

**SYDNEY COASTAL  
COUNCILS GROUP**

**2023-24**

# **ANNUAL REPORT**

**Sydney Coastal Councils Group Inc.**

[www.sydneycoastalcouncils.com.au](http://www.sydneycoastalcouncils.com.au)

[info@sydneycoastalcouncils.com.au](mailto:info@sydneycoastalcouncils.com.au)



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## FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

As I reflect on another year as Executive Director of the Sydney Coastal Councils Group (SCCG), I am pleased to see consistent strong and positive feedback from Member Councils on SCCG's capacity and collaboration programs and its advocacy work. I would also like to draw attention to some of the SCCG's key achievements this year.

Throughout 2023-24 the SCCG has continued to work towards a collaborative, effective and consistent approach to coastal and estuarine management between Local Government, State Agencies and other stakeholders. This has included the continued success in the Get the Site Right campaign with all nine SCCG Member Councils participating with an increase in developer compliance. The SCCG's continued advocacy for Manly's endangered Little Penguins, supported by our role on the Recovery Team and media coverage from ABC Radio and Channel 9, reinforces the SCCG's commitment to marine biodiversity protection. Additionally, the SCCG's role as a Parliamentary Witness at three inquiries highlights our active participation in shaping policy and addressing crucial environmental issues related to the sustainable management of our coastal environments.

I'm also pleased to see the NSW Government's commitment to regularly engage with the SCCG through quarterly meetings set up with Sydney Water, Transport for NSW, NSW Coastal Council and the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water. I understand that these meetings are highly valued by our members as it provides them with an opportunity to raise issues of concern, peer to peer learning, and to be engaged on each organisation's agenda.

Our collaboration with the scientific community remains vital, and we are proud to facilitate connections between Member



Councils and the Sydney Institute of Marine Science (SIMS), particularly through our Grants Committee.

Finally, I am proud of the SCCG Secretariat's achievements in 2023-24, preparing 14 advocacy submissions in consultation with our nine Member Councils. These addressed key issues like the NSW Beachwatch Program, prompting the Minister to extend the consultation period. Our Parliamentary participation and submissions on the Planning System & Climate Change, local government infrastructure funding, the NSW Reconstruction Authority Act, NSW Plastic Next Steps, and the Draft Disaster Adaptation Plan Guidelines demonstrate our commitment to critical environmental and policy issues. The Annual Survey confirms that advocacy remains a priority for our members.

I extend my thanks to all committee members, supporters, and the dedicated SCCG Secretariat for their hard work in advancing resilient and healthy coastal and estuarine environments

Sarah P. Joyce  
**SCCG Executive Director**



Image: Leichhardt, courtesy of Inner West Council

# ABOUT US

Established in 1989, the Sydney Coastal Councils Group Inc (SCCG) is a regional organisation of councils (ROC), advancing sustainable management of Sydney's urban coastal and estuarine environment.

The SCCG is made up of the Secretariat and three core Committees, namely the Executive Committee, General Managers Forum and Technical Committee.

The functions, operations, activities and committees of the SCCG are facilitated by the Secretariat and led by an Executive Director.

The General Managers Forum provides strategic direction and advice on the development and implementation of the SCCG Strategic Plan.

The Technical Committee enables council technical staff to exchange information, network and learn from their peers, collaborate on current and emerging needs and develop regional projects.

The Executive Committee undertakes decision-making on specific strategic and governance matters. The Executive Committee for the 2023-24 representation are below:

**Chairperson:** Cr Jack Boyd, Sutherland Shire Council

**Vice Chair:** Cr Miranda Korzy, Northern Beaches Council

**Treasurer:** Mayor Paula Masselos, Waverley Council

**Members:** Cr Heidi Lee Douglas, Bayside Council

Cr Dylan Griffiths, Inner West Council

Cr Shannon Welch, North Sydney Council

Cr Kathy Neilson, Randwick Council

Cr John Moratelli, Willoughby Council

Cr Lucinda Regan, Woollahra Council

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# SCCG VISION

Resilient and healthy coastal and estuarine environments that are protected, conserved and managed in a manner consistent with the principles of ecologically sustainable development.

# MISSION

Engaging with our members and their communities to lead sustainable management of our region's coastal and estuarine environment through collaboration, capacity building, advocacy and research.

# GUIDING PRINCIPLES

P1—Restore, protect and enhance the coastal environment, its associated ecosystems, ecological and physical processes and biodiversity.

P2—Facilitate the sustainable use of coastal resources, now and in the future.

P3—Promote adaptive, integrated and participatory management of the coast.

Image: Sydney Coastal Councils Group





# SCCG IN A SNAPSHOT

## OUR WORK IN 2023-24

Coordination of: **19** SCCG & Guest Presentations

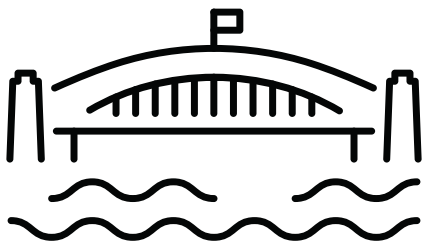
Involvement in: **65** External committees, meetings, workshops & events

Facilitation of: **25** Internal committee meetings

Advocacy via: **14** Comprehensive submissions

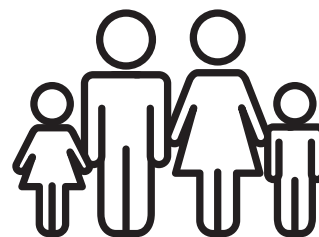
## OUR REGION

### Landscape



**801.29km<sup>2</sup>**  
total land area  
**87 beaches/**  
swimming sites

### Population



**1.2 million**  
Sydneyiders across  
**9 LGA's**

\*At the time of publication the Gross Regional Product (GRP) was unavailable



Image: Palm Beach, Northern Beaches Council

# FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE

The SCCG financial position for 2023-24 is provided below.

Total Income:	\$559,682
Total Assets:	\$840,380
Total Expenditure:	\$807,101
Total Liabilities:	\$461,268
Total Equity:	\$379,112

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# ANNUAL MEMBERS SURVEY SNAPSHOT

- 100% of SCCG members surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that SCCG's letters and submissions prepared on behalf of member Councils were of a high standard.
- Submissions on State and Federal Government reforms as well as formal correspondence to State and Federal authorities on issues of concern were identified as the most important advocacy activities for member Councils.
- 100% agreed or strongly agreed that the SCCG has built the capacity of their staff regarding coastal management and estuarine management.
- Presentations by experts, peers and state government representatives at meetings and peer-to-peer discussions were identified as the most useful capacity building service that SCCG provides.
- 87% of SCCG members surveyed agreed that they were satisfied with SCCG's performance in relation to access to expert/government stakeholders, access to additional information, access to networking and relationship building, and capacity building benefits.

Image: Elouera Beach, Sutherland Shire Council





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# GOAL 1 - COLLABORATION

Facilitate cooperation between, and coordination of actions by Member Councils

## SUMMARY

The SCCG represented members on several external committees and stakeholder workshops, enabling greater collaboration and partnerships; providing an interface of communication and ensuring SCCG remained up to date on emerging issues, programs and best practice approaches.

## HIGHLIGHTS INCLUDE:

- Development of the outer Sydney Harbour Coastal Management Plan (CMP), collaborating with Member Councils and stakeholders to address key coastal and estuarine management challenges. The project aims to provide a long-term, strategic approach to managing risks such as sea-level rise, erosion, and water quality, ensuring the sustainable protection of the Harbour's natural and community values.
- Continued participation of Member Councils in the Get the site Right (GTSR) campaign, which demonstrates a strong commitment to reducing sediment pollution and improving water quality across Sydney's waterways. In the most recent campaign, a total of 965 site inspections were conducted, with a marked improvement in compliance between initial and follow-up visits, which highlights the campaign's success in driving positive environmental outcomes.
- Facilitating NSW Coastal Council and Coastal Management Program Leader meetings with participating councils to identify impediments to raise with the Minister, while also benefiting from peer-to-peer learning. This ongoing collaboration has strengthened relationships and knowledge-sharing.
- Collaborating with a diverse range of stakeholders, the SCCG continues to take a proactive role in advocating for the protection of the endangered population of Little Penguins on Sydney's Northern Beaches. Through joint efforts, including educating the boating community and advocating for targeted conservation measures, this collaboration has contributed to the ongoing protection of this vulnerable species in our region.
- Development of over 9 advocacy submissions to the NSW Government on issues that relate to the SCCG's strategic objectives.
- Delivery of 12 capacity building meetings with member Council staff through the Sand Management Working Group, Technical Committee and Coastal Management Program Leaders meetings.
- Delivery of 19 expert presentations and/or peer-to-peer learning presentations through the Sand Management Working Group and Technical Committee.
- SCCG Representation on the Smart and Local Feedback Forum which seeks to build Councils capacity to deliver SMART technology and places.

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## ACTIVITIES

### **Development of the Outer Sydney Harbour Coastal Management Program**

The SCCG continues its commitment to the sustainable management of our coastal region by spearheading the development of coastal management program (CMP) for outer Sydney Harbour. This initiative will cover Stages 2-4 of the CMP process, in accordance with the NSW Coastal Management Framework, ensuring a strategic and coordinated approach to managing Sydney's coastal and estuarine environments.

CMPs are designed to set out a long-term strategy for the coordinated management of the coast. They identify coastal risks and opportunities, evaluate options to address those risks and opportunities, and recommend actions that can be implemented by councils and state agencies.

The study area for the Outer Sydney Harbour CMP is the coastal zone that extends eastwards from the confluence of the Parramatta River and Lane Cove River to the harbour entrance between North and South Head. It encompasses Port Jackson and Middle Harbour extending northwards to the tidal limit of Middle Harbour Creek. This area crosses seven local government areas and includes parts of Sydney Harbour National Park and Garigal National Park.

Key issues such as stormwater and sewage pollution, litter, coastal inundation, and degraded seawalls will be addressed. The CMP will focus on solutions that are not only locally tailored but also regionally consistent, promoting sustainable coastal adaptation, water quality improvements, litter prevention, and habitat restoration, such as for coastal wetlands and rainforests. Collaboration with key agencies, including National Parks & Wildlife Service (NPWS) and Sydney Water, will ensure a holistic approach to managing the harbour foreshore.

Building on the work from the Greater Sydney Harbour CMP (Stages 1 and 2), this project seeks to establish coordinated, regionally consistent approaches to emergency management, monitoring, and infrastructure adaptation. SCCG has applied for grant funding through the NSW Coastal & Estuary Grants Program and, if successful, anticipates commencing the project in late 2024.

Image: Hornby Lighthouse, Woollahra Council



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## Get the Site Right Campaign

The SCCG helped coordinate the eighth annual Get the Site Right Campaign in partnership with the Parramatta River Catchment Group, Cooks River Alliance, Georges River Keeper, WaterNSW, NSW EPA and NSW Department of Planning and Environment. The campaign targets erosion and sediment control on building sites with a particular focus this year on construction litter. The campaign aims to improve compliance with controls and raise awareness of the effects of sediment and litter laden runoff on our waterways.

All nine SCCG member councils participated in the month-long compliance and education campaign in May as well as a follow-up 'blitz week' in October. During May, SCCG member councils inspected 158 development sites, and issued about \$44,000 in fines.

Importantly, compliance rates increased from 10% on the first inspection to 57% on the second inspection during the campaign, reflecting significant improvement in adherence to erosion and sediment control measures. While this shows progress, it also demonstrates a continued commitment to protecting Sydney's local waterways.

Image: Parramatta River Catchment Group



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## Manly's Little Penguin Protection

SCCG continues to take a proactive role in protecting the endangered Little Penguin population on Sydney's Northern Beaches, particularly around Manly's Spring Cove area. This population is the last mainland breeding colony in NSW and face increasing threats from human activity, particularly boat strikes, habitat degradation, and disturbances in critical breeding areas.

In the 2023-24 breeding season, a worrying decline in the population was recorded, with only 19 breeding pairs remaining, highlighting the urgent need for targeted conservation efforts. To address this, SCCG had intensified its collaborations with key stakeholders such as Transport for NSW (Maritime), Northern Beaches Council, and the NSW NPWS. Together, these organisations are working to enhance public awareness and compliance with boating regulations specifically designed to protect the Little Penguins.

A cornerstone of SCCG's efforts is the educational video campaign aimed at the boating community, which promotes adherence to speed limits and the observance of no-anchor zones around critical penguin foraging habitats in Spring Cove. By educating boaters on the dangers posed by high-speed vessels and improper anchoring, the campaign seeks to mitigate the risk of penguin mortality and habitat disruption.

SCCG's ongoing media engagement is pivotal in amplifying this message. Appearances on platforms such as ABC Radio and Nine News have been instrumental in raising public awareness about the plight of the Little Penguins and reinforcing the importance of following boating rules. This outreach not only promotes species-specific conservation but also supports broader marine biodiversity protection efforts in the region. Through these initiatives, SCCG continues to lead in the promotion of the protection of one of Sydney's most iconic and vulnerable wildlife species.

Image: SCCG



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# GOAL 2 - CAPACITY BUILDING

Develop and exchange knowledge and tools to support the role and build the capacity of Members

## SUMMARY

The SCCG continued to build Member Council and stakeholder capacity through a range of forums. Twelve capacity building meetings with member Council staff were delivered through the Sand Management Working Group, Technical Committee and Coastal Management Program Leaders meetings. Nineteen expert presentations and/or peer-to-peer learning presentations were also made available to members through these forums.

Regular updates on coastal related news and policy were provided to members in the Coastal Currents quarterly newsletter as well as via direct email and webinars and workshops organised with key stakeholders including state and federal agencies.

Speakers from across NSW Government were also invited to attend SCCG's Technical Committee, CMP Leaders Meetings and Sand Management Working Groups to discuss progress of government projects and changes to legislation and policies. These meetings also provided important networking opportunities, peer to peer learning and information / knowledge sharing between member Councils.

Image: SCCG



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# INTERNAL COMMITTEE MEETINGS

## Technical Committee

The 'themed' technical committee meetings continue to receive positive feedback as an important capacity building tool for the SCCG and its members. The SCCG has facilitated four of these meetings in the period 2023/24:

- Water Quality – included presentations on water quality monitoring at swim sites and the NSW Government's Water Quality Objectives and its integration with DCCEE Science – Water Wetlands and Coastal Science Branch.
- Coastal and Estuarine Hazards – included presentations on coastal management reforms in practice with reference to Local Government, and Sydney Water wastewater incident response and notification process, including Noggin.
- SMART and Sustainable Cities – Sydney Water presented on their projects in prioritising and implementing wet weather overflow abatement programs, and the City of Melbourne's Data in the Park project, which involves collecting data from park sensors to identify park use patterns.
- Marine Biodiversity – Sydney Water presented on biodiversity analysis within the sediments of naturalised stormwater channels. Presentations also included urban habitat creation project updates from Woollahra Council and Northern Beaches Council.

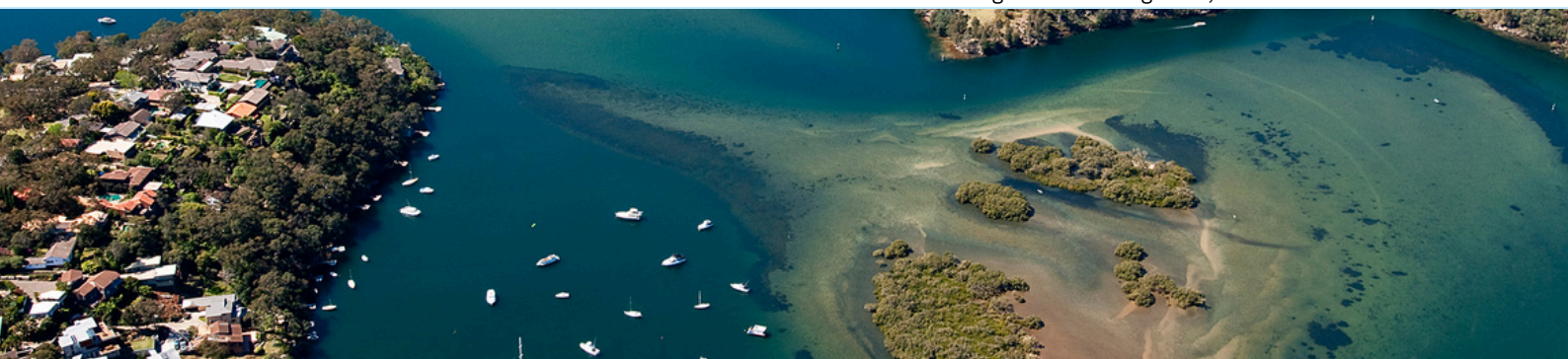
## Sand Management Working Group (SMWG)

The SMWG continues to meet quarterly to identify and workshop key issues relating to beach management. In 2023/24 the group heard several presentations on the following:

- Environmentally friendly strategies for shoreline protection
- Lady Robinsons Foreshore Management Plan, Bayside Council
- Stockton Beach Nourishment: from preferred solution to implementation
- Low-cost nature-based shoreline protection for estuaries and lagoons
- Kingscliff Foreshore Upgrade
- Mapping and investigating intertidal exposure on Australian shorelines using open-source satellite data
- NSW Beach Profile Database – Photogrammetry
- Bayside Council Beach Nourishment Approvals Experience
- North Cronulla Beach Works
- Port Hacking dredging and beach nourishment project
- The long-term instability of four estuaries on the NSW coast
- The National-Scale Beach Erosion Early Warning System
- Long-term monitoring program at Bengello Beach, Moruya

These presentations have guided SCCG Member Councils on coastal processes, information availability and potential management strategies for the ongoing threats posed by sea level rise and beach erosion.

Image: Port Hacking River, Sutherland Shire Council



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# GOAL 3 - ADVOCACY

Provide a regional and cohesive voice representing Member Councils.

## SUMMARY

Advocacy was a major focus for the SCCG in 2023-24, taking three main forms: i) formal submissions to government, ii) participation in relevant external committees and/or advisory bodies and iii) direct communications / correspondence with government agencies, elected representatives, and Ministers. The SCCG saw the development of over 14 advocacy submissions and letters to the NSW Government on issues that relate to the SCCG's strategic objectives.

## SUBMISSIONS

- SCCG Response Letter to Minister Sharpe re Beachwatch Consultation Extension – June 2024
- SCCG Letter to NSW Coastal Council re SCCG Introduction – June 2024
- SCCG Submission on NSW Reconstruction Authority Act 2022 – May 2024
- SCCG Submission on Draft Synthetic Turf in Public Open Space Guidelines for Decision-makers – April 2024
- SCCG Submission to NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into Ability of Local Governments to Fund Infrastructure and Services – April 2024
- SCCG Submission on National Adaptation Plan – April 2024
- SCCG Letter to Minister Sharpe re Proposed Changes to NSW Beachwatch Program – March 2024
- SCCG Joint Submission on NSW Plastics Next Steps Discussion Paper – February 2024
- SCCG Submission on Parliamentary Inquiry into Planning System – November 2023
- SCCG Positions Paper on Coastal Inundation and Sea Level Rise – October 2023
- SCCG Letter re the Shark Management Program – October 2023
- SCCG Joint Submission re the Revised ERSED Guidelines – October 2023
- SCCG Letter re State Leadership and Coastal Inundation – August 2023
- SCCG Submission – IPART Issues Paper Monitoring the NSW Biodiversity Credits Market – August 2023

SCCG submissions are available at [www.sydneycoastalcouncils.com.au/submissions/](http://www.sydneycoastalcouncils.com.au/submissions/)

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## **WHOLE OF GOVERNMENT APPROACH TO SAND MANAGEMENT**

The SCCG has continued to advocate for councils regarding access to sources of sand for beach nourishment and the need for a whole of government approach, in recognition of the support needed by councils in managing beaches.

As well as beaches being of value to residents, they are major attractions for tourism and support coastal economies. In 2016, the total value of Sydney's coastal beaches was estimated at \$1.3 billion per annum. These values go beyond the jurisdiction of councils and it should not be up to councils alone to maintain beaches.

Beaches are subject to periodic loss of sand from storms and require renourishment; sand may eventually return naturally but the time taken is extending due to increasing frequency and severity of storms. Climate change and sea level rise create tipping points now and increasingly into the future where sand loss from storms will not return to beaches.

Whilst there are a variety of sand sources such as land-based, nearshore sources and large offshore sources, the approval processes to access and deposit sand on beaches are complex and lengthy, adding time and cost to councils.

A key platform for action is the NSW State-wide Coastal Management Framework Interagency Working Group on which the SCCG has sought representation where it can advocate for the whole of government approach to beach nourishment and for a process for streamlining approvals under Councils' Coastal Management Programs.

## **QUALITY OF OUR SUBMISSIONS**

As part of the Annual Survey, the SCCG seeks feedback on how the SCCG is performing against our goal to provide a regional and cohesive voice representing our Member Councils and advocating for their interests.

Consistent with last year, 100% agreed or strongly agreed that the SCCG's submissions were of a high standard and that of all the activities that the SCCG undertakes, advocacy is the most important to member Councils. Particularly those advocacy activities that included submissions on State and Federal Government reforms as well as formal correspondence to State and Federal authorities on issues of concern.





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# GOAL 4 - RESEARCH

Identify and address current and emerging regional coastal issues.

## SUMMARY

During 2023-24, SCCG continued to engage with our government and academic partners to further our knowledge and promote and distribute research outcomes to our member councils.

## HIGHLIGHTS INCLUDE:

- Participation of Northern Beaches and Woollahra councils in Project Restore, under the NSW Government's Seabirds to Seascapes program. The project involves restoration sites for Posidonia seagrass and kelp forests and installation of Living Seawalls and artificial reefs. Outcomes of the research will inform restoration projects in other locations.
- Research partnership with the CSIRO through the delivery of the Smarter Cleaner Sydney Harbour Project to better understand the quantity and type of marine litter entering our waterways.
- Continued facilitation of member Councils engagement with academic partners through the Grants Committee, Technical Committee and Sand Management Working Group.

Image: Bronte Gully, Waverley Council

