



Avoca Beach to get a New Lifeguard Tower

A major source of interest (some would say controversy) in recent weeks has been the news that a lifeguard tower is to be erected on the beachfront. It has been claimed by the experts that such a tower will improve the vision of the beach, particularly on busy days, which will make the beach safer. It will also provide better working conditions for lifeguards, who are exposed to the elements.

There has been some conjecture about the need for such a tower, but the most angst has been on its proposed location. First indications that the front row of parking or part of the footpath were favoured spots were soon howled down by locals. A meeting of the Avoca Beach Community Assoc. passed a motion that Council be requested to leave the car park and the footpath alone. On the sand has been ruled out as we have witnessed the damage high seas can do in recent times. So, we had a dilemma.

The size of the tower was considered a problem by us as well. The model first proposed was at the North Entrance beach. It was 4.5 x 4.5m overall (20 sqm). We asked for smaller.

A meeting of Council officials, Lifeguard bosses, the Surf Lifesaving hierarchy, the Surf Club, and members of the ABCA was held in an attempt to come up with a solution. It was life member of the Surf Club and ABCA member, Mike Tamblyn, who came up with the favoured proposal by thinking outside the square. Mike has proposed that the tower be cantilevered over the rock wall just to the west of the boat ramp. The floor of the tower would be 2m off the ground, giving visual access to the beach for pedestrians. Stairs would go down to the sand. The box for the lifeguards would be 2.5m x 2.5m with a deck around 3 sides. Mike's plan aims at minimum disruption to the public and maximum utility for the lifeguards.

This plan is being considered and is favoured but not yet certain.

No doubt many will claim any tower to be an eyesore, a visual blight on our beautiful beach, conversely no-one is saying it will make the beach prettier. But towers feature on many beaches up and down the coast and it's hard to argue with the experts.

We visited lifeguard towers at North Entrance, Shelly Beach, Wamberal, and McMasters Beach, and spoke to the lifeguards there. All agreed that the towers made their jobs easier and were an asset to beach safety.

The photo is of Shelly Beach tower, built many years ago. The exact form of Avoca Beach's tower is still being determined and changes will probably occur, but it looks like a tower is headed our way.

Steve Fortey



Shelly Beach Lifeguard Tower

We Meet the Administrator

Recently Ian Carruthers and I met with the Central Coast Council's administrator, Rik Hart, the man charged with the responsibility for clearing up the financial mess of the newly amalgamated Council.

Some things were made clear from the start, such as both Gosford and Wyong Councils being in a poor position from the word go and unfit to embark on a merger. This was despite the state government's assurances to all councils across the state that a merger would save significant amounts of money and provide better services.

It emerged that the state government did little to oversee the merger, provide checks and balances and require reporting procedures from the newly merged Central Coast Council. It's apparent the NSW Government abrogated its responsibility as a watchdog. It was disappointing to hear from Mr Hart how frustrating it has been for him getting support from State government entities. In the past 12 months he has managed only one meeting with the Local Government Minister.

We asked a few pertinent questions, like:

1. Why should rate payers have to bail out an inefficient and incompetent Council by copping the current 15% rate rise for the next 7 years?

The answer from Mr Hart is that in order to operate at the current service level Council has obtained large loans from banks. It must repay these loans from surpluses generated over the next ten years.

2. How did these loans become so large?

This comes mainly because of Council spending more than it earned for several years. It appears this was mainly an effort to clear a backlog of work needing to be done and provide funding for new programs. This was seen as a short-term deficit that could be alleviated over a longer period. Also, in a bad start to the merger, the newly elected councillors were misled by the reporting of their financial position.

Mr Hart was keen to tell us Council is now trading successfully and is expecting a small surplus this financial year. However, it still has its massive debts to service.

In his first week as administrator Rik Hart received a demand from a bank asking for immediate repayment of a \$100m loan. Failure would have been catastrophic. The bank justified this, citing Council had met the definition of being insolvent. It was obviously a hectic introduction for Mr Hart and his new CFO, Natalia Cowley, who in a very stressful period managed to refinance.

Back to maintaining the 15% rate for 7 years. Mr Hart maintains it would be one of several strategies put in place, increased efficiencies and productivity being two major areas of saving money. The alternative is the loss of up to 250 jobs and a decrease in services.

3. How can ratepayers have confidence in Central Coast Council anymore?

Mr Hart produced the following facts and figures:

- Better financial management and accountability. Monthly financial reporting, tighter budget management, stabilised leadership.
- Reduced spending. Capital works from \$242m to \$175m. Savings on contracts \$20m. Reduced employee costs \$30m. Reduction of 40% in senior managers.
- Asset sales over \$60m. Consolidated administration overheads (sale of Gosford building)
- Productivity improvements. Service (customer call centre) and IT system consolidation. More efficient work programs and practice.

4. Having achieved some semblances of stability, how long do you expect to be in the job?

September next year is when Mr Hart expects a newly elected Council, and he is looking forward to fading into retirement.

5. How can we expect the newly elected Councillors to maintain the pathway to financial stability?

They will be left a strict financial plan that cannot be deviated from. Councillors will have more intense financial training and only two years to prove their worth before the next Council elections. We also have a very good CEO and CFO.

Rik Hart was at pains to say on several occasions that he understood the anger of residents over the Council debacle and the consequent rate rises.

Our opinion?

The Administrator has taken on a mammoth job, he is experienced, and he knows his stuff.

There needs to be short term pain to get a wayward Council back on track.

He has a convincing (but not very comforting) argument for the need to maintain the current rates for a further seven years.



Council services. Will they deteriorate further?

The big test

The big test will be the setting up the newly elected Councillors to continue badly needed reforms.

Cometh the hour, cometh the man?

We hope so.

The results of the public inquiry into Central Coast Council will be interesting, but they will not make our dire financial situation go away.

Steve Fortey

President's Report

It was a relief to finally be able to hold a general meeting last month. Although numbers were a little down on previous meetings. I put that down to inadequate communication on my part and the fact that the AGM was held also. Many know that AGMs are good to avoid.

In an encouraging sign that something is right, positions were filled at the AGM for the next year:

President: Steve Fortey Vice President: Ian Carruthers

Treasurer: Robert Burns Secretary: Carol Fortey

Committee members are: Angela Kennedy, Michael Scobie, Colin Tipney, Virginia Riley, and Mike Rubbo.

I would like to thank all committee members for the great support they have given me over the past years and look forward to continuing with such a competent, enthusiastic bunch, all with the good of Avoca Beach as their motivation.

Good news recently as we were preparing for another bout with developers at the State Local Planning Panel. On this occasion it was a second DA for the Bangaloe Stud (their first one had been knocked back). Days before appearing at the panel to oppose this proposal we were informed that the developers, Living Choice, had decided to withdraw the DA. A welcome decision.

We continue to wait for news on the amended DA for Saltwater Estate. No approval yet that we know about.

And we are just getting over the loss of opportunity through Council's failure to take advantage of Bob Pickett's generous offer of acreage for community use. A beautiful parkland with a vibrant creek flowing through it would have been such a wonderful asset.

There has been a changing of the guard at Avoca Sharks Rugby Club and Mick Burgess has been announced as the Club Coach for the upcoming season. Mick has been a rugby stalwart for the Central Coast for many years and a hard-working development officer for NSW rugby. He takes the reins from Club Legend Fuzz (Justin

Staben) and is set to continue the great tradition of strong coaching we have had for many years. Welcome Mick, and best wishes for a great 2022 season. To Fuzz, we say many thanks for your enormous contribution to the Avoca sporting community.



Landcare in action near the shark tower.

Thanks to Graeme Murray our first Landcare event was a great success with 15 participants who, despite the weather, took on the daunting task of eradicating noxious weeds by the walkway to the shark tower. A heap of asparagus fern and lantana plants, plus the odd bits of rubbish have been cleared in a productive first outing. Plans are in place for the next session in a few weeks and you'll be notified on the Friends of Avoca site.

A big thanks to all those who contributed to this issue, it really is a team/community effort. If you would like to contribute to the next issue, please let us know on avocabeachca@gmail.com

Steve Fortey

Editorial credits: Steve Fortey: Editor | Julie Pickett: Advertising

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Also if you'd like to contribute to the newsletter, get in touch.**

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(Donations also welcome.) Providing your email enables us to send you local information.



Why Is My First draft So Crap? 5 Reasons Why You Should Keep Writing.

So starts a post on Adrienne Ferreira's website for aspiring writers. Adrienne runs six-week introductory and advanced courses locally, with **Bravewords Writing Studio**. She knows it takes courage to write, to break through the barrier from trepidation to elation, then despair and back again, hence the name of her business. She's written a very well received novel herself called *Watercolours*, which was not at all a quick or easy process, and she completed a Master's Degree in creative writing, both of which have well-prepared her to help others in our community.

A chance conversation with Mick and Jenny Kilp at their paddle boat business on the lake earlier this year led to the couple signing up for Adrienne's course. Both confessed an urge to write, feeling that they had stories to tell, but doubting if anyone would be interested. Meeting together with others in the same boat once a week, sharing their assignments and seeing the impact of their words helped to break down their doubts so that their voices became more bold and confident.

Adrienne has some preoccupations, which show up both in her novel and when advising students. She feels that a sense of place is important in creative writing; evoking place helps stories to be specific in interesting ways, something she focused on with the country town in her story, based in part on the small town in which she grew up. She thinks research is important too, as in the case of *Watercolours*, for which she researched the history of silk farming in Australia and made that a part of the life of her fictional town.

For the course, too, she researched, discovering that the most common impulse to write in a community like ours is to set down life experiences. It's not the only motivation of course, but one most likely to pull in students, so she designed a creative nonfiction course, **Telling True Stories**, and opened for business just over a year ago.

Each of her courses has been fully subscribed, 8 people meeting each week to learn some writing craft, share a newly written piece and have it critiqued in a supportive atmosphere. The feedback has been great. What sort of talent has Bravewords unlocked? Adrienne has decided to share pieces by students, Jenny and Mick.

Jenny's father was a poet. She grew up enjoying his writing, and English was her favourite subject at school. At university she was good at essays, but she always wondered if she had any creative talent.

"In the back of my mind I thought I'd write a book one day. I didn't know for sure what I wanted to write about, fiction or nonfiction, but the course just let me explore what I could write. I didn't realise how much of an art it is, and how when you're writing you're doing so not just for yourself, but for the reader. I was really surprised at how much there was to learn, and I was so pleased to learn it. If you're thinking you're not ready to write, you go to the course and suddenly you're doing it — it's happening!"

Each week in **Telling True Stories** students are given a short assignment based on a writing prompt. This was one of Jenny's responses:

The Real World Goes Like This

by Jenny Kilp

It's a princess in a castle, waiting for her prince to save her from the bad guy in the back street, smoking cigarettes and glancing sideways.

It's the flowers in the market, beautiful and bold, but soon they'll fade and die and I haven't worked out why.

It's the bream on my plate that I now won't eat 'cos I just found out it was once a living thing.

It's the bleak and rainy weather on the bloody fields of battle, while the generals feast on pheasant and sleep in feather beds.

It's the stench of sweaty workers in the hot and steamy smelters making steel, so our cities can shine.

It's the lady in an apron in the city slum soup kitchen, caring for the souls who weep when no one's watching.

But there's nothing real in this world.

Everything is real in this world.

What is real?

Sometimes, when I'm still and listen and the chatter in my head has ebbed, I see beyond the hum of the cars passing by, the tick of the clock, the call and response of the neighbourhood dogs, the twitter of birds and wind in the trees and the beat of my heart.

Then, the real world goes like this:

It's a friend on the phone in a knowing tone, asking me out for tea

It's a walk in the park on a bright sunny day and a picnic under a tree

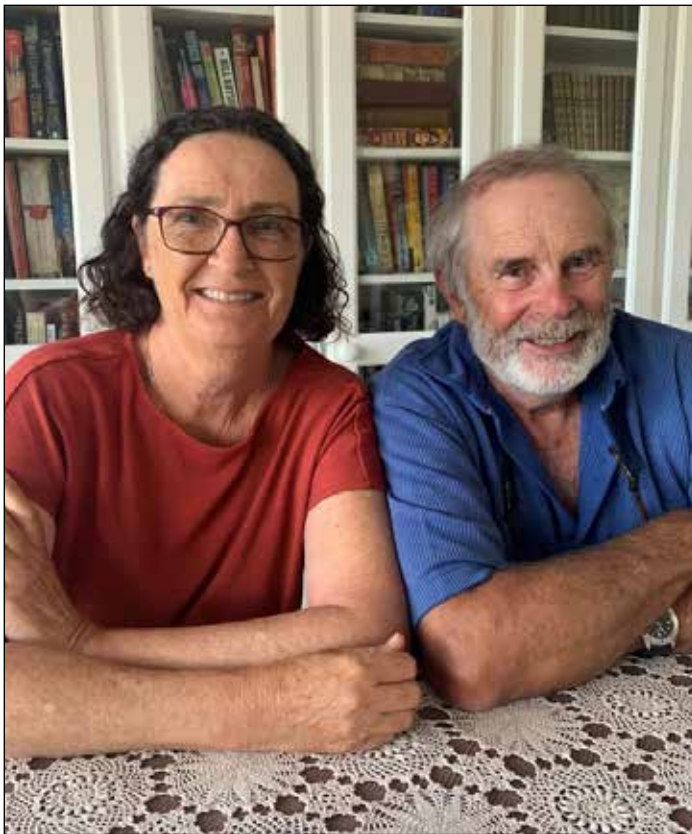
It's the colours of the sunset on a crisp autumn day and the way he smiles at me.

Everything is real in this world.

But nothing is real in this world.

BRAVEWORDS





Mick has been a voracious reader ever since he was a kid. He read all the classics from a young age and still tears through several books a week. He's also a natural storyteller.

"I've always been an observer — I find so many things interesting and I'd tried writing before, but I always got stuck. Doing the course was like being given a key. It unlocked things that I just couldn't access before. It gives you the tools to write and the know-how. And more than anything the confidence, especially being part of a group; you realise your writing isn't so bad, and you think, I'll be a bit more creative and take more risks. There are so many stories bubbling inside me. And there's nothing like a deadline to make you write!"

The prompt for this piece was to write about a detailed technical task, something you know how to do that others may not, but in a way that is vivid and engaging, rather than dry.

She came into my life while on her way to Tokyo

By Michael Kilp

She came into my life while on her way to Tokyo, graceful and stunning. Though many had come before and many since, she was special. I embraced her. Despite her desperate attempts to break free, I was determined to subdue her. We were of similar height and weight, but she was out of her element.

I plunged my knife in up to the hilt. Her essence drenched me. We slipped and slid on the wetness.

Next, my coring tool hammered between her eyes. I removed skin, gristle, bone and brains, exposing her spinal cord. A two-millimetre stainless steel wire was then inserted down her backbone, severing her every nerve. A quick death, for I am an experienced executioner.

I was the slaughterman on the MV Seaquest, a 42 foot tuna longliner, eighty miles east of Newcastle in the mid 1980's.

All I ever wanted in life was to get up close and learn about marine creatures. A hero in my youth was Jacques Cousteau. I vowed to follow in his footsteps, but a lack in science and mathematics at school meant my marine biologist career was doomed. I took a different path.

She was given a two-hour bath in icy brine to plunge her core temperature. This stopped the enzymes in her flesh decaying her muscle tissue. Packed in ice below deck, she was joined by many of her brothers and sisters, until there was no more room. The twenty kilometres of fishing line retrieved, we headed for port, the slaughter over for this trip. Within seventy-two hours, my beauty winged her way to Japan and her final resting place.

I often recall our chance encounter all those years ago with sadness, and I wonder in the great scheme of things about forgiveness and karma.

Telling True Stories Writing Course beings again on 28th January at the Erina Centre. Visit www.bravewords.com.au for more information, and to read Adrienne's blogpost *Why Is My First Draft So Crap?*



Big Day at the point. Photo David Benson



Duncan at dawn, first to a coffee



Now, that's satisfying work



Avoca Beach is a place full of tradies and we've never done a story on one. So, in a nod to all our hard-working tradies, here goes:

Jack Mitchell is a tall gangling fellow with an engaging smile. He is a third-generation builder, following on from his well-known builder dad, John Mitchell. It seems like he never really wanted to do anything other than build. He remembers before he even started school, he'd sometimes ride to construction sites with his dad and Pat and Steve, the bricklayers, "would lift me up with my little pointing trowel and some offcut bricks, and I'd be building my own little wall, even using mortar." Then, when he did make it to school apparently, so rumour has it, Jack asked the teacher on his first day, what time was the smoko. What else could he become but a builder?

Jack apprenticed with his dad in 2004 when he was 16. He is now 33, has four kids, one 9 weeks old, and has built 4 houses on his own license with quite a few renovations in between. He doesn't have to advertise. Word-of-mouth, the good opinion of those for whom he has built houses, like ABCA president, Steve Fortey, helps, he admits. "It all comes through referrals. My dad has laid down a good platform for us, the younger generation. My brother's a builder as well."

As well as Steve's place, he's done a big house up on Cape Three Points and a very interesting project at Catherine Hill Bay where he's done additions and alterations to a 130 years old miners hut. He enjoyed the connection with history, the little we have.

He doesn't seem to find building particularly stressful although there is the pressure of the seven-year warranty that hangs over your work and the possibility of it costing a lot of money if you have to fix things. For the client though, having a house built is the biggest expense many people will ever have in their lives, and of course they're very nervous about it. He finds that it helps that his previous customers are happy to talk through the process with somebody contemplating a build, go over the unknowns they faced themselves

Jack is as much a manager, as hands-on builder these days with lots of trades coming on site. He has his own team of carpenters and other skills he trusts. Do you take the job home I ask? Well, he and his wife, Abbey, his partner, do the office work at home at night and before the kids get up of a morning. He tries not to work on the weekends.

How have building practices changed in the years he's been a builder, I ask? All the tools are battery-powered these days. Back in the day there were extension cords all over the site but now the choice of battery powered tools is endless, reciprocating saws, planes, trimmers even battery-operated circular saws and so the cords are gone.

Any room left for the old handsaw and hammer; I ask?" We use nail guns a lot of the time but I've still got a hammer on my belt and use it to do a lot of persuading." "What's persuading?" "Knocking things into place. Then, pulling nails is still a big part of the hammer's job. The old handsaw 's still useful too because a circular saw only goes down a certain depth."

In 2009, before the kids came along, he and Abbey travelled Australia in what he calls his troop carrier, an all-purpose vehicle he's still got. He was teaching carpentry to young indigenous guys in communities north of Alice Springs, the Gulf and Boroloola while living in both Katherine and Darwin.

They came home for a bit, and then when Sanden was born, they moved to Croker island off the Coburg Peninsula, a place with a population of around 400. There is no phone

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Whilst Jack taught carpentry again, Abbey worked in a role that supported local youth workers. Often their projects overlapped which meant they could travel to these remote parts of the territory together, enjoying working side by side and all the while getting paid to do it.

The fishing up there was second to none, says Jack: "Keeping us occupied out of work hours, though I probably enjoyed catching these beauties a bit more than Abbey!"



In the dry season people would move around, visiting distant relatives on the mainland," their ingenuity in keeping bashed up old cars running was just amazing," he says. Getting off the island when it was time to go home, turned out to be touch and go. The tide rise and fall is 6 metres, and if you miss it you're in real trouble. That day the fishing boat owner had trouble with his motor, and they started late to cross the 2 km channel. They got to the other side

at 4 PM with still a hundred metres of water between them and the shore. "Get going, Mate said the boat owner, or we'll both be stuck here all night."



"It was almost a metre deep when I drove off onto soft sand. I had a snorkel of course but any moment the engine could have sucked in water and that would have been it for the old troop carrier and all our possessions, facing a rising tide. We made it, though. All good experiences," says Jack with a laugh, as we turn to have a look at the house he's building now on Ficus Avenue by our tranquil lake. It's up on a slab a precaution against water rising here for other reasons.

Like most tradies, Jack has plenty of stories. When he was working on the surf club at Wamberal there was a bloke leaning over the fence looking at the Styrofoam blocks they were putting down. Blocks which when locked together, make a flat surface on which you could pour concrete. "What are those for?" The bloke on the fence asks. Well, when the tide comes in, the surf club will float, Jack's mate replies. Mike Rubbo



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The Club appreciates the continued support of all our local businesses, sponsors & supporters

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More info by email at avocasharks@gmail.com



The Rock Pool. Is there a solution?



Recently we were sitting on the surf club balcony looking down on the rock pool, which really deserves its name, being a mess of dangerous rocks so hazardous that few parents will let their kids paddle in it. It's such a shame because the location is beautiful and the need for a wading pool for little ones, is great.

With me were Spike Jones, well known surf club identity and John Mitchell who built the surf club. Neither were around when, 50 years ago, a bulldozer in rapid time scraped the rocks into the horseshoe form they are now in. Sand used to cover the bottom but in recent times that rarely happens.

The opinion locally is that the pool became worse after the recent foreshore works and that Council missed an opportunity to improve the pool.

But before we get to that, a bit of history. Spike was one of those who helped get the ball rolling on something much more ambitious, an ocean pool like those of we see on other beaches. It was in the early 90's when a receptive Robert Bell was Mayor. Plans were drawn up to put an ocean pool within the existing circle of rocks, and the money was there to pay for it.

Unfortunately, the need for the pool to be pumped out from time to time with the outfall to go somewhere near 'Muggs' Rock, didn't please the surfers of the day who successfully lobbied against the project. There is no chance now, given council finances and how hard it is these days to get things done, that we'll ever have an ocean pool.

But there are other things that can be done. The way was shown by Greg Pearce, a council engineer and also a member of the surf club. On a really low tide, also back in the 90s, Greg got a machine in to scrape the rocks

from the bottom and push them to the northern side of the horseshoe, leaving room for sand to accumulate. Memory has it that he got down to flattish bedrock quite easily and quickly though that can't be checked because Greg is no longer with us.

We asked for a meeting with Council. As fate would have it, on the day we met sand had come back to the pool making it a kid's heaven for the first time this year. Mother nature was playing with us. But our Council officers were aware of the problem and a range of options was discussed.

Council is now considering the following options. Scraping and the moving of the loose rock bed back to the northern wall, to allow sand to come back in to fill cavity as it did before (the Greg Pearce option). John Mitchell's idea of extending the current rock wall up the beach to prevent sand from being washed away was received favourably. And the removal of those pesky rocks on and just underneath the surface of the beach itself is also on the Council's agenda. There is no guarantee of course and the sea has its own ways, but council admits to having been aware of the problem for a long time and seems now to have finally been nudged to action.

How fast will things happen? Gone are the days of Greg Pearce and his one day scrape. But as the holiday season approaches, when the pool is most needed and little feet are most in danger, we hope the busy time won't be used as an excuse for putting the job off. Where there's a will there's a way as the saying goes.

Thanks to Michael Scobie for initiating the meeting.

Mike Rubbo and Steve Fortey



Shark Tales

Not everyone likes talking about sharks because it reminds us of our own fragility in the ocean. Humans are a squishy species with no hard outer protection, relatively poor swimming abilities and pathetic teeth, but we like to splash about in an environment filled with species that have exceptional swimming ability, thick skin and very sharp teeth. Recently, there have been a few local surfer/shark encounters and a White Shark washed up on the beach near the tower at Avoca in mid-October (see picture), so let's talk sharks.



Sharks are a tricky subject as they are fascinating, ancient creatures but they scare the pants off most people. As a result, the line between shark conservation and human protection is very contentious in Australia. The Shark Meshing (Bather Protection) Program (SMP) was first introduced in NSW 1937 and is run by the Department of Primary Industries (DPI - Fisheries), which is the same department that list shark netting as a key threatening process in NSW due to the threat to a variety of marine species.

The SMP runs from 1 September – 30 April between Wollongong and Newcastle and includes 51 beaches. The job of supply, maintenance, inspection and clearing of the nets goes to various contractors, who are required to check their set nets every 72 hours weather permitting. In the Central Coast South region, Terrigal, North Avoca, Avoca, Copa, Macs, Killcare and Umina are netted. It is important to note that the shark nets do not go from one end of the beach to the other, top to bottom. They are 150 metres in length and 6 metres deep and are set mid water, approximately 500 metres from the shore. Thus, they cover only a very small portion of the beach but still manage to capture many animals of various species.

In 2020-2021, a total of 375 marine animals were caught in the SMP, including 40 target

sharks (24 White Sharks, 10 Bull Sharks and 6 Tiger Sharks – termed target species as they are deemed to be the greatest risk to humans). The remaining 335 species captured were non-target species including other species of sharks, rays, turtles, finfish, dolphins, seals and two Humpback Whales. Of the 375 species captured, only 38% were released from the nets alive.

Many of the non-target species captured are listed as threatened species under various state and federal legislation, which means the SMP is in breach of DPI Fisheries own environmental laws. However according to DPI Fisheries, the SMP has reduced the rate of interactions between target sharks and humans – which is the reason the program has not been scrapped. Since the SMP commenced, there has reportedly been only one fatality and 36 unprovoked encounters (9 of which were target sharks) at the 51 meshed beaches.

Aerial surveys from helicopters have been introduced to the SMP with mixed results as turbidity in the water can have a huge effect on sighting success from the air. Under this program, observers on the helicopters can send real time alerts to the NSW SharkSmart App and Twitter. Beachgoers can then be notified when there is a target shark in their area. In addition, the DPI Fisheries shark tagging project using SMART drumlines also sends alerts to the SharkSmart App and Twitter. The SMART drumlines are used to catch the target sharks, which are then fitted with tags. Tagged sharks can be detected on a network of 21 real-time listening stations on the NSW coast that are located from Tweed Heads to Merimbula. When a shark swims within 500 metres of one of the listening stations, an instant alert is sent to the app and Twitter. This type of alerting system isn't for everyone though – I personally cannot think of anything worse than being constantly pinged when there is a target shark near me, however others really value this type of warning system.

In addition, DPI Fisheries contract to Council/Surf Life Saving to employ drone operators on weekends and during school holidays (except in winter) to monitor for sharks at some of the busier beaches, which is proving to be a useful tool.

But all that said, there are no guarantees in life and no amount of human intervention can make the ocean risk free. The thing that comforts me when I'm out in the water is the fact that there is usually a line of crazy lizards swimming 500 metres further off the beach than me, acting as a first line of defence.

Kristy McQueen

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Avoca Lagoon – Flood Risk – New Study

Avoca Lagoon is a jewel for Avocans and visitors providing recreational, sporting, ecological and visual benefits. At the same time, the Lagoon is prone to ecological challenges and climate hazards.

The climate hazards include flooding caused by intense rainfall events, inundation of the lake shore proximate to the sea driven by ocean storms, and climate change.

Central Coast Council recently released a new Flood Study for Avoca Lagoon and its catchment (as well as for the other 3 coastal lagoons). The study was performed by Manly Hydraulics Laboratory – the last flood study was done over a decade ago.

The study addresses the connection between intense rainfall events in the Lagoon catchment, flood levels in the Lagoon and its tributary streams, excess stormwater flowing overland, and exposure of properties.

(The risks for beach foreshore properties at the Lagoon entrance from ocean inundation were analysed in studies and mapping (Appendix 5) for the Gosford Beaches Coastal Zone Management Plan (2017)).

Based on past events, the main areas around the Lagoon exposed to flooding are summarized in the diagram below.



Flooding Avoca Drive and Bowling Club May 1 1998 after 250mm of rain

Climate change is projected to progressively increase the intensity of rainfall events and to raise sea levels. Manly Hydraulics basically concluded that these climate change effects will not have a significant impact on lagoon flood levels before late this Century. (In the case of the tributaries flowing into the lagoon, increasing rainfall intensities do have some impact on stream flood heights – about 0.1-0.2m increase for a 100 year frequency rainfall event.)

Council manages flood risk for properties around the lagoon by two means. First, it periodically reduces the fluctuating height of a small section of the berm. Second, an instrument (location shown on image above) constantly measures water levels and when the lagoon reaches a height of 2.09 metres (AHD), Council brings in a machine to breach the berm causing the lagoon to discharge to the ocean.

Potentially, there could be circumstances (eg safety of Council staff) when breaching the berm cannot be performed. If the berm remains in place, in the example of a 100 year frequency (statistically) rainfall event, the lagoon is estimated to reach a water level of 3.0 metres (AHD).

The study provides estimates of flood damage costs for a range of flood intensities. For a flood event with a 100 year frequency, with the berm unbreached, 181 residences and 25 commercial properties are estimated to be affected, with a damage cost of \$23 million.

Whilst Avocans are blessed in living in a beautiful location, there are associated natural hazards which we need to be aware of. For that reason, as a community, we should take an interest in work by Council to identify the risks and to develop plans and strategies which will make our community more resilient. As well, we should consider what steps we as individuals should take for personal safety and to protect our properties.

Ian Carruthers



Image of Avoca Lagoon Catchment and Flood Prone Locations (Source: Manly Hydraulics report)

The new flood risk report is technical in nature and can serve several purposes - including a revised Flood Risk Management Plan (which Council will prepare); informing the community on flood preparedness; and pricing property insurance

The sand berm at the beach acts as a dam with the lagoon water level perched about 1 metre above sea level (AHD – a standard survey reference). The state of the sand berm is key in determining flood risk during any severe climate event.

Flood heights in the lagoon are primarily driven by intense rainfall events in the catchment area, and the ocean has little effect.



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