

Clarence River Erosion Management Plan

Improved management of boating wash and
riverbank erosion

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Author: Maritime Management Centre
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1 Introduction

Riverbank erosion management is undoubtedly a significant issue for the future health and stability of our river systems. Waterways are often the heart of the cities and towns that surround them and are enjoyed by local residents, boaters and local businesses for recreation and commercial benefit.

In 2014, we spoke with communities across 11 river regions in NSW to inform Regional Boating Plans (RBPs). One of the key actions arising from the RBP process was the need to develop a state-wide policy for managing and mitigating boating-related erosion issues.

There are a range of reasons for riverbank erosion including flooding, high wash boating activities, resource extraction, wind waves, loss of vegetation, sea level rise, stock access and natural environmental changes.

This Management Plan seeks to balance the environmental needs of the river while ensuring boaters, businesses and local residents can enjoy the river for years to come in a sustainable and responsible manner.

2 Overview

The Management Plan includes a set of twelve management actions which seek to accommodate all river users and local residents, while ensuring sustainable enjoyment of the river for years to come. The actions represent a compromise to meet the environmental needs of the river consistent with the precautionary principle, and to provide certainty for boaters and local businesses to use the river for recreation and commercial benefit.

The actions are all measures which will be in place for a period of two years from September 2015 to September 2017. At the end of this period the effectiveness of the Plan will be assessed by the new Committee established to implement the Plan, monitor the river state, consult with stakeholders and community and recommend any changes.

Management actions are described in detail at [section 5](#).

3 Context and method

The Maritime Management Centre (MMC) within Transport for NSW (TfNSW) leads the strategic policy direction for maritime issues in NSW. MMC directs initiatives that support the Government's objectives for boating safety, maritime property and waterways management.

The Transport for NSW Maritime Program is led by MMC and delivered by Roads and Maritime Services (RMS). MMC works side-by-side with RMS who are responsible for policy implementation, delivery and compliance.

This work forms part of the development of a State-wide framework for managing boating activity in erosion-sensitive areas. Other pilot areas include the Tweed River, and the Upper Williams River (also known as the Seaham Weir Pool). In late 2014, MMC held public consultation sessions in each region and met with key stakeholders about the proposed policy framework.

A key part of the framework is undertaking scientific analysis to identify areas of the riverbank that are sensitive to erosion and where high-wash boating activity is likely to be a contributing factor. The Water Research Laboratory (WRL) at the University of NSW has developed an internationally recognised Decision Support System that can provide this information.

A working group consisting of RMS, Northern Local Land Services (NLLS), Clarence Valley Council (CVC), local land owners and boaters, commissioned WRL to undertake a Riverbank Vulnerability Assessment of the Clarence River between Rogan's Bridge to Ulmarra*. In late 2014, the working group agreed to MMC releasing WRL's report and seeking public comment.

MMC then developed a draft set of management actions that were developed through a combination of the scientific evidence provided in the WRL Report, expert Roads and Maritime boating knowledge, strategic Maritime Management Centre management advice and public and stakeholder consultation responses. Feedback on that plan has now been taken into account in the final Management Plan.

*A full copy of the report is available at <http://maritimemanagement.transport.nsw.gov.au/>

4 Consultation

In October and November 2014, the MMC undertook a program of consultation with the Clarence River community about riverbank erosion management and sought feedback on potential mitigation measures.

The consultation involved a targeted forum with key stakeholders and a community drop in session as well as informal conversations and briefings. We also spoke with local councils and authorities that have a role in looking after, managing or caretaking in and around the Clarence River.

In late 2014, MMC released WRL's report and sought public comment. Based on the findings of the WRL report and consideration of public feedback, MMC and RMS developed a proposed set of management actions for the Clarence.

In July 2015, MMC held a public information session in Grafton and presented a draft set of proposed management actions for the Clarence River. The draft management options and a copy of the presentation were published online for public comment, which closed on 31 July 2015.

MMC has considered the feedback from all levels of consultation in the development of this Plan, which has included over 100 responses across the various phases of consultation. This has helped inform the final Management Plan.

MMC and RMS have made a genuine commitment to consultation to help inform decisions regarding the management of boating in areas where the riverbanks are sensitive to erosion. There is also an opportunity for other agencies and stakeholders to play their part in contributing to the health of the rivers by addressing non-boating related issues.

5 Management Actions

A map providing indicative locations for the various river zones is at [Appendix 1](#).

1. **No new speed or wash restrictions between Moleville Rocks and Ulmarra**

Reason – The WRL Report confirms the majority of this stretch of river is suitable for wake generating activity under assumed tolerances, provided activities occur towards the middle of the river and riverbank remediation occurs at key sites.

This confirms:

- Approximately 35km of uninterrupted river with no new restrictions.
- Recognises importance of river for all users.
- Notes key findings from WRL report.
- Some remediation work required at key sites.
- Takes into account social and economic values of river amongst boating enthusiasts.
- Behaviour issues addressed through education, compliance in this area.
- Boating encouraged towards middle of river or appropriate shoreline.

2. **Installation of yellow (distance off) marker buoys and shore-based signage to encourage wake generating activities in most appropriate sections of river and shore based signage to communicate restrictions**

Reason – To minimise erosion, boating activities should generally be encouraged towards the centre of the river. Distance off buoys and land based signage are considered the most appropriate solutions to convey the message about where best to undertake these activities.

However, the centre line of the river may not always be the most appropriate course in all locations, with wake generating activity likely to have minimal impact on banks in areas that are resistant to erosion, such as rock embankments. RMS will explore mapping options to provide advice to users on the most suitable areas to undertake activities that generate substantial wake.

Distance off buoys may be deployed around areas where remediation work is underway. Cardinal or lateral marks will not be used as they are for identifying safe navigation channels.

3. **New no slow-tow zone for northern channel between Susan Island and Grafton**

Reason – The banks of the northern channel are subject to substantial erosion, the area is popular with rowers and small powered boats, and the outside channel is more suitable for wake generating activity. This should reduce user conflict while maintaining unrestricted usage of the southern channel.

4. New no slow-tow zone between Rogans Bridge and Moleville Rocks

Reason – The WRL Report identifies this section as highly eroded and too narrow to focus wake-generating activities into the middle of the river to effectively limit erosion. The no slow tow restriction is a two year temporary restriction while riverbank remediation is undertaken and its effectiveness will be subject to review.

5. Prepare scope of works for riverbank remediation at sites identified in WRL Report

Reason – A number of sites along the river have been identified for remediation in the short and medium term. MMC, Clarence Valley Council, Northern Local Land Services and the NSW Soil Conservation Service, are working together to identify the actions and costs of bank remediation at specific locations identified in the WRL Report. The focus is on implementing works at key priority sites during 2015, with medium-priority works considered subject to feasibility.

6. Work with landowners to improve banks

Reason - Local landowners have a role to play in riverbank remediation. We will work with local landowners to explore opportunities for bank remediation, revegetation, and stock access management.

7. Code of Conduct implementation and support for local businesses to educate operators

Reason – The Clarence River Awareness Group has developed a Code of Conduct for tow sports on the River. MMC will support its implementation and distribution and will assist local boating clubs and business operators to provide boating education and training to users through its community grants program.

8. Ongoing education and increased compliance during implementation

Reason – During implementation there will be a need for increased compliance operations from RMS as well as immediate and ongoing education, particularly during the boating season, for boaters and local residents to ensure that everyone understands the new restrictions and boating regulations more generally.

This will include deployment of boating education officers during the boating season.

MMC will also explore opportunities to educate QLD boaters on towing rules and codes of conduct.

9. Establish a Clarence Riverbank Project Management Committee to implement the Plan, monitor river state, consult with stakeholders and community and recommend any changes

Reason - A number of agencies are responsible for various aspects of this plan and an overarching committee with representatives from MMC, RMS, LLS and CVC is required to implement its Actions. The Committee will meet quarterly to discuss the status of the Plan, progress actions and discuss any emerging issues.

In the event of a significant flood event, the Committee will convene to make recommendations to MMC on whether there is a need for any additional temporary restrictions. The Committee will also brief stakeholders and the community twice a year on the status of the Plan.

10. Ongoing monitoring and further research

Reason - Ongoing monitoring of riverbanks will be required, including the condition of banks, to assess the effectiveness of riverbank remediation works and boating restrictions. Further research will also be undertaken to confirm boat pass numbers and activities on the river and to understand any effects of dredging in the region.

11. Call for locations to undertake wake generating activity

Reason - MMC is interested to hear from the tow sports community about locations that are well suited to tow sports and wake generating activities and would like to hear of any proposals for suitable locations to establish dedicated tow sport areas and facilities.

12. Temporary measures and ongoing review

Reason – the above outcomes will be in place for a period of two years. At the end of this period the effectiveness of the Plan will be assessed by the Committee.

6 Notes on Management Actions

1. Aquatic Events

The restrictions above in no way affect the conduct of aquatic events such as the annual Grafton Bridge 2 Bridge race. The above actions are designed to alleviate the cumulative impact of wash. As aquatic events are held infrequently and occasionally, they are not considered to have a substantial or ongoing impact on riverbank health..

2. New Restrictions

The proposed new Marine Safety Regulation 2015 will introduce new powers to restrict, through signage, the operation of vessels that generate a large wave or wake for the purposes of wakeboarding or wake surfing. A new penalty notice offence will apply to vessel owners who breach these restrictions.

The new Regulation is expected to commence in December 2015. These new powers will be used to restrict the operation of wake generating boats in the Rogans Bridge to Molville Rocks and Susan island areas. Restrictions on the operation of wake generating boats will only apply to specific areas and signs will advise restrictions that apply. These restrictions will not apply if the same vessel is used in the same area for other activities that do not generate a large wake, such as waterskiing or cruising.

As the new powers will not become available until 1 December 2015, as an interim measure, the restricted zones will be implemented on 1 September 2015 by notice under S.11 of the Marine Safety Act, through the erection of signage that prohibits:

- Wakeboarding
- Wakesurfing
- Aquaplaning
- Use of additional ballast.

3. Rationale for No Slow Tow rather than No Towing Restrictions in temporary restriction zones

Some respondents have variously called for a complete ban to boating, prohibition of all tow sports, and speed restrictions in these areas; however it is expected that the combination of the introduction of no slow towing restrictions and undertaking of riverbank rehabilitation work will both significantly reduce the amount of wave energy being generated and improve the resilience of river banks to erosion.

While it is thought that this will lead to substantial improvement to the condition of river banks in these areas, ongoing monitoring and review will allow the restrictions to be fine-tuned if required. Concerns raised that the new restrictions still allow a substantial amount of heavy wash generating activity are considered to be largely unfounded, as the restrictions will apply to the vast majority of circumstances where heavy wash is generated; such as wakeboarding, wakesurfing, aquaplaning and use of ballast. A general prohibition on waterskiing is not considered necessary due to the preference for smooth water and the comparatively lesser level of wash generated.

4. Timing

The new restrictions will commence on 1 September 2015 and will be in place until September 2017, subject to review. This provides certainty to vessel operators prior to the commencement of the 2015-16 boating season. Other elements of the plan are being progressively rolled out.

5. Remediation Works

The strategy for improving waterways management and increasing riverbank resilience to erosion on the Clarence River requires an investigative program to identify, cost and prioritise key sites for remediation between Rogans Bridge and Ulmarra.

North Local Land Services and NSW Soil Conservation Service have been engaged to investigate, identify, cost and prioritise key sites on the Clarence River for remediation.

This will help enable decision making on remediation works to ensure that the river remains suitable for sustainably use for a wide range of purposes.

6. Access improvements at Punt Road

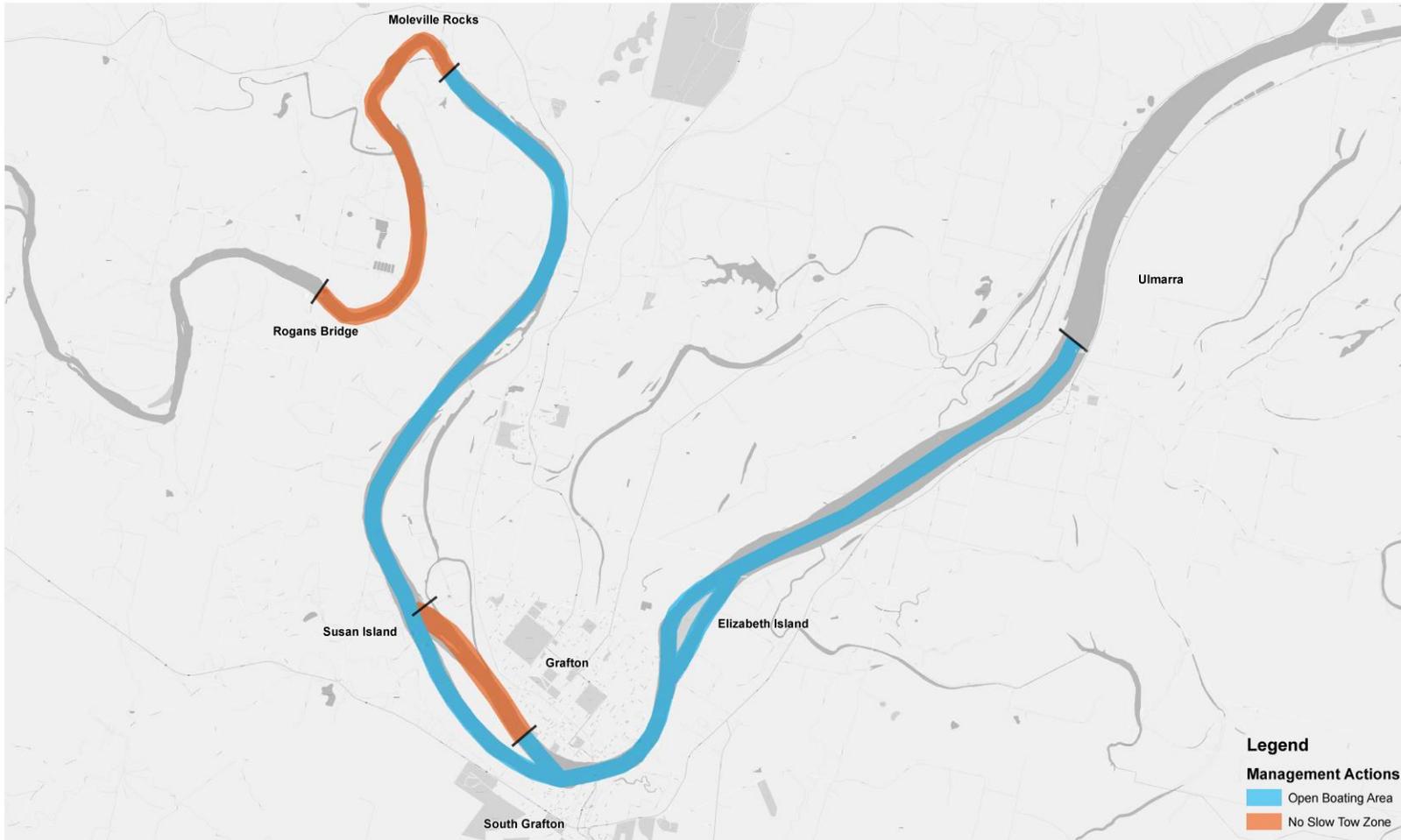
A number of requests were received to improve boating access at Punt Road, Seelands. While there are site constraints at this location, MMC is generally supportive of this notion and will consider funding opportunities to improve this facility during the next round of Boating Now infrastructure grants.

7 Appendices

- 1. Appendix A – Map of river restrictions**

Appendix A – Map of river zones.

Clarence River Management Actions



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