

WILSON INLET MANAGEMENT ADVISORY GROUP

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD 21 FEBRUARY 2007 AT THE SHIRE OF DENMARK RECEPTION ROOM AT 1.00PM

PRESENT: George Ebbett, Brad Kneebone, John Jamieson, Geoff Findlay, Zak Launay, Jason Froud, Helen Heydenrych, John Xanthis, Dave Rushton, Graham Wright (proxy for Danny Burkett)

IN ATTENDANCE: Phil Shaw (Dept of Fisheries)

The Chairman opened the meeting at 1.10pm

1. PUBLIC OPEN FORUM

Case Koning

Requested that the decision to no longer allow members of the general public to attend entire WIMAG meetings be minuted.

Also asked Jason Froud to provide an update of current Fisheries research for the inlet. Jason explained that the Dept of Fisheries (Kim Smith) research utilised fish traps while the Murdoch University research (Ben Chuwen) was using nets. So far the fish traps are working well with approximately 80 cobbler caught in 40 traps.

Mr Koning also raised the issue of a potential lack of boat ramp facilities if the mouth of the Hay River is closed and no longer available for launching small boats. He is also concerned that increased reliance on the site on the City of Albany (CoA) side of the river, north of the South Coast Hwy road bridge, will lead to erosion/degradation in this area because it doesn't have adequate parking and suggested that WIMAG should lobby the CoA to address this. John Jamieson explained that while he sits on WIMAG as a representative of the CoA he is only 1 of 15 Councillors. He suggested to Case that he raise the issue at the next Council meeting.

In addition to the above, Mr Koning is concerned about the current state (health) of Wilson Inlet. He suggested that dredging to create a significant channel behind the sand bar should be undertaken as a matter of urgency as a means of improving inlet flushing during future openings. George informed Case that a recent Councillor motion to undertake a similar dredging project was rescinded at the last Council meeting.

John Xanthis tabled a document compiled by the Wilson Inlet Restoration Group (WIRG) titled 'Western Channel Dredging Proposal Wilson Inlet, Draft Summary February 2007'. John also advised that the South West Development Commission could be approached to possibly fund a project of this nature.

2. APOLOGIES

Basil Schur, Danny Burkett

3. CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on the 20th December 2006 were confirmed as a true and accurate record.

4. MATTERS ARISING FROM MINUTES AND CORRESPONDENCE

- 4.1 Correspondence to George Ebbett from the office of John Kobelke following Minister Kobelke's meeting with George and Chris on the 31st October 2006 in relation to the bar opening. George also provided a copy of a letter from Minister Kobelke to Terry Redman in relation to the same issue.
- 4.2 JFA Consultants Pty Ltd Position Paper regarding Denmark Rivermouth dredging proposal – waiting on advice from the Dept of Environment & Conservation, Land & Water Quality Branch. Geoff (Findlay) put into context the channel dredging issue stating that the urgency of the project is due to one operator with a larger boat than that previously operated but also conceded that the

Denmark community has an expectation that the boating channel will be deepened to benefit all boating needs. Geoff also suggested the need for the dredging project position paper and the strategic boating plan to demonstrate consistency.

- 4.3 EPA decision regarding reclamation of approximately 700m² of Wilson Inlet foreshore as a component of the Denmark Rivermouth development deemed that potential impacts on water quality from reclamation activities can be adequately managed under approval issued through the *Waterways Conservation Act*. Helen provided a copy of the letter from the EPA to the Shire of Denmark. Helen provided a brief overview of second meeting with Wayne Webb and David Guilfoyle regarding the indigenous consultation process which resolved that a more thorough, strategic approach should be taken to ensure cultural issues for the Denmark River, Wilson Inlet, including foreshore areas, are identified before the commencement of any significant development activities. In the meantime however, once environmental considerations have been addressed and relevant approvals obtained, dredging can go ahead provided it doesn't include the river channel upstream of the boat ramp.

5. FUTURE BAR OPENINGS – PROPOSED WATER LEVEL POLICY

The Shire of Denmark are looking to introduce a policy ensuring minimum 1.1AHD inlet water level is reached before bar openings are undertaken by the Water Corporation. The upcoming meeting of the Denmark Council will provide an opportunity for further discussion regarding this matter.

In the meantime, George has recently received information from the Environmental Defenders Office (EDO) pertaining to legislation that defines the Water Corporation's current approach to management of the Albany Drainage District, which apparently incorporates the sandbar at the mouth of Wilson Inlet. The Water Corporation have broad powers underlining its management of this area across a number of Acts including the *Land Drainage Act*, *Water Corporation Act* and the *Water Agencies (Powers) Act*. George explained that in order to achieve a satisfactory environmental, social (and economic) outcome for the inlet it may be necessary to instigate amendments to existing legislation with implications beyond Wilson Inlet.

The EDO also explained that one approach to try to prevent an opening of the inlet when water levels are below the preferred minimum is to refer the proposal to breach the sandbar to the EPA for assessment under Part IV of the *Environmental Protection Act*. Proposal can be referred to the EPA by any person if they are 'likely' to have a significant effect on the environment.

George also provided details of a letter from Minister Kobelke's office to Terry Redman. He explained that the letter included a reference to advice from the Dept of Fisheries regarding the impact of a reduced opening period on inlet fish stocks, as well as the Sandbar Opening Protocol. Jason Froud advised that this statement is not entirely untrue although it needs to be expanded further. The main concern is that the letter demonstrates a lack of understanding about the purpose of the opening protocol, which is not a legal document but simply provides an opportunity for stakeholders to guide the Water Corporation's management of the bar opening. The protocol does not enforce a preferred inlet water level but recognises a minimum level of 1.1m AHD be reached before the bar is breached.

The option of establishing a series of levees to reduce flooding to eastern floodplain areas was briefly discussed however it would be an expensive approach. Graham Wright advised that he will be meeting with affected landholders by the end of March to better understand the extent of flooding. Graham also informed the group that the Nenamup floodgates on Eden Road have recently been refurbished. Graham expects these improvements should stop any unauthorised opening or closing of the floodgates.

George reiterated the need to formally request that the Minister appoint someone from the Water Corporation to explore this issue and possibly come up with an alternative to the current bar opening management approach that will better take into consideration environmental, social and other economic impacts (including tourism) of the bar opening. **Action:** George and Dave to compile a response letter to Mr Kobelke summarising all relevant points and requesting that a suitable appointment be made to resolve this matter.

John Xanthis reiterated concerns in relation to other factors likely to contribute to reduced inlet opening periods in the future stating that the use of Denmark River as a public water source and predicted drier

climate will result in lower inlet water levels. John also explained that WIRG has resurrected an earlier dredging proposal to partially address this issue (the proposal document was tabled during the public open forum session with the intention of discussing this further at the next meeting). This document contains information about funding opportunities for a project of this nature and might also be considered for proposed dredging at the Denmark Rivermouth.

Graham Wright left the meeting.

6. DENMARK STRATEGIC BOATING PLAN

A draft Denmark Strategic Boating Plan Desk Study and Stakeholder Forum report has been prepared by Estill & Associates detailing a review of existing legislation, policies, existing project proposals, plans and strategies and recommending a number of strategic approaches to address the Denmark River and Wilson Inlet future boating needs.

The group agreed that the draft plan is lacking in some areas and suggested that the recommendations be expanded on. Some preliminary ideas included the need for more information regarding lease areas, existing (private) jetties and the plan should provide more clear guidance for future management, appropriate locations for facilities, etc.

It was suggested that the consultant contract for this work be looked at to ensure satisfaction of all project requirements and expectations. Also suggested relevant agency feedback to the Shire.

7. SEAPLANE PROPOSAL

The relevant authorities, including the Department for Planning and Infrastructure and the Albany Harbours Planning Committee are currently assessing a proposal by Splash Air Seaplanes to operate within Princess Royal Harbour, King George Sound near Whaleworld, Walpole/Nornalup Inlet and Wilson Inlet. For Wilson Inlet it is proposed that a 5 seat seaplane will land and take-off at a minimum of 200m from shore with passengers transferring at the Denmark Rivermouth boat ramp.

Members expressed some concerns regarding possible implications for commercial fishing and aquaculture leases (existing and possible future) as well as inlet birdlife impacts. The group also expects there will be some members of the Denmark community that will object to this activity and suggested that further community consultation be undertaken to better gauge community attitude towards the proposal.

8. PROPOSED WILSON INLET AQUACULTURE EXPANSION

Zak Launay provided details regarding his intention to expand oyster operations in the inlet, including a proposed land-based processing facility (Aquaculture Park on Inlet Drive). Approval for the proposal will depend on a favourable outcome of a Aquaculture Planning Strategy for Wilson Inlet review because the proposed extension to the lease area exceeds the area approved in the current strategy. In the meantime Zak can approach the Dept of Fisheries to provide preliminary feedback and possibly initiate consultation with relevant agencies and other stakeholders.

While it is recognised that the aquaculture strategy is due for review, the Dept of Fisheries have not dedicated resources to undertake the review and it is likely that any review will take time as it requires a period of community consultation. Phil Shaw advised that it is important for Zak to carefully consider the financial implications and uncertainties of variable water quality conditions from year to year. John Jamieson also explained that there are planning (zoning) considerations in relation to the Aquaculture Park component.

9. MEMBERSHIP

Recruitment process to fill 3 community positions will be undertaken in the coming weeks. The Group resolved that applications for these positions should be assessed in accordance with the selection criteria in the WIMAG Terms of Reference with no preference for any particular area of expertise, knowledge, experience, etc.

10. WA COASTAL CONFERENCE

Helen Heydenrych provided a progress report in relation to planning for the 4th WA Coastal Conference to be held in Denmark on 31st October to 2nd November 2007.

Following a request for quotes from a number of companies Green Skills were awarded the contract to organise and coordinate the conference. The conference organising team is comprised of Deb Booker, Debbie Rice and Liz Jack, all of which bring a diverse range of skills to cover the broad areas of management of the conference. Meetings of the Conference Steering Committee have so far focused on preferred key speakers and presentation subjects, including socio-economics of sustainable fisheries, fisheries research (eg. integrated management for commercial and recreational fisheries). The Department of Fisheries can possibly advise of possible guest speaker from relevant university.

11. WILSON INLET NUTRIENT REDUCTION ACTION PLAN

Dave Rushton tabled a WINRAP implementation progress/update report primarily focusing on initiatives throughout the Wilson Inlet catchment area during December 2006 and January/February 2007. Copies of the report are available from Steve May at steve.may@water.wa.gov.au.

12. MEMBERS REPORTS

John Jamieson – In light of overwhelming community support for recent decision by the City of Albany to ban 4WD use on Cheyne Beach, suggested issues associated with coastal vehicle access and impacts due to other recreational pursuits be addressed at the coastal conference.

Brad Kneebone – Seconded John's suggestion stating that foreshore degradation at Morley Beach can be attributed to off-road vehicles.

John Xanthis – South West Development Commission is a possible source of funding for inlet dredging proposals. Recommended Helen (Shire of Denmark) investigate further.

Jason Froud – Minimum snapper sizes in Wilson Inlet to increase from 28cm to 41cm. Early results of cobbler trapping encouraging. Details regarding a krill survey for south coast estuaries, including Wilson Inlet, is available from the Dept of Fisheries website.

Advised that this will be his last WIMAG meeting and that Phil Shaw will be his replacement as the Dept of Fisheries representative. He will continue to work for the Fisheries Dept in Perth.

Geoff Findlay – advised that with the 1/4/07 cut off for exemptions for the Recreational Skippers Ticket approaching there is a belief that training prices may increase so people should get in early to beat the last minute rush.

Helen Heydenrych – Review and consolidation of foreshore management plans for Wilson Inlet.

Zak Launay – Concerned about impacts of proposed rivermouth dredging (turbidity plumes) on aquaculture lease area.

Dave Rushton – Denmark River Allocation Planning update – a project to determine current use (abstraction) and survey social water requirements (SWR) for the Denmark River and Scotsdale Brook is currently being undertaken by the Dept of Water. The user survey will target landholders directly adjacent to relevant waterways while the SWR survey will have a broader focus on key community stakeholder groups which have some association with the river as well as landowners adjacent to the river.

Met with representatives of the Water Corporation on 30th January to discuss future wastewater disposal options for Denmark, including a proposal to fertigate the golf course and some areas of the Denmark Agricultural College with treated wastewater. Fertigation is the term used to describe irrigation with nutrient rich wastewater.

Research investigating the impact of acid sulphate drainage on estuarine systems to involve Wilson Inlet.

George Ebbett – Inquired about DoW Wilson Inlet phytoplankton reports. Dave explained the lab experienced some sample backlog in recent months and committed to follow-up.

13. NEXT MEETING – 18th April 2007