, denial and inaction have left our coasts and coastal communities unprepared for the dramatic impact of climate change. There is no national coastal policy or program.

It’s time for new leadership to protect and restore our coasts, and to take decisive action to tackle climate change.

### **The challenge of coastal growth**

The ‘sea change’ phenomenon is a national trend, which notwithstanding the substantial economic growth in coastal regions, has created significant environmental and social pressures. In the ten years from 1996 to 2006, the population of non-metropolitan coastal areas increased by a million people.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics estimates that the rate of growth in coastal local government authorities in the year to June 2004 was two per cent, 60 per cent above the national average growth rate of 1.2 per cent.<sup>13</sup>

The highest rates of population growth were in coastal areas adjacent to State capital cities, such as the Gold Coast in Queensland and Mandurah in Western Australia, which had an annual growth rate of six per cent. This growth, often in so-called ‘ribbon’ developments, has resulted in shorter lengths of undeveloped coastline.

Between 1991 and 1996, one quarter of Australia’s total increase in population was concentrated within three kilometres of the coast – predominantly the ‘sea change’ locations on the New South Wales and Queensland coasts, and in the south west region of Western Australia. Coastal population is expected to increase by another one million people over the next 15 years.<sup>14</sup>

Due to the lack of a coordinated, national approach to coastal policy, this trend is occurring without adequate consideration of the impact of climate change on coastal settlement.

**Impact on biodiversity**

Terrestrial biodiversity at risk along our coasts includes some of the most threatened ecosystems in Australia. In some cases, habitats are degraded, threatening critical ecosystem functions. Pressures are increasing due to the coastal focus of Australia's population, and the demand for tourism and recreation facilities on our coastline.

Estuaries are home to a significant part of Australia's biodiversity. Even small changes in sea levels will significantly alter the physical dynamics of estuaries, which will in turn threaten the biodiversity of these rich habitats.

A growing problem is exposure of acid sulfate soils in areas where human activities are encroaching on foreshore lands. When excavated or drained, acid sulfides react with oxygen in the air to form sulfuric acid, which can kill plants and animals, contaminate drinking water and food and damage buildings and infrastructure.

## Labor's fresh ideas for coastal protection

### Summary

New leadership is required to address the challenges of coastal growth and climate change, provide national direction and support for local communities to protect their coastal environment and help them prepare for the dramatic impacts of climate change.

A Rudd Labor Government will deliver much-needed national leadership in coastal protection, heeding the calls for greater support for on-the-ground coast care work, better planning to prepare for the dramatic impact of climate change and a coordinated national approach to coastal policy.

In this context, Labor will:

- Establish a \$100 million, five year Community Coast Care Program to better protect our precious coastal environment from unallocated Phase Three Natural Heritage Trust funds.
- Invest \$200 million over five years in a Great Barrier Reef Rescue Plan to help secure the Reef from climate change and declining water quality from unallocated Phase Three Natural Heritage Trust funds.
- Provide \$25 million over five years to help prepare coastal communities for the impact of climate change using funds already provided to the Australian Centre for Climate Change Adaptation.
- Embark on a national consultation with coastal councils, coastal Natural Resource Management Councils, capital city mayors, academics, community groups and State and Territory Governments to develop a blueprint for coastal cities and towns to meet current and future climate challenges.
- Update and improve the Australian Disaster Mitigation Package to take into account severe weather and storms due to climate change.
- Seek World Heritage listing for Ningaloo Reef in Western Australia.
- Hand over Point Nepean and Malabar Headlands to the Victorian and New South Wales Governments for protection as national park and public open space.
- Work with State Governments, coastal councils, coastal NRM groups and experts to develop a national coastal policy, with greater Federal Government involvement in policy and planning.
- Invest up to \$3 million to assist every Surf Life Saving Club in Australia to install a rainwater tank as part of Labor's *National Water Security Plan for Towns and Cities*.

### A national approach to coastal policy

A Rudd Labor Government will work closely with State and Territory Governments and local councils to develop a coordinated, national approach to coastal policy. This will allow for the development and sharing of best practice coastal management across local communities to preserve our natural heritage, protect biodiversity and secure our way of life.

In this context, Labor will:

- Establish national principles for the improved management of coastal Australia and a more sustainable use of coastal natural resources.
- Use best practice monitoring and evaluation programs to implement consistent, long-term reporting on government, industry and community investments in coastal management.
- Engage with representatives of the insurance industry to assess industry responses to the impacts of climate change on coastal communities.
- Ensure that the Australian Centre for Climate Change Adaptation makes emerging knowledge and information on the impacts of climate change in coastal Australia available to coastal councils and coastal communities so that adaptation and mitigation strategies can be developed appropriate to local conditions.
- Implement relevant recommendations of the PMSEIC report *Climate Change in Australia: Regional Impacts and Adaptation – Managing the Risk for Australia*.

A report prepared for the National Sea Change Taskforce has identified that best practice principles for integrating planning, conservation and natural resource management include:

- Recognising fundamental ecological limits by minimising urban footprints and impacts on natural systems.
- Limiting the use of non-renewable resources and the production of waste.
- Explicitly preventing further urban exposure to coastal hazards, including potential sea level rise.
- Reflecting and promoting Indigenous input to coastal planning and management decisions.<sup>15</sup>

Labor will work with the National Sea Change Task Force and other stakeholders in developing broad, national principles for coastal management, consistent with its commitment to sustainable development.

A Rudd Labor Government will also establish an independent Commonwealth statutory authority, Infrastructure Australia, to assess the adequacy, capacity and condition of Australia's infrastructure assets; and to plan and develop nationally significant infrastructure in a coordinated and objective way.

### **Preparing for the impact of climate change**

The 2007 PMSEIC report *Climate Change in Australia: Regional Impacts and Adaptation – Managing the Risk for Australia* makes three major recommendations on climate change adaptation in coastal communities.

In response to these recommendations, a Rudd Labor Government will:

- Commission the Australian Centre for Climate Change Adaptation to assess the socioeconomic impacts and consequences of climate change for our coastal communities and the benefits of adaptation.

- Convene a national summit with city and coastal community leaders, Federal, State and Territory Governments, local councils and experts to develop a blueprint for meeting the current and future climate challenges in a coastal context.
- Establish a climate change adaptation communication campaign to focus attention on practical measures that coastal communities can take to adapt to climate change.

A Rudd Labor Government will ensure a national focus on climate change adaptation for coastal communities through the Australian Centre for Climate Change Adaptation, and will provide region specific information to coastal councils on the impact of climate change on their communities.

Labor will also ensure that around \$25 million over five years from funding already provided to the Australian Centre for Climate Change Adaptation is directed to addressing the impact of climate change on coastal communities.

With the national leadership of a Rudd Labor Government, working in partnership with State and Territory Governments, coastal councils and coastal NRM groups, we can develop strategies to:

- Review and update building codes to take account of changing climate conditions.
- Develop consistent planning measures (for example, setback lines, planned retreat, dune management, building designs, regulation of new structures) and introduce siting requirements that account for sea level rise.
- Manage urban sprawl in climate sensitive areas through zoning and regulation.
- Inform and educate the public about the impact of climate change.
- Encourage early planning for development of long term infrastructure adaptation strategies.
- Protect and replant wildlife corridors to facilitate migration of species under future warming.
- Revegetate and manage developed land to maximise the north-south connectivity between national parks and other reserves.
- Reduce local stresses (water quality, fishing pressure) on coral reef systems to encourage recovery and reduce mortality.
- Assist dispersal of species that become 'stranded' as their bioclimatic zone moves.

### **Disaster preparedness for coastal communities**

Despite a decade of warnings on climate change and a request two years ago by the *2005 Climate Change Risk and Vulnerability* report for the Australian Government's Disaster Mitigation Australia Package to be informed by climate change risks, the Howard Government has failed to take action.

The *Climate Change Risk and Vulnerability* report warned that climate change related increases in the ferocity of tropical storms could:

*“Put some of our significant population and tourist centres like Cairns, Broome, Darwin and Townsville, as well as remote communities, at considerably increased risk.*

*In many temperate urban and rural centres, any increase in severe weather events linked with climate change — bushfires, heavy and sustained rainfall, high winds and in particular cyclones, sustained heatwaves — could cause significant damage.”*

The Department of Transport and Regional Services estimates that natural disasters cause more than \$1.14 billion damage a year to homes, businesses and the nation's infrastructure, along with serious disruption to communities. Coastal communities bear the brunt of many of these natural disasters.

The *Climate Change Risk and Vulnerability* report called for the Australian Government's Disaster Mitigation Australia Package to be informed by climate change risks, but this has not happened.

That is why a Rudd Labor Government will:

- Update and improve the disaster mitigation plan – taking into account the increased likelihood of severe weather and storms due to climate change.
- Set up an expert scientific panel to advise Federal, State and Territory Governments and local councils on how to prepare for more severe climate change-related natural disasters.
- Provide region-specific information to local councils on the impact of climate change on their community through the Australian Centre for Climate Change Adaptation.

This plan will ensure assistance and information on long-term planning for construction and residential building in low-lying coastal areas affected by increased sea levels as well as other areas where extreme weather could impact such as low and heavy rainfall.

### **Protecting our precious coastal communities**

Climate change will add to the many pressures facing coastal environments, including those identified in a recent report from the National Sea Change Taskforce:

- Habitat loss and fragmentation due to urban development and tourism.
- Loss and degradation of coastal wetlands.
- Change in hydrological systems and marine habitats.
- The introduction of pests and exotic species.
- Coastal erosion and damage to dunes.

These challenges need to be addressed at a national level – through better planning and strategic focus, and at a local level, through the active engagement of community groups, local businesses and local councils.

A Rudd Labor Government will establish a new \$100 million, five year Community Coast Care Program to better protect our precious coastal environment from unallocated Natural Heritage Trust Phase Three funds.

The Community Coast Care Program will provide grants of up to \$50,000 for community groups to undertake coastal restoration and preventative work in such areas as:

- Habitat protection;
- Restoration of coastal waterways;
- Removal of invasive weeds and pests;
- Dune restoration and prevention of coastal erosion; and
- Preparing for extreme climate-related events and storms.

### **Great Barrier Reef Rescue Plan**

The Great Barrier Reef is under threat from increased temperature associated with climate change and poor water quality from major runoff events. A rise in sea-surface temperature will result in more extensive coral bleaching. The risk of bleaching is then magnified if reef waters are polluted from increased nutrients and sediments associated with catchment runoff.

In December 2002, the Prime Minister and the Queensland Premier signed the ten year Great Barrier Reef Water Quality Protection Plan. While some progress has been made in identifying needs and developing programs, the plan has suffered due to the Howard Government's failure invest in practical, on-ground works.

A Rudd Labor Government will implement a comprehensive \$200 million Reef Rescue Plan to tackle climate change and improve water quality in the Reef through a range of activities including:

- Grants to farmers, cane growers, Indigenous communities and landholders for improved land management.
- Building partnerships with Indigenous communities and industry groups.
- Water quality and land condition monitoring.
- Research and development.

This represents the largest single commitment ever made to address the threats of climate change and declining water quality to the Great Barrier Reef and will have enormous benefits for the Reef, local landholders and farmers, the tourism and fishing industries and Indigenous communities adjacent to the Reef.

Labor's Reef Rescue Plan the following key elements:

- Water Quality Grants Scheme (\$146 million over five years).
- Reef Partnerships Program (\$12 million over five years).
- Land and Sea Country Indigenous Partnerships Program (\$10 million over five years).
- Reef Water Quality Research and Development Program (\$10 million over five years).
- Water Quality Monitoring and Reporting Program (\$22 million over five years).
- Publication of an annual Great Barrier Reef Water Quality Report Card.

### **World Heritage Listing for Ningaloo Reef**

Ningaloo Reef in Western Australia is the largest fringing coral reef in Australia and is home to dugongs, manta rays, six of the world's seven marine turtle species, 250 species of coral and about 500 species of fish.

Independent research commissioned by the Western Australian Government into the World Heritage qualities of the site shows that its outstanding values are of international significance.

Labor is committed to protecting the magnificent Ningaloo Reef for future generations. A Rudd Labor Government will seek World Heritage listing for the Reef, based on the boundaries proposed by the Western Australian Government.

If elected, a Rudd Labor Government will submit the nomination for listing before the next World Heritage nomination round closes in February 2008.

### **Protecting Point Nepean and Malabar Headland**

Point Nepean in Victoria is a popular tourist destination renowned for its historic features, significant remnant flora and fauna, outstanding coastal scenery and panoramic views of Bass Strait, the Rip and Port Phillip Bay. Point Nepean has a long history of use by Indigenous people and contains a wide number of Indigenous archaeological sites.

Point Nepean also contains the remains of military fortifications from the 1880s, World War One and World War Two.

Point Nepean is on the National Heritage List, but the Howard Government has played politics and delayed the hand back of Defence Department land to the Victorian Government for protection and incorporation into the Point Nepean National Park.

A Rudd Labor Government will aim to transfer Commonwealth Land at Point Nepean to the Victorian Government in 2008 in time for the 20 Year Anniversary of the Point Nepean National Park.

The Howard Government has allowed negotiations to drag on with an agreement unlikely to be reached until 2009.

Labor will end the blame game between Canberra and Victoria and finalise negotiations in time for a hand over in 2008.

Malabar Headland in New South Wales has stunning coastal bushland, dramatic sandstone cliffs and is home to the endangered Eastern Suburbs Banksia Scrub. It has some of the most diverse and high quality areas of coastal bushland in the Sydney region, supporting over 283 endemic native plant species and more than 170 bird species. It contains important Indigenous cultural heritage sites and significant World War Two defence sites.

Malabar Headland is listed on the Register of the National Estate, but despite an earlier promise, the Howard Government has refused to hand it back to the State Government.

In line with the existing commitment and undertakings, a Rudd Labor Government will transfer the ownership of Malabar Headland to the NSW State Government for protection and incorporation into a national park and public open space.

**Rainwater tanks for surf life saving clubs**

To mark the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of surf life saving in Australia, a Rudd Labor Government will invest up to \$3 million to assist every Surf Life Saving Club in Australia install a rainwater tank.

Australia's 305 Surf Life Saving Clubs have a special place in Australian culture. Thousands of children have grown up as 'Nippers', and over the years lifesavers have helped more than 520,000 people on our beautiful yet dangerous beaches.

Surf Life Saving Clubs are models of dedication, leadership and community service. With community concern about climate change and water use at an all time high, this funding will assist Surf Clubs save water and provide a public demonstration of action we can all take to conserve our precious water supplies.

A Rudd Labor Government will invest up to \$3 million to provide up to \$10,000 to every club to install a rainwater tank, or contribute towards a larger water savings project.

This initiative will show local communities across Australia what we can all do to use water more wisely as we face a hotter and drier future with climate change.

This initiative is funded as part of Labor's *National Water Security Plan for Towns and Cities*.

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## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Australian Local Government Association (2005) Submission to NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into infrastructure provision in coastal growth areas.
- <sup>2</sup> Albanese, A. and J. George (2006) Meeting the Challenge of Coastal Growth: ALP Discussion Paper.
- <sup>3</sup> PMSEIC Independent Working Group (2007) *Climate Change in Australia: Regional Impacts and Adaptation—Managing the Risk for Australia*, Report Prepared for the Prime Minister’s Science, Engineering and Innovation Council, Canberra, p16.
- <sup>4</sup> Gurrán, N., Squires, C. and E. Blakely (2006) Meeting the Sea Change Challenge: *Best Practice Models of Local and Regional Planning for Sea Change Communities*
- <sup>5</sup> Gurrán, N., Squires, C and E. Blakely (2006) Meeting the Sea Change Challenge: *Best Practice Models of Local and Regional Planning for Sea Change Communities*, p10.
- <sup>6</sup> CSIRO and Bureau of Meteorology (2007) Climate Change in Australia - observed changes and projections.
- <sup>7</sup> Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2007) Working Group 1 Report. *The Physical Science Basis*.
- <sup>8</sup> Frew, W. (2006) “Sydney’s Vanishing Future”, *Sydney Morning Herald*, October 30.
- <sup>9</sup> Hansen, J., et al (2007) “Climate Change and Trace Gases”, *Phil. Trans. R. Soc. A* 365, 1925–1954.
- <sup>10</sup> The 7.30 Report, 12 March 2007.
- <sup>11</sup> Macken, J. (2006) “Washing Away a Way of Life”, *Australian Financial Review*, 10 January, p45.
- <sup>12</sup> PMSEIC Independent Working Group (2007) *Climate Change in Australia: Regional Impacts and Adaptation – Managing the Risk for Australia*, Report Prepared for the Prime Minister’s Science, Engineering and Innovation Council, Canberra.
- <sup>13</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (2005) *National Regional Profile*, ABS, Canberra.
- <sup>14</sup> Albanese, A. and J. George (2006) Meeting the Challenge of Coastal Growth: ALP Discussion Paper, p7.
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