



TWEED ESTUARY BOATING PLAN

2006 – 2010

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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 Background

The Tweed River is an important natural resource of the far north coast of New South Wales. It is a vital link in the social and ecological fabric of the valley and requires sensitive management in order to sustain the quality of this link. Given the Tweed Shire's rapidly expanding catchment of people and the resultant increased demands on the river, both from a recreational and commercial viewpoint, the Tweed presents a complex boating management challenge.

Since 1991 the Tweed Shire Council, through its Tweed River Committee, has oversighted the preparation and implementation of detailed management plans for specific sections of the river and specific issues eg. bank erosion. These plans define management actions and remedial works, many of which have been successfully completed over the past 12 years. In the context of holistic management of the Tweed Estuary the Boating Plan will complement these existing plans and seek to develop strategies that promote the safety of all waterway users.

Boating Plans are designed to identify and protect the recreational and environmental values of a waterway, ensure that boating practices maximise user safety and enjoyment, and provide a consistent approach to existing and anticipated future needs.

1.2 Process

The process of developing a boating plan provides a number of opportunities for NSW Maritime and stakeholders to share information and provide input to the plan. The following represents a summary of the planning process:

- 1. Prepare Discussion Paper:**
 - Reviewed existing literature including all components of the Tweed Estuary Management Plan, Healthy Rivers Commission Reports, etc.
 - Undertook detailed analysis of Maritime's management information system.
 - Sought submissions from relevant government agencies.
 - Undertook detailed site inspections.

- 2. Seek Community Input**
 - Discussion Paper released and advertisements placed in two issues of the *Tweed Link* (Tweed Shire Council's weekly newsletter) and publicised via a media release in SEQ and northern NSW newspapers. Copies were made available through the Internet, were mailed on request and were placed at the Tweed Shire Council, Tweed Civic Centre and NSW Maritime's Tweed Heads Service Centre.
 - Presentations were made to the Tweed River Committee and to interested community members at the Tweed River Forum, as part of the calendar of events celebrating the Tweed River Festival.

3. **Prepare Draft Plan**
 - Identified values and issues arising from submissions received.
 - Prepared a detailed values and issues paper.
 - Developed a series of management strategies and actions.

4. **Second Stage Public Consultation**
 - Draft plan placed on public display for a period of two months.

5. **Finalise the Plan**
 - Analyse stakeholder submissions
 - Review plan in light of stakeholders' responses.

6. **Implement, Monitor and Review Approved Plan.**

The strategies and actions adopted in this Tweed Estuary Boating Plan are designed to be responsive to changing priorities and conditions on the estuary, and as such will be subject to ongoing review during the five year life of the plan.

The subsequent five year planning cycle will commence with Maritime undertaking a formal review of all strategies and actions adopted in this plan.

1.3 Objective

The Tweed Estuary Boating Plan is a 5 year plan designed to identify and protect the recreational and environmental values of the Tweed Estuary, ensure that boating practices maximise user safety and enjoyment, and provide a consistent approach to existing and anticipated future needs.

The plan provides a comprehensive body of information regarding boating and related activities on the Tweed Estuary, and in the context of holistic management, complements the Tweed Shire Council's existing Tweed River Estuary Management Plan.

1.4 Major Initiatives

The Tweed Estuary Boating Plan contains management strategies addressing values and issues relevant to both the entire estuary as well as location specific areas.

The following summarises the major initiatives incorporated in the Tweed Estuary Boating Plan, with each strategy referenced to its detailed location in the plan. Other more location specific initiatives are included in the individual management sections in the plan. These initiatives will complement existing Waterway's management strategies.

Creation of a jointly funded Riverkeeper position.

Increasing vessel traffic and existing stretched resources underpin the importance of this management strategy. In addition to assisting the Boating Officer with safety compliance work, the Tweed Riverkeeper will be heavily focussed toward

Introduction of Minimal Wash zones, for safety and environmental reasons, in designated reaches of the river

environmental compliance, and will be responsible for identifying gaps in community awareness and providing education on the appropriate use and protection of the Tweed Estuary. The cost of the Riverkeeper position will be absorbed within the budgets of participating agencies. There will be no additional fees or taxes on the boating community (Section 6.7)

Strategies to protect and rehabilitate the banks and foreshores of the Tweed Estuary are key initiatives in all Tweed Estuary management plans. NSW Maritime has a responsibility to boater safety and a shared responsibility for the natural environment. In-line with the precautionary principle of the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Environment, (*"Where there are threats of serious or irreversible environmental damage, lack of full scientific certainty should not be used as a reason for postponing measures to prevent environmental degradation"*), and its key responsibility to boater safety, NSW Maritime will introduce "Minimal Wash" zones in designated reaches of the estuary. (Section 6.4)

Implementation of Random Breath Testing

The Government has adopted the recommendation of the Alcohol Summit to enable random breath testing to be carried out on NSW waterways. This initiative received Royal Assent on 10 March 2005 with the proclamation occurring on 29 April 2005.

The *Marine Safety Amendment (Random Breath Testing) Act 2005* amends the *Marine Safety Act* to do the following:

- enable random breath testing by Police Officers of persons operating vessels,
- prohibit persons under 18 years from operating vessels with any alcohol in their blood, and
- increase penalties for offences under the Act for Prescribed Concentration of Alcohol offences to be in line with similar offences under the Road Transport (Safety and Traffic Management) Act 1990.(Section 6.3)

Banning of power boating in the Ukerebagh Passage (electric motors permitted), Kerosene Inlet, Wommin Lake and Wommin Lagoon.

These areas have been assessed as having conservation values deserving of environmental protection. Habitat conservation has been one of the primary objectives of all previous Tweed Estuary management plans, and consistent with these plans, NSW Maritime recognises the need to protect these highly sensitive areas. (These areas also present as navigation hazards due to shallow water, therefore prohibiting entry will remove the possibility of vessels grounding). (Sections 6.2, 7, 9, 17)

Note: Vessels powered by electric outboard motors and passive recreation vessels such as rowboats, canoes and kayaks will be

Implementation of restrictions to protect the amenity of riverside residents in selected areas adjacent to urban precincts.

permitted.

This initiative is in-line with the objectives of the *Protection of the Environment Operations (POEO) Act 1997* and the *Protection of the Environment Operations (Noise Control) Regulation 2000*.

NSW Maritime will:

- introduce a 75dB(A) noise restriction (measured at 30 metres) in selected areas where riverside residents reside close to a narrow section of the estuary.
- introduce a restriction (in selected areas) on all boating activity that lends itself to repeat passes in a confined area (eg skiing) prior to 8:00am.

This restriction does not however preclude residents from accessing the estuary from their backyard, motoring a short distance to an unrestricted area, undertaking their desired towing activity and then returning to continue their activity after 8:00am.

The boating plan endeavours to establish effective controls for boating in areas where residences are located immediately adjacent to the riverbank. This initiative addresses the impact that early morning vessel noise has on the amenity of riverside residents and promotes the equitable enjoyment of the river for all stakeholders. (Sections 14,15,16)

Risk mitigation regarding navigation under the seven major traffic bridges over the Tweed Estuary.

Initiatives include improvements to signage, no skiing or aquaplaning under bridges, addition of navigation lighting, identification and marking of appropriate spans for each-way navigation and education relating to distance-off regulations. (Section 6.3)

Removal of 8 knot speed restriction on the Rous River.

The Rous has been a gazetted 8 knot zone since 1947 when a speed restriction was introduced over the entire estuary. The restriction was designed to mitigate bank erosion from river steamers. Subsequent studies indicate modern vessels cruising at 8 knots produce high energy wave action which has the most impact on bank stability, particularly in areas identified as having a high potential for erosion. (Section 13).

Due to its narrow nature Maritime will also place "No Skiing or Aquaplaning" and "No Freestyling" restrictions on the entire Rous River.

Creation of a 4 Knot

The Lower Rous is a narrow and winding section of the river

speed restriction from the Rous River / Tweed River confluence and extending 800 metres upstream along the Rous.

containing highly sensitive seagrass and mangrove areas as well as other ecologically sensitive flora and fauna. This restriction will mitigate the impact of vessels in this ecologically sensitive area, and address safety concerns for boaters stemming from the blind bends in this narrow section of river. (Section 13)

Creation of a 4 Knot speed restriction in the area from Wyuna Canal (north of Caddys Island) to the Cobaki Creek / Terranora Creek confluence.

This is an area of limited navigation due to shallow water. It also contains significant seagrass beds, is an important benthic nursery and has areas with varying degrees of erosion. This restriction will address environmental, navigational safety and bank stability issues. (Section 18)

Creation of a 6 knot speed restriction from the port beacon immediately upstream from Boyds Bay Bridge to Terranora Inlet

This is a high traffic area with conflicts occurring between power boats, generally with an offshore destination, and local aquatic sport users including dinghies, sailors and rowers. This restriction seeks to reduce the risk of incidents in this busy area around Boyds Bay Bridge where a number of accidents and incidents have been recorded, generally relating to vessel speed, line of sight and anchoring issues. (Section 17)

Holding Tank Audit

This audit program is aimed at ensuring compliance with the holding tank requirements under the Marine Pollution Regulation 2001. This initiative, which commenced in 2002, will be expanded during the life of this plan to encompass Class 1 – 4 commercial vessels, as well as recreational vessels. (Section 6.1)

Education campaigns

NSW Maritime acknowledges that the majority of recreational boaters on the Tweed reside north of the border, and will therefore endeavour to ensure, in partnership with Maritime Safety Queensland, that all education campaigns run by NSW Maritime reach boaters in SEQ. This may require seminars to be based in areas north of the border in order to accommodate the significant number of boaters that reside in the lower half of the Gold Coast City Council area.

Campaigns will be aimed at:

- Educating the public with regard to all new restrictions resulting from this boating plan;
- Increasing the level of awareness amongst vessel operators of the dangers of the Tweed bar and the associated risk of vessel capsizing;
- Improving compliance to NSW regulations from QLD

personal watercraft users of the Tweed. (79% of all PWC on the Tweed are registered in QLD);

- Educating the public on the impact of freestyling (irregular driving) and power turning on boater safety and bank stability;
- Informing the boating community of its responsibilities in managing sewage and bilge water disposal;
- Identifying to the boating community the high traffic areas of the Tweed Estuary and those that pose as hazards to navigation.