

Views sought on Draft Entrance Management Policies Information sessions Conducted By Council

Wednesday December 2nd – 3pm

The Progress Hall in Jutland Ave was well attended with 170 plus in attendance.

Norm Lenehan from Eurobodalla Shire Council introduced Dr Phil Haines of BMT WBM, environmental consultants, who were commissioned by Eurobodalla Shire Council to prepare a draft Entrance Management Policy and an associated environmental assessment of Coila Lake and of Tuross Lake to determine a trigger point that would see each lake opened to the sea.

Norm told the assembled that this would be the last chance that the community would have to look at the content of the draft before it was finalised and placed on exhibition.

Council intends to place the Draft Opening Policy Plan on exhibition in the last two weeks of January and the first two weeks of February hoping to be able to capture comment from absentee ratepayers who might be in the area on holiday.

The meeting today was called to enable Council to capture last minute opinion prior to the Christmas Season that would see residents otherwise distracted.

It is hoped that following on from the meeting a report will be handed to Council at its last meeting of the year to adopt the Draft Opening Policy Plan and have it exhibited in the January/February timeframe for maximum comment ensuring maximum community participation

Following introductions Dr Haines advised the assembled of the philosophy of the Draft Opening Policy.

When Should Council open the lakes?

The Policy looks at defining the triggers to open the lakes. Considered in these triggers were affected infrastructure and natural processes. “it is a matter of looking at the impacts of the rising lake levels and knowing when to intervene ” Dr Phil said.

“it is also about minimising the risk to public safety” and “conservation of biological communities”

“These define when to go about opening the lake”. “It defines the how, when, where and who...”

Coila Lake

Dr Haines then spoke of Coila Lake and stated that the existing Opening Policy was being reviewed. Whilst the existing trigger level is between 1.65 and 1.85 it is the intention of the Opening Policy document to increase these heights by increasing the heights of any affected infrastructure that might be affected in the coming 100 years.

The Height of Coila Lake at the moment is 0.33 m AHD. It is intended to steadily progress the trigger height to something in the order of 2.0 metres or if 1.8m for a period of three months.

The Policy recommends an opening pilot channel of 10m wide and 2m deep.

Tuross Lake

Dr Haines then spoke of Tuross Lake

The current level of the lake is 0.42m AHD. That is 0.42m above the average sea level that sits somewhere between high tide and low tide. The level of the berm (top of the sand bar in the rivermouth is 2.0m)

The Draft Opening Policy states recommends that Council begin to monitor the lake when it reaches 0.7m AHD and consider opening (on consultation with affected landowners) if the lake reaches 0.8m for more than 14 days or more than 2.0m for more than 3 days.

The Draft Opening Policy looks at minimising the impact to infrastructure by recommending that affected infrastructure adjust itself over time to increase its height above sea level and the “forecast” changes in sea level brought about by climate change.

One recommendation is to construct floating pontoons adjacent to the boatsheds and to steadily increase the height of the road way of Hector Mc William Drive at The Narrows over the coming one hundred years.

This would then enable the Opening Policy to increase its trigger height thus replicating nature as best as possible.

It was at this point that the “workshop” was informed that the idea of the Opening Policy is to limit the effect of inundation and compromise of infrastructure and assets.

“It is NOT about opening the lake and keeping it open”

Question Time

The following are a cross section of questions from the floor. It was impossible to take notes on everything however the following should give a good idea of the feeling from the floor and some of the replies received. The questions are as best remembered.. The replies may come from both Norm Lenehen and Dr Philip Haines. and any quotes are attributed to the speaker with an initial. Where there are no quotes the Reply is summary of what was said by either or both speakers.

1) Why spend all that money on changes in height to proposed infrastructure when all that is required is to open the lake at the right time?

2) Is the natural state of the Tuross Lake and River now Closed?

Reply: "it seems that way" PH

3) What water has been taken out of the Tuross River and has this contributed to the current state of the Tuross River Mouth? Does the Tuross River top up Deep Creek Dam?

Reply: Tuross River is used to top up Tuross Reservoirs and to top up reservoirs to the south and the amount of water extracted is negligible especially seeing as Council only pumps water following an increase in flow of the Tuross River. "Council only pumps at high flow" NL

4) Would a breakwall keep the lake open?

Reply: "this is something the State Government would have to pay for. Generally it wouldn't be viable. Lake Illawarra is a good example of what would be required and this could cost \$20 million." NL and PH

5) Does Council have any thoughts of dredging?

Reply: Dredging might work but only for a short period as the beach sand has a northern flow and any dredging would see an infill of sand from the south to fill the area dredged. The sand is part of the beach and it is not allowed to extract sand from beaches. PH

when asked later if the sand inside of the river mouth was also classified as "beach sand" the meeting was told "yes, this sand can only be moved to one side and not extracted" - PH "As high tides are bringing in more water across the bar more sand is also coming with it" NL

5) What about the smell of the lakes.- the smell is bad and will have an affect on tourism"

Reply: the meeting was told that this is a natural condition as weed dies off and that there was nothing that an Opening Policy could do for the situation.

6) Council moved stormwater around to have it flowing from a gully near the caravan park. Has this caused the problem we have now?

Reply: No. The stormwater as a negligible influence on the body of sand at the river mouth. PH

7) Is the Tuross Lake unhealthy? Would you swim in it?

(at this point a member of the Oyster Growers told the gathering that Tuross Lake was healthy and was tested on weekly basis to ensure that the quality assurance of our locally grown oysters met stringent industry requirements)

8) A question was asked as to whether the Opening Policy considered the ecology of the Lake and the fact that being an enclosed system with the wildcard of three dolphins trapped within was now having an immediate impact on the natural balance of fish stocks and that the closure of the lake was now having an absolute impact on any natural breeding cycles where Tuross Lake plays a vital role as a breeding ground for a variety of fish stocks.

Reply: The ecology of Tuross Lake and the possible detriment to its habitat was not considered beyond acknowledging that nature was playing it's hand and as a consequence the ecology of Tuross Lake had best fend for itself.

As for the dolphins... "well, they put themselves in there didn't they?" NL

9) An observation from the floor identified that following the 1974 flood the whole frontal beach system changed and sand that had once be contained by frontal forest roots was now free once again. This most likely was contributing to the volume of sand that was now sealing the lake.

10) Has the financial loss to the community through its loss of tourist amenity been factored into "the trigger" that determines when the lake is to be opened?

Reply: "No" ... PH

The gathering then discussed that it was critical to the Tuross Community to have the Tuross River Mouth open. It was stated that the continued closure will see a drop off of visitors to the village who come to enjoy the fishing and the safety of the river mouth for swimming. Visitors are already determining to go elsewhere for their holidays. This has dire consequences for our community.

There was passionate discussion that Council should heed the plea of Tuross residents to see the lake open. Collectively everyone agreed it should be opened now. A member of the meeting then presented some interesting facts about previous openings and the way that they were done. It was clear that with a minimal height differential of lake to sea that the lake would only remain

open for short period if opened by Council however a higher differential so the lake opening remaining so for two years.

10) What about dredging the opening?

Reply: The gathering was told that Council does not own the sand and cannot grant permission.

Sand cannot be extracted from beaches. All the sand inside the sandbar at the river mouth is also marine sand and cannot be extracted. This sand can only be moved to one side.

11) What is the economic benefit of having the lake opened or closed?

Reply: "This cannot be calculated" PH

12) What would be the expected rainfall required to open the lake?

Reply: "150mm" PH

(note: there was general discussion throughout question time on Councils ability to meet a response time to opening the river mouth following heavy rains. It was stated that Council would begin monitoring the lake height when it reached 0.7m AHD however the gathering was informed from the floor of a previous event that saw rapid and considerable flooding within a time frame that could not be met by Council work crews wishing to reduce the berm and any mitigate any possible calamitous impact. It was strongly advised that Council needs to ensure the berm height is kept at a level that would see minimal impact on infrastructure, especially in light of the fact that possible inundation would be accompanied by windborne waves that would see major damage impacting assets not considered by this study such as oyster sheds and oyster leases.)

13) A local dairy farmer asked about the trigger heights and noted that if the height reached the trigger level his property and those of his neighbours would be cut off. This would require him to pour his milk into the lake and he raised concerns that if the water reached the heights of his paddocks then manure would end up in the lake and the banks of the river would become soft and subside into the river. He asked who was consulted from the dairy farmers and was given two names. It was stated that neither of the dairy farmers consulted would be as affected as he and his neighbours in a flooding event and that his property and that of his neighbours should play a key role in the trigger level.

Reply: (No documented quote of reply as it failed to respond directly to the farmer who asked the question. The meeting was informed that dairy farmers had been consulted however it was of the opinion of the farmer asking the question that the WRONG Dairy farmers had been consulted as those consulted would not be directly affected by flooding. The overall Council reply was considered by the gathering to be a dismissal of the farmer asking the question. Residents respected the farmers observations and shared his fears

and it is hoped that he and his neighbours will be sought out for opinion prior to the Draft being put to Council in December.)

14) What justification does Council have to increase the trigger heights rather than to drop them and open the lake?

Reply: "It is a cost benefit to Council to minimise the amount of times it needs to open the lake" NL

Discussion then followed that the Draft Opening Policy was exactly that and that the meeting was called to present the Draft Opening Policy. The policy had a clear mandate which was to determine the trigger height where Council needed to open the lake.

The meeting was not about offering up alternatives and to recommending opening the lake though the feelings of the gathering would be conveyed to Council in the report.

If the residents wanted the lake opened then the "must write to Council". How many letters? "Hundreds, telling Council what you want.". "It is not up to Council.. it is up to the State Government" "They are the ones who must be lobbied"

A member of the gathering applauded Council staff for having been supportive of a previous intent to dredge that saw money coming from the Federal Government but that was not met by the State Government. She commended Council staff on their diligence to this project that, in the end, failed.

Stafford Dixon – Senior Vice President of the Tuross Head Progress Association invited members of the audience to join the Tuross Head Progress Association so that they could be part of a lobby group to petition the Council as well as State and Federal politicians to see a permanent opening to the Tuross River mouth constructed.

In closing it was stated that the continued closure of the lake was having, and will continue to have a diminishing effect on livelihoods of the Tuross River community and that Council needs to have a good look at what the Tuross River community wants and needs and not just look for something such as this study that requires little if any action from Council at all.

In Closing:

It was strongly recommended that any resident wishing to pursue the idea of a rivermouth opening should either write a letter to Council requesting that they consider opening the bar or, if unable, possibly become a member of the Tuross Head Progress Association and have the Association write to Council, State and Federal Ministers on their behalf, reporting back through the Association any progress or correspondence received

It was evident from the meeting that the only item for discussion on the day was the Opening Policy and the triggers that determined when Council should open the lake. The driving mechanism for the Policy was purely infrastructure based in addition to minimising risk of loss or safety.. When asked about the environment and of any environmental concerns in modification to habitat by prolonged closure the gathering were informed that “the habitat will need to evolve” NL.

The “information session” and “public consultation” ended at 4:35pm. Sadly there was no vote of thanks for the presentation by Council and their consultant, Dr Philip Haines, both of who were well within achieving the goal set to them of establishing an opening trigger height.

The gathering wanted a solution to the closed lake and came expecting to hear of what could be done to open it. In the end most of the gathering left feeling disillusioned and feeling that the Draft Opening Policy will remain unchanged despite their comments and concerns and that it will have no part in seeing the river mouth opened .for reasons of fishing, tourism, ecological management of Tuross Lake fish stocks, breeding grounds and mangrove habitats and the release of the three dolphins who “put themselves in the lake” and can only hold themselves responsible.

Notes made by Lei Parker as best remembered – apologies to those who made excellent comments that were left unwritten as I madly tried to take notes of the meeting to pass on to the community. Apologies to those questions that I have left out feeling that they were generally dealt with and replied to elsewhere in the meeting.

Should there be anything above that requires editing please let me know as I would like to have these notes best represent the feel, the content and the general response to the information session by all the Tuross residents that attended.