Project Note
May 2007

INSTITUTE FOR **Rural Futures**

Alternative Landscape Futures

Today, half of Australia's population live within seven kilometres of the coast. More than six million people live within two kilometres of high water. Over the past decade, the 'Sea Change' phenomenon has led to 50 per cent population growth rates in some parts of coastal Australia. As one example, the New South Wales Government is expecting more than 150,000 new residents to make their home on the coastal strip from Forster to the Queensland border in the next 25 years (SMH, January 18th, 2007, p. 1).

Pressures of Changing Landscapes

The ongoing population surge means that the coastal plains of Australia are under increasing demand for

their land and water resources. They represent a very small proportion of the continent that has relatively good rainfall, soils, transport and communications. However, such demand is not sustainable.

On the coast, 70% of sandy beaches have been retreating over the last century. Nevertheless, development of land and water resources continues in a generally haphazard way, resulting in loss of good agricultural land, reduced water quality and supply, urban sprawl, and natural resource degradation. Such fragmented planning and its lack of landscape ecology design principles increases the environmental, economic and social costs for communities now, and into the future.

Coping With Sea Change

Innovative regional planning methods which take into account the environmental, economic, and social aspects of Sea Change in Australia are needed. This project, funded by Land and Water Australia, combines a regional landscape ecology approach with urban and regional planning to investigate the design, analysis, and implementation of alternative planned scenarios for regional Australia. The project will develop an Australian relevant methodology, drawing on experience from the Carl Steinitz (Harvard)

Alternative Landscape Futures approach.
A small-scale trial and refinement of this approach is being tested on the Northern Rivers Region of New South Wales. This region is currently experiencing a complex array of pressures and rapid change. The study seeks to understand how past landscape change influences present decisions and/or provides alternative future directions.
After analysing 30 years of landscape change from satellite imagery and socio-economic change from census data, future trajectories will be examined and plausible alternative scenarios developed to better understand the design of more sustainable regional futures. The impacts of these scenarios on patterns of ecological resource issues, regional development, and socio-economic factors, will be assessed.

Study Outcomes and Benefits

This study will develop and test an innovative regional landscape planning method relevant to Australian regional contexts, communities and governments. The method will be transferable to different regions and socio-ecological contexts, for planning and designing sustainable regional development, resource use and governance.
At policy levels within local governments involved in this project there are various planning, service delivery (including water) and regional development issues, and potential land use conflicts. The approach being tested and developed through this study will contribute towards a novel integrated resolution of many of these issues and help the development of future policies in many Australian regional contexts. Local government in the Northern Rivers Region will benefit directly from this study, which will develop a regional plan and several landscape design options of direct relevance and applicability to the region.

Project Details

Project Title: "Regional Alternative Landscape Futures for the Northern Rivers of NSW"
Funding Organisation: Land and Water Australia
Budget: $178,000
Completion Date: August 2008

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