



NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service

Submissions report

**Public exhibition of draft coastal hazard
response plans for Sandon River and Woody
Head campgrounds**



Acknowledgement of Country

Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands where we work and live.

We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

This resource may contain images or names of deceased persons in photographs or historical content.

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Artist and designer Nikita Ridgeway from Aboriginal design agency – Boss Lady Creative Designs, created the People and Community symbol.

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1. Background

The National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) has prepared draft coastal hazard response plans (CHRP) for Woody Head and Sandon River campgrounds, to proactively plan for coastal hazards including erosion, recession and inundation. These hazards are currently threatening the use of the campgrounds and their natural and cultural values.

The draft plans include detailed coastal hazard studies and an assessment of potential management approaches and will form part of the Clarence Valley Council's Open Coast Coastal Management Program .

Key stakeholders and the wider community were consulted in the preparation of the draft plans, which involved onsite meetings, face-to-face discussions and phone conversations.

To provide further opportunity for the community to have a say on the draft plans and adaptive management proposals, the plans were exhibited for public feedback from 27 June to 29 July 2024.

This report provides a summary of the community feedback received and outlines how the feedback has been considered.

Draft Clarence Valley Council Coastal Management Program

Clarence Valley Council (council) has now completed Stage 4 of the Clarence Valley Open Coast Coastal Management Program. The coastal management program was publicly exhibited at the same time as the CHRP. It is available [on the council's website](#).

2. The consultation process

To ensure community views, concerns and aspirations about the future management of the campgrounds were considered, a 4-phase consultation process was undertaken to develop the plans:

Phase 1: Initial consultation with key stakeholder groups and individuals on issues and values. This included the establishment of 2 stakeholder reference groups (2022).

Phase 2: Consultation with key stakeholders on future management options (2022).

Phase 3: Public exhibition of draft coastal hazard response plans for Sandon River campground and Woody Head campground (July 2024).

Phase 4: Publish final plans on the NSW government *Environment and Heritage* website (expected September 2024).

Phases 1 and 2 were undertaken in the initial stages of the project, to inform the development of the CHRP. This involved:

- consultation with Yaegl Local Aboriginal Land Council about cultural values and the Aboriginal community's aspirations for the future management of the campgrounds
- involvement in the Clarence Valley Council's Clarence Valley Coast and Estuary Management Committee
- onsite meetings and briefings with the stakeholder groups and individuals.

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Public exhibition of the draft CHRP coincided with the council's exhibition of the draft coastal management program, to provide a coordinated approach

2.1 Public exhibition of draft coastal hazard response plans

The draft CHRPs were on public exhibition for 33 days from 27 June to 29 July 2024, to provide an opportunity for the community to submit feedback.

The draft CHRPs were exhibited on the NSW Government's *Environment and Heritage* and *Have your say* websites, with submissions invited via an online survey, email or mail.

Engagement tools

Key stakeholders and the community were informed about the exhibition by:

- advertisements in Illuka and Clarence Valley newspapers
- council's media release, as part of the coastal management program exhibition
- email notifications to 59 individuals and stakeholder groups
- online factsheets, with hard copies also available at the campgrounds.

To provide an opportunity for the community to discuss the draft plans with staff, 2 community information sessions were also held during the exhibition:

1. Wednesday 3 July at Iluka Community Hall
2. Thursday 4 July at Maclean Showground

A total of 10 people attended the sessions.

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Draft coastal hazard response plan

Sandon River campground, Yuraygir National Park



Coastal hazards at Sandon River

Many NSW coastal areas already experience flooding during higher tides. Coastal erosion and the recession of sandy beaches are impacting coastal ecosystems and infrastructure.

The campground at Sandon River also faces these coastal hazard challenges, threatening the use of the campgrounds and the natural and cultural values. A hazard assessment and options report has been prepared for Sandon River campground.

Coastal hazards are impacting the campground now and are expected to increase:

- **Inundation** from both the Sandon River and ocean tides is currently impacting the campground access road and expected to increase by 2043.
- **Coastal erosion** is expected to impact the campground by 2043.

Proactive planning for the future

The National Parks and Wildlife Service is taking proactive steps to manage coastal hazards at Sandon River campground and has prepared a draft coastal hazard response plan to assess and identify approaches to mitigate coastal hazard risks.

- Potential short, medium and long-term management options have been considered and a preferred option recommended.
- A multi-criteria analysis of options has been completed considering environmental, cultural, social, recreational, and financial factors.



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Draft coastal hazard response plan

Woody Head campground, Bundjalung National Park



Coastal hazards at Woody Head

Many NSW coastal areas already experience flooding during higher tides. Coastal erosion and the recession of sandy beaches are impacting coastal ecosystems and infrastructure.

The campground at Woody Head also faces these coastal hazard challenges, threatening the use of the campgrounds and the natural and cultural values. The natural features of the beach have made this area more susceptible to erosion and beach recession.

A hazard assessment and options report has been prepared for Woody Head campground. **Coastal erosion and recession are the major hazards** at Woody Head campground now and are expected to increase.

The main access road is currently impacted by extreme coastal erosion events and shoreline recession is expected to reach the access road before 2043. Coastal erosion and recession are currently impacting the beach access from the campground. Shoreline recession is expected to make the beach inaccessible from the campground before 2043.

Proactive planning for the future

The National Parks and Wildlife Service is taking proactive steps to manage coastal hazards at Woody Head campground and has prepared a draft coastal hazard response plan to assess and identify approaches to mitigate coastal hazard risks.

- Potential short, medium and long-term management options have been considered, and a preferred option recommended.
- A multi-criteria analysis of options has been completed considering environmental, cultural, social, recreational and financial factors.

Figure 1 Draft coastal hazard response plan factsheets

3. Submissions received

A total of 14 submissions were received from a range of interested individuals and community groups. Eight online survey responses were received and 5 submissions via email. One submission was received through the council coastal management program exhibition and has been considered in this submission report.

Several submissions provided comments on both draft plans with a total of:

- 12 responses on the draft Sandon River campground plan
- 6 responses on the draft Woody Head campground plans.

Eleven submissions were from individuals with 3 submissions made on behalf of organisations.

3.1 How submissions were recorded and analysed

All comments were documented and considered. The submissions and survey data were recorded using the following procedures:

- all submissions were filed in the NPWS internal records management system and recorded in the submission register
- comments in the survey were treated the same as written submissions
- similar points or issues were grouped together in themes according to either the section of the plans or the specific issue.

Themes and comments were assessed to determine if changes to the plans were needed.

3.2 Summary of feedback

The majority of the responses received were local in origin. Many respondents reported being regular visitors (over 10 times in the last 5 years) to the parks and some reported multidecadal connection with the parks and campgrounds.

Figure 2 shows the location of respondents.

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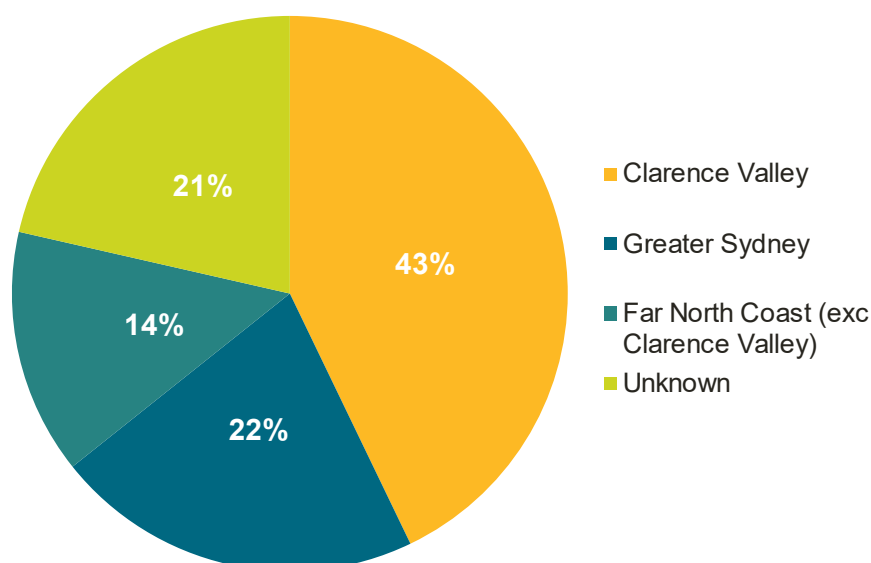


Figure 2 Location of respondents

3.3 Key themes raised

There were a range of views and issues raised in the submissions with many supporting the general intent of the draft plans. Some were opposed to aspects of the draft plans, and some feedback was out of scope for the project.

Overall, there was strong support for the proposals in the draft plans including:

- support for adaptive management at both campgrounds
- support for works to maintain safe access to the campgrounds for as long as possible
- support to maintain access for Aboriginal cultural experiences.

The main concerns raised in the feedback were:

- concern about the access and services to Sandon village
- concern about environmental impacts of the proposals
- concern about the costs.

Consideration was given to where changes could be made to the draft coastal hazard response plans to improve outcomes for the park's natural and cultural heritage values, visitors and the community while maintaining the key values, objectives, and considerations of the CHRPs.

The feedback and how this has been considered are summarised for Sandon River and Woody Head separately in sections 3.4 and 3.5 respectively.

3.4 Sandon River campground submissions

Most submissions (70%) supported adaptively managing the site for as long as possible. One submission disagreed to adaptively managing the site, which indicated a preference to allow nature to take its course.

Four of the 6 survey respondents agreed the CHRP explained the need for retreat planning.

There were 11 comments on aspects of the Sandon River CHRP in the survey and written submissions. Comments were grouped by topic and considered.

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Table 1 Themes and number of submissions

Theme	Number of submissions
Sandon village access and services	4
4WD on beaches	3
Dune stabilisation	3

The draft Sandon River campground CHRP is comprehensive and has received broad support. No changes are proposed to the CHRP. The following sections respond to comments received in the submissions.

Sandon village access and services

Some submissions indicated that maintaining access to Sandon village via the campground boat ramp is preferred, along with maintaining services such as electricity and waste.

‘Access to the village from the campground is highly valued and used by a lot of different people.’

Response

The draft Sandon River CHRP has identified that the scale and extent of the coastal hazards to the Sandon River access road and campground are such that any structural protection options would be costly, environmentally damaging and potentially ineffective.

The proposal is not to close the road immediately but to strategically plan for retreat by setting thresholds and triggers for when the site is unsafe and the decommissioning of facilities needs to occur.

Planning for retreat will include detailed investigation into the future management of the current campground facilities, including boat ramp access, waste services and electricity supply to Sandon village.

The plan of management for Yuraygir National Park and Yuraygir State Conservation Area notes the current access to Sandon village is by 4-wheel drive vehicle along the beach, or by boat across the Sandon River. During periods of high ocean levels, the ‘back track’ behind the beach is available for Sandon village residents.

NPWS recognises that any changes to this arrangement may trigger a plan of management review or amendment. Council has responsibility for the development of residential land within the local government area. Council will lead Action S2-2 of the coastal management program to develop a strategy for Sandon village, which includes consideration of access and services. NPWS will work with council in the implementation of this coastal management program action.

Vehicles on beaches

Three submissions received indicated 4-wheel driving on beaches is a community concern. This is consistent with submissions received by council during the development of the coastal management program and will also be considered by council in their submissions report.

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Response

There is a designated beach access point for vehicles just north of Sandon River campground within Yuraygir National Park. Vehicles are permitted along the beach within the park boundary. NPWS rangers patrol this area and undertake compliance action if drivers are causing harm under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974*.

A review of vehicle access to beaches will be considered as part of Action NP2-1a of the council's coastal management program. Council has committed to reviewing their vehicles on beaches policy in Action FM1-2 of the coastal management program.

Dune stabilisation

Two respondents specifically highlighted their support for undertaking nature-based erosion buffer methods such as dune revegetation.

Another submission suggested that fencing used should consider native animals and their passage.

'Recent strategies to re-establish the natural landscape and revegetation in recent years have proven to have some success.'

Response

The plan recommends nature-based dune stabilisation techniques to build a natural buffer against erosion for the campground in the short term.

The CHRP includes concept only and further detail on methods and fencing types will be determined in the detailed design phase. NPWS will consider animal passageways and shorebird and turtle nesting at this location during the design.

Relocation of Sandon River campground

One submission indicated support for relocation of the campground further north of its current location, while another submission did not support the proposed alternative (Site D) described in the CHRP.

Response

Only a preliminary assessment of alternative campground locations was undertaken as part of the draft CHRP. Retreat planning will include a more detailed investigation into alternative sites. Community feedback will be considered on alternative site options in the retreat-planning stage.

Historical erosion is not a major issue

One submission suggested that erosion is not a major issue at Sandon and the site is likely to remain viable.

Response

The technical coastal erosion and recession assessment completed as part of the hazard study shows the Sandon River campground is at risk of erosion by 2043. Thresholds will need to be set that will use physical triggers (such as the edge of a road) rather than

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timeframes. The timing of planned retreat will depend on the actual rates of erosion and recession experienced, and the impacts of erosion, recession and inundation on accessibility, safety and the visitor experience.

Do nothing option

One submission highlighted their preference to allow nature to take its course.

Response

Short-term nature-based solutions represent a good balance between intervention and natural process.

3.5 Woody Head campground submissions

Survey responses

Six submissions were received on the draft Woody Head campground CHRP, with the main topic the proposed extension of the seawall. This recommended option resulted in mixed responses, with some submissions strongly supportive of the seawall extension, while others questioned the financial investment in coastal protection works rather than environmental conservation works.

'There are very few campgrounds like it left in New South Wales and everything needs to be done to protect it so that future generations can use it.'

A summary of feedback submissions is below:

Retreat: 3 submissions agreed that the plan adequately explained the need for long-term retreat planning at the site and supported the notion of retreat at Woody Head. One submission indicated that they would prefer immediate retreat.

Sand nourishment: feedback was generally supportive of sand nourishment, with a submission highlighting the need for a seawall to protect the existing sand nourishment works completed in June 2024. Others considered sand nourishment as a very important medium-term measure.

Coastal inundation at Shark Bay was raised, however this area is 1.5 km from the Woody Head campground and does not form part of the current hazard study. The NPWS is a support agency with council to develop an adaptive management strategy for Iluka (including Iluka Road) – See Action IL1-2a in the council's coastal management program.

Response

The draft Woody Head campground CHRP is comprehensive and has received broad support. No changes are proposed to the CHRP.

The draft CHRP includes concepts only and further detailed design, investigations and approvals are needed. The final location and design of the seawall will be subject to these investigations and approvals.

The timing of long-term planned retreat will depend on the actual rates of erosion and recession experienced, and the impacts of erosion, recession and inundation on accessibility, safety and the visitor experience.

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A detailed cost-benefit and multi-criteria analysis considered the environmental, social and economic values of the campground. This assessment indicated that the financial investment to protect access to the campground was worthwhile to protect the social and economic values. The Yaegl Local Aboriginal Land Council has indicated support for the project to maintain access to a culturally important place.

Funding is not yet available for the construction of the seawall; however, without protection, access to the site is predicted to be compromised by 2030. The coastal management program provides strategic justification for coastal protection works and will support future funding bids.

The listed dune restoration projects are existing priorities that are funded through existing operational programs.

4. Next steps

You can view the final coastal hazard response plans for [Sandon River campground](#) and [Woody Head campground](#) online.

We will continue to engage with key stakeholders and the community in the management of the Sandon River and Woody Head campgrounds.