

Sand Nourishment for Stockton : What is the Timeline & why won't you tell us?

Here is a longer version of an opinion piece drafted in April 2021 that notes that no timeline exists that can tell Stockton community and beach users ; **When will mass sand nourishment place sand on Stockton Beach?** . By our estimates, even under the most optimistic scenarios, we anticipate a date no earlier than 2 years from now. With no other action, or options on the table, the community can only expect and plan for further coastal retreat.

So the community asks: **Tell Us the Timeline!!**

While not explored here, we think that there are other options that can halt the shoreline retreat in the meantime. For now – the key message to take away is that feasible projects have real timelines and schedules. While schedules often slip, this is far better than having no schedule at all.

In the last 3 years Stockton community has witnessed progressive loss of their beach amenity caused by unchecked erosion. 45m of recent beach recession adjacent to Corroba oval now provides a threat that might eventually separate the peninsula from the mainland. Given diverse opinions from some state groups over the causes of erosion problems, the Stockton Community Group recently commissioned its own report from certified coastal engineers ICM headed by respected engineer, Angus Jackson, to obtain a clear explanation as to what has caused the accelerated erosion at Stockton. ICM report notes: “the interruption of sand supply and resulting starvation of sand to Stockton Beach is most significantly due to the changes to the harbour entrance and port”. While these causal factors have been known from past studies, the level of inaction at actually replenishing the sand is ongoing. Sourcing offshore sand for this purpose remains the subject of changes to State legislation that were put in place to stop sand extraction. Today NSW Coastal Management Plans (CMP) remain unable to use such sand. From a community perspective, the CMP process, introduced in 2016, appears fundamentally flawed to deliver an actual timeline that would successfully place sand back on Stockton Beach. The August 2020 Stockton CMP would appear to have endorsed an unfunded aspiration that remains not feasible today and with no communicated timeline. Our intent is to explain our reasoning behind these assertions, and to ask our leaders to tell us the timelines that places mass sand on Stockton Beach.

In December 2020 Stockton beach is one of only 2 NSW sites to have an endorsed CMP, yet when we look at what was endorsed back in August 2020 the community has concerns. The intent of any CMP is to identify feasible means of addressing erosion problems, doing appropriate ranking and selection, before seeking state funding. The Stockton 2020 CMP asked for 3 costed items; 50,000 m3 of placed quarry sand, extension to two seawalls, by so called revetments, with an upgrade to the main seawall that has visibly sunk, and lastly funds for continued studies. The 2020 CMP also spoke of the aspiration for mass sand nourishment noting possible offshore and river channel sources – yet both of these options were not feasible at the time, and therefore not costed. In the 9 months following CMP endorsement, the placed quarry sand option has been replaced by the aspiration of dredged river sand, one of the four revetments replaced by a plan to use rock bags using emergency funds, and timelines concerning sea-wall updates and revetments are not available. The river sand option needed further state funds to undertake suitability studies including assessments of placing that sand at Stockton (and by whom and at what cost). Where this becomes complex is that there is existing NSW approvals (dating back to 2004) to dredge the south arm river channel and dump this sand offshore in spoil grounds. The current state significant GasDock project explicitly states (on a NSW govt. website) that such approvals to dredge and dump that sand offshore have been obtained. This may be an error on the govt website, but it provides little comfort to Stockton community. If GasDock goes ahead who will incur their project cost increase and schedule delays if the dredged sand is used at Stockton? What if GasDock does not go ahead?

Eg On the Scoping Report found at :

<https://www.planningportal.nsw.gov.au/major-projects/project/25051>

We have (on page 5/123):

*Once the Terminal was built, the equipment would be tested and commissioned. In building the Terminal, the shipping channel in the south-arm of the Hunter River would need extending. Approval for this was granted in 2013 (DA-134-3-2003-i) and it does not form part of the proposed Terminal. The Terminal would make use of this approval in dredging the channel **and disposing of these materials at existing dumping grounds**, which are about five kilometres offshore of the Port of Newcastle.*

(as noted above with think this information on the govt. website is not 100% correct)

Stockton Beach has received welcome attention from the Deputy Premiers task force in finding suitable sand sources for mass nourishment. Despite Task Force formation and press releases, the community is yet to learn of an actual timeline as to when sand might appear on Stockton Beach. While Stockton Beach has a certified 2020 CMP, a check of allocated NSW project funding shows that current funding winner is Warilla beach (now the third certified CMP) in the Shell Harbour area, where their council is embarking on a 15 million project to rejuvenate seawalls with nearly 7 Million dollars of State funding announced in the 2020-21 funding cycle. The irony today is CoN with aspirations for mass sand nourishment, have a certified CMP but no funds, no feasible project to place sand, and no timelines.

Eg see:

<https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/topics/water/coasts/coastal-management/programs/coastal-management-program-report-card>

<https://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/7189558/council-agrees-to-15-million-project-to-tackle-warilla-beach-erosion/>

<https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/news/over-11-6-million-to-support-coastal-works-across-the-illawarra>

Mass sand nourishment for Stockton is likely a good technical solution but given today's lack of feasibility in NSW, the timeline to actually place sand on Stockton beach will remain of the order of several years at best. We therefore ask our State leaders to comment on what feasible timeline can we expect for mass sand placement on Stockton Beach? As a final comment, we again refer to the study commissioned by Stockton Community group by ICM, who recommend: "Given the clear interaction of the harbour infrastructure with the coastal processes, the port, including both the owner and lease holder, needs to be involved with any proposed solution."