

Local Government and Integrated Coastal Management The Queensland Coastal Councils Group (QCCG)

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Abstract

Local Government plays a major role in both coastal planning and management within Queensland. Councils across the State are involved in designing, delivering and maintaining coastal infrastructure, development assessment, strategic planning, environmental protection, and community engagement.

Due to changes in legislation and the delegation of authority from the State Government, Local Government has been forced to take a lead role in coastal management activities. The introduction of the Integrated Planning Act (1997), Coastal Protection and Management Act (1995), and the repealing of the Beach Protection Act (1968) have had a significant impact on the way that Councils must manage their coast, and how Local and State Government undertake coastal management activities.

These changes have placed increased pressure on Local Governments, and have stretched and challenged the resources and capacity of Councils to effectively manage pressures placed on the coastal environment. One way that Local Governments in Queensland have sought to adapt to these changes is through the development of the Queensland Coastal Forum, and formation of a Queensland Coastal Councils Group (QCCG). The Forum and QCCG provide a means for networking, information sharing, collaboration, and assisting advocacy efforts made on behalf of Local Government. The development of the QCCG and the success of the Queensland Coastal Forum show how regional collaboration has positively influenced coastal management within Queensland.

The Importance of Queensland's Coast

Queensland beaches, estuaries, and riverine systems are its most recognized icon and a fundamental lifestyle asset of the State. The desire to experience our coastal lifestyle has seen dramatic growth in domestic and international visitation in addition to an ever-increasing residential population. Tourism and population growth are central drivers of the State's economic growth.

The Queensland Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) have developed Regional Coastal Management Plans for sections of the Queensland coast, and have then encouraged local governments to develop shoreline erosion management plans. In previous years the Queensland Beach Protection Authority (BPA) undertook this type of investigation, with advice then given to Councils about how to implement the BPA's recommendations. Now Local Governments are developing, funding, and implementing coastal management activities with reduced assistance from the State or Federal Governments. In many cases, Councils have taken on roles that may be considered outside the scope of their core duties and expertise.

There has been a significant reduction in Federal and State based funding for integrated coastal management. The regional investment delivery model established by the Australian Government for the second version of the Natural Heritage Trust (NHTII) has not only excluded Local Government from the process but has resulted in a significant net decline in funding available for coastal management activities (estimated to be as much as 75% since NHTI). The demise of the Coast and Clean Seas initiative and the focus on improving rural landscapes has significantly affected the ability of Local Government to address the enormous management pressures being faced in coastal areas.

The removal of the BPA, considerable reductions in the Federally funded Coastcare program, and the demise of the Coastal CRC have left a significant void in coastal management in Queensland. There is no longer an agency that sees one of its specific roles being to provide advice to local governments. There have been significant reductions in Treasury allocations to state based coastal management programs and reduced numbers of technical staff available to assist Local Government. This has led to closer links at an officer level between councils.

Present Situation – Challenges for Local Government

Many local governments are not adequately resourced, or have the capacity to deal with the variety of roles that they are obliged to fulfil under current policy and legislation. These roles include assessing Prescribed Tidal Works applications under IDAS, preparing Shoreline Erosion Management Plans, and completing detailed operational works and tidal works applications for various capital works and maintenance programs. These activities are in addition to the completion of routine capital works programs and operational activities that all councils undertake in order to manage the local coastal environment for residents and ratepayers.

The changes to legislation and policy have not been matched by a change within the structure of many Councils, or in the level of resources available to undertake the wide range of work. Many smaller regional councils may be structured with only one or possibly two engineers, environmental officers or planners working on a range of activities across coastal community engagement, strategic coastal planning, operational and capital works programs. Additionally, sustained levels of population growth over the last five to ten years has placed additional strain upon councils to effectively deliver services. Much of this growth has been driven by the 'Sea Change' phenomenon which has not only driven population growth, but has altered the demographic of many communities. These changes have commonly resulted in a general expectation for higher service levels, and a reduction in community knowledge about coastal processes and potential hazards that the community previously understood.

The Role of Regional Collaboration

As a result of increasing pressure and expectations, many local governments have sought to work cooperatively in a variety of ways to achieve common objectives. There have been a number of ways that this has occurred:

- Through Regional Organisation of Councils (ROCs)
- Local Government Procedure and Training Manual 'Toolbox'
- Through various information networks amongst officers
- Through the creation of the 'DA Online' website
- Developing clear messages on water use and drought implications

The increased level of participation in collaborative efforts has meant that many Councils that are in a better position to share information on successes and failures, and are able to collectively have greater influence and provide a larger voice in decision making activities.

Unfortunately, it would appear that at a local government level, integrated coastal management initiatives are often fragmented or frustrated. While many local governments are attempting to undertake best practice integrated coastal management, there are often problems with resourcing, financing, and possessing the internal capacity to effectively deliver fully integrated outcomes.

As the pressures on coastal processes escalate, the need for cross boundary and regional approaches to achieve integrated coastal management has also increased. This need for cross boundary and regional approaches that seek to advocate on behalf of local government isn't limited to Queensland. In NSW, a group of individual Councils jointly formed the Sydney Coastal

Councils Group (SCCG) in 1989, while in Victoria, the Association of Bayside Municipalities (ABM) formed in 1974 to represent a number of Councils who border Port Phillip Bay in Melbourne. The formation of both the SCCG and ABM have enabled more effective advocacy, information exchange, and access to potential funding for member Councils.

Collaboration Through the Queensland Coastal Councils Group

Within the broad field of coastal management in Queensland, collaborative activities initially came through informal contact between neighbouring Councils, or where two or more Councils had common projects or issues. The success of these informal networks that provided information sharing, highlighted a need for additional support and guidance in undertaking coastal management and planning involving issues or legislation that extend beyond a single local government boundary. It was then decided that a 'Coastal Forum' should be held, where Local Government staff involved in coastal management activities could meet to discuss and workshop issues, or to report on specific projects that they were working on. Five such Coastal Forums have been held, and have been hosted by a number of councils across Queensland. Based on the increasing levels of interest in the Queensland Coastal Forum, and because of the benefits that the Forum has provided for participants, there have been increased expectations on how the Forum should facilitate positive outcomes for participants. It was therefore decided that a consistent direction and a strategy were needed to ensure that the Forum remained relevant and useful to Local Government.

As a result, at the 5th Queensland Coastal Forum a resolution was passed to form a scoping group to develop a proposal to form a Queensland Coastal Councils Group (QCCG). The scoping group looked at various options that facilitated coastal collaboration. It was noted that other states in Australia have a Coastal Council(s) set up by the State Government specifically to provide independent advice to government, encourage Integrated Coastal Management and assist local governments to effectively manage their environments. This was in contrast to the existing situation in Queensland, where the Queensland Government removed the Beach Protection Authority (BPA) and the extension programs that it delivered. The BPA and its programs have been replaced by State and Regional Coastal Management Plans that take a very wide view of the coast. Additionally, the Coastal Protection Advisory Council advises the Minister on coastal issues with one representative from LGAQ. Previously the BPA had 3 local government representatives.

The scoping group also noted that increased and targeted advocacy efforts through LGAQ could influence other agencies or levels of government to increase the level of active involvement in coastal management and the support it provides to Local Government. For this to be truly effective there needs to be a clear Local Government position on what type of assistance it wants and needs. At present there are few opportunities to discuss the issue and formulate a united Local Government view. A united local government view is important in that it will allow LGAQ to continuously improve advocacy measures. Presently, one of the most effective ways to engage with LGAQ to outline issues relevant to how Local Government manage the coastal zone is through the LGAQ State conference. It is interesting to note that at the 2006 LGAQ State conference, a motion was put forward by Councillors from Hervey Bay City Council and Bundaberg City Council, that requested LGAQ to lobby the State Government to create a streamlined and simpler approval system to allow beach nourishment and protection works to be carried out quickly and economically which achieve community objectives. The QCCG scoping group also noted that the creation of the QCCG will allow councils to follow up on this motion, and to provide LGAQ with support and assistance in their advocacy efforts.

The scoping group produced a package of documents that were sent to all councils across Queensland that manage a section of coastline or tidal estuaries. These documents outlined how the QCCG would initially operate and contained a letter inviting councils to formally join as members of the QCCG. Through acceptance of the invitation, councils are now part of a collaborative group that will provide leadership, direction and a coordinated approach to coastal management activities at a local government level amongst member councils. The QCCG will

liaise with the LGAQ in order to assist and support advocacy efforts, and will act as a key stakeholder for other agencies.

In addition to the big picture or regional benefits that the QCCG can offer to councils, there are also benefits in:

- Managing and planning for coastal environments even more effectively through stronger and clearer connections between coastal management activities across the state.
- Providing clear and logical reasoning for investment of resources by federal, state and local governments in beach infrastructure and management.
- Apply the adaptive management framework to coastal management through easy access to best and worst practice examples, and opportunities through the Qld Coastal Forum to review activities and share experiences.

Through the period of time that the Coastal Forum has been running and while the QCCG has been developed, a number of practical benefits have already been realised (refer to Table 1).

Table 1. Benefits offered and services achieved through the QCCG

QCCG Services	Advancing Coastal Management	Integrated	Example
QCF Coordination	Regular information sharing opportunities		Cairns 2004 Coastal Forum focused on SEMP's
	Networking, case studies, peer support		Sunshine Coast 2005 Coastal Forum field trip to erosion protection and foreshore development at Cotton Tree, Maroochydore.
	Identifying common issues, problems and solutions		
Project Working Groups	Follow through on issues to identify solutions		QCCG Scoping Group produced Business Plan and Proposal aimed at addressing lack of clarity, staff working in isolation.
Advocacy	Clear policy and direction for LGAQ to promote and negotiate with State Government and others		QCCG Scoping Group sought involvement and information from LGAQ, EPA, SCCG, ABM, IPWEAQ.
Technical Guidelines and Training	Embed knowledge and new procedures etc		QCF and Qld Coastal Conference opportunity to fully implement the QCCG

Into the Future

The development of the Queensland Coastal Forum, and the formalisation of collaborative activities through the QCCG has provided tangible benefits to many councils across Queensland. Through continued growth and input into the QCCG, and into the Queensland Coastal Forum, it is proposed that project working groups can be formed that will investigate ways to better manage the coastal environment, coastal infrastructure, and improve the ways that councils can strategically work with governing legislation. Figure 1 shows conceptually how the QCCG can positively influence the way Local Government manages of the coastal zone.

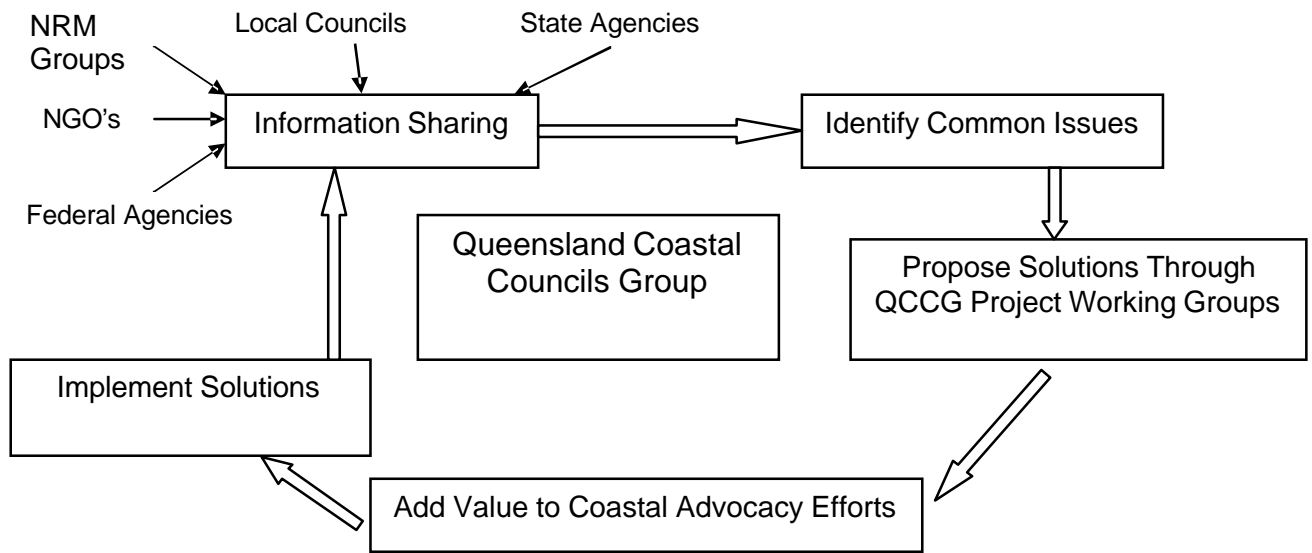


Figure 1. Conceptual map showing QCCG benefits.

In order to sustain the current levels of service that is provided to coastal communities by Local Government, and to effectively manage the coastal resources within the local government area, it is essential that cooperative and collaborative processes be investigated. Many Local Governments are under resourced and lack the capacity to effectively work through coastal legislation and policy. This is further compounded by a growing population, and an expectation for higher levels of service. The QCCG and the Queensland Coastal Forum are providing ways for councils to access information and support to better manage their coastal environment and contribute to the wider coastal management dialogue.