

Newcastle Southern Beaches Coastal Management Program

Bar Beach to Merewether management options



City of Newcastle

Overview

City of Newcastle is preparing the Newcastle Southern Beaches Coastal Management Program (CMP) to establish a long-term, strategic and coordinated approach to managing coastal hazards while protecting the environmental, social and cultural values of Newcastle’s coastline. The CMP applies the NSW Government’s risk-based Coastal Management Framework and will replace Part B of the existing Newcastle Coastal Zone Management Plan 2018.

The Southern Beaches CMP covers the coastline from Nobbys Headland to Glenrock Lagoon and is one of several CMPs being progressed or implemented by City of Newcastle under the *Coastal Management Act 2016*. The program is currently in *Stage 3 – Identify and Evaluate Options*, building on earlier technical investigations into coastal processes and hazards.

Technical studies undertaken during Stage 2 identified that unprotected sections of the southern beaches, particularly between Bar Beach and Dixon Park are at risk from coastal erosion sooner than previously understood. This stretch of coastline is constrained by limited bedrock and a lack of natural or engineered protection, reducing its capacity to naturally respond to sea level rise and increasing erosion pressure while maintaining the assets and functions we are accustomed to. The Stage 2 findings informed the development of a shortlist of potential management options for the Bar Beach and Merewether Beach embayment for further assessment in Stage 3. This shortlist formed the basis of the community engagement summarised in this report.

Management options

An overview of the impacts of the shortlisted management options, including a comparative summary of their respective positive and negative impacts, was provided to participants to inform and guide their participation. This information highlighted that each option presents distinct advantages and disadvantages, and that selecting any option involves inherent trade-offs.

Type of management	Indicative capital cost	Indicative operational cost	Sandy beach	Impact to surf quality^^	Protection of existing assets^	Impact to environment	Resilience to climate change	Impact to existing roads
Merewether and Dixon Park option 1 Maintain seawall + amenity sand nourishment	\$26m	\$1m [†]						
Merewether and Dixon Park option 2 Maintain seawall + managed partial retreat	\$10m	\$0.3m						
Merewether and Dixon Park option 3 + Bar Beach option 1 Mass sand nourishment	\$45m	\$0.7m			*			
Bar Beach option 2 Seawall + amenity sand nourishment	\$29m	\$0.6m [†]			*			
Bar Beach option 3 Seawall setback 12m + amenity sand nourishment	\$33m	\$0.7m [†]						
Bar Beach option 4 Managed retreat	\$6m	\$0.3m						

Very good Good Average Poor Very poor

[^] Protection of existing assets at current location, such as buildings, active pathways, recreational areas.

^{*} Option to relocate or retain Cooks Hill SLSC building.

[†] Indicative operational costs will depend on sand source for top ups.

^{^^} Ratings informed by the Surf Amenity Impact Assessment Report.

Community engagement

Community engagement was undertaken between August and November 2025 to inform and educate the community about coastal change, communicate technical findings, and seek feedback on the shortlisted management options for the Bar Beach to Merewether section of Newcastle's coastline.

While the survey was opt-in and not statistically representative of the broader population, it provided a substantial and diverse body of qualitative and quantitative feedback that will inform the Stage 3 acceptability assessment.

What we heard?

Across all engagement channels, beach nourishment was the least favoured management approach overall, with common concerns raised about cost, effectiveness, environmental impacts, longevity and ongoing maintenance requirements. In contrast, protection and managed retreat options attracted stronger support, although for different and sometimes competing reasons. Protection was often preferred for its perceived ability to retain existing assets, access and amenity, while managed retreat was supported as a more sustainable, adaptive and environmentally responsible long-term response to coastal hazards and climate change.

Feedback demonstrated a high level of consistency across age groups, wards and most user groups, indicating that views on coastal management for this section of coastline are broadly shared across the community. However, some differences emerged between specific coastal user groups. In particular, the surfing and board riding community expressed an overall preference for managed retreat, reflecting their emphasis on preserving the surf quality, preserving the natural coastal processes and intergenerational equity. In contrast, the surf life saving community indicated a stronger preference for protection measures, aligning with their focus on safeguarding surf club infrastructure and operational needs. Despite these differences, the broader patterns of support and concern remained similar across the wider community.

The results clearly show that there is no single management option that will satisfy all community members. While preference rankings provide an important indication of community views, viewing the options that scored the highest alone do not take into consideration the user groups, values and drivers for the selection. For Merewether and Dixon Park Beach, the most preferred option was Option 2 - Maintain the seawall with managed partial retreat (46%), while for Bar Beach the preferred option was Option 2 - Seawall combined with amenity sand nourishment (39%). However, this report demonstrates that the decision is not as simple as selecting the highest scoring option. Each location requires consideration of nuance, site specific detail and broader contextual factors that influence the drivers for the management options preferred by the community. The following sections outline this nuance, detail and context to support a deeper understanding of why each option was selected and the acceptability of the trade offs involved.

Each option involved trade-offs between environmental outcomes, surf quality, public access, infrastructure protection, cost, traffic impacts and long-term resilience. Many participants acknowledged the complexity of the decision and recognised that some level of compromise is unavoidable.

Open-text feedback reinforced the importance of protecting Newcastle's coastal identity, surf culture and natural environment, while also highlighting strong and sometimes conflicting views about infrastructure retention, traffic impacts, governance, cost, and the role of expert advice versus community input.

Our reach



580,000

social media impressions were recorded



8,291 project

webpage visits achieved



1,000 flyers were

distributed at CN facilities,

16 signs were deployed

across the city,

50 footpath decals were

installed, and

1,000 flyers were

delivered to homes



99,000

Touchpoints across multiple channels (TV, Newspaper, and Radio)



3,587 e-Newsletter

recipients, and

16,895 opens



76,638 impressions

achieved through a partner campaign



820 people

participated across

9 in-person events



429 people

participated in the quick poll



975 people provided

feedback via the online survey



7 detailed submissions were

received from key stakeholders and interested community members

Quick poll results

Based on what you know now, which of the following management strategies do you feel is the most appropriate overall?		
Beach nourishment	Protection	Managed retreat
16%	57%	27%

Survey insights

Overall, how familiar are you with the issues facing our southern beaches?

Very familiar	Heard of them but don't know much	Somewhat familiar	Not familiar at all
51%	8%	40%	1%

Based on what you know now, which of the following management strategies do you feel is the most appropriate overall?

Beach nourishment	Managed retreat	Protection
25%	36%	39%

Of the options available for Merewether Beach and Dixon Park Beach, which is your most preferred?

Option 1: Maintain seawall + amenity sand nourishment	Option 2: Maintain seawall + managed partial retreat	Option 3 + Bar Beach option 1: Mass sand nourishment,
42%	46%	12%

Of the options available for Bar Beach, which is your most preferred?

Option 1: Mass sand nourishment (includes Merewether Beach)	Option 2: Seawall + amenity sand nourishment	Option 3: Seawall setback 12m + amenity sand nourishment	Option 4: Managed retreat
12%	39%	16%	33%

Next steps

City of Newcastle will continue to review and analyse the outcomes of community consultation and incorporate feedback as part of the acceptability review, a key component of Stage 3 under the NSW Coastal Management Framework. The acceptability of options, and the drivers behind community preferences, will be considered alongside technical, environmental and economic evaluations to inform decision-making on preferred long-term management actions. City of Newcastle may seek additional community input on a long-term solution as we progress through Stage 3 to further test acceptability.

The proposed management approach for Newcastle's Southern Beaches will be documented in the draft Coastal Management Program, which will be placed on public exhibition in Stage 4. This will provide a further opportunity for the community to review the proposed approach and provide feedback before the CMP is finalised.

City of Newcastle will continue to keep the community informed as the project progresses and provide opportunities for the community to have their say at key stages of the CMP development process.