

Our reference: MD09/1229

Tom Clarke
Secretary
Green Corridor Coalition Inc
PO Box 343
WALLSEND NSW 2287

15 MAY 2009

Dear Mr Clarke

I refer to your letter to the Hon Carmel Tebbutt MP, Deputy Premier, Minister for Climate Change and the Environment and Minister for Commerce, concerning the Hexham Swamp Rehabilitation Project. The Minister has requested that I respond on her behalf.

As you know, eight floodgates control tidal flow to and from Hexham Swamp. Floodgates will be opened in a staged manner to maximise the opportunity for transition of vegetation and habitats, without causing damaging effects on the receiving waters or resident communities.

The Hunter-Central Rivers CMA manages the tidal inundation of Hexham Swamp in accordance with 57 conditions set by the Department of Planning under Part 3A of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act. Under these conditions, the CMA must actively manage the gates for a period of not less than 6 months while undertaking a detailed monitoring program.

At the end of the 6 months, the CMA must convene a meeting of scientists to review the monitoring and make a recommendation to the Department of Planning to confirm if the effects of tidal inundation are within expected parameters. If the scientific review indicates that parameters are in line with expectation, the CMA can then apply to the Department of Planning for approval to go to the next stage and open the second of the eight gates.

Management of the floodgates is proceeding in a carefully planned approach. In order to prevent unexpected inundation during the initial phase of the project, the gates are closed to an opening of 0.6 metres whenever the height of the Hunter River exceeds 1.8 metres.

This precautionary approach is to allow the CMA to monitor the impact of tidal inundation while data is collected to test tidal inundation models. The aim is to prevent creation of pools over the summer months that could create breeding habitat for mosquitoes.

It is intended that gates will remain fully open during winter high tides in 2009 to validate the modelling outside the mosquito breeding season. If modelling results are confirmed, and monitoring confirms that the effects of inundation are consistent with anticipated results, the gates will remain fully open in subsequent summers.



Under agreement between the CMA and the Department of Environment and Climate Change (DECC), the gates will be automatically closed whenever a flood alert or flood warning is issued for the Hunter River or tributaries. On lifting the alert, the gates will be reopened to 0.6 metres by the Department of Lands, on instruction from DECC. The gates will remain at the 0.6 metre opening until the river height drops below the 1.8 metre trigger level. This procedure was adopted in the recent event outlined in your letter.

The Hunter-Central Rivers CMA is conscious of community expectations to return tidal inundation to the Hexham Swamp through active management of the Ironbark Creek floodgates.

Regarding the tyre dump on an adjacent property, this is on private land outside the project area managed by the CMA and is a pollution control matter outside its jurisdiction. The Newcastle City Council is the appropriate regulatory authority and maintains general surveillance of this site.

I trust this information addresses your concerns.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Richardson', with a large, stylized initial 'R'.

BARBARA RICHARDSON
Director Urban and Coastal Water Reform
Climate Change, Policy and Programs