



## **Public Address to Meeting of Sutherland Shire Council**

**28 April 2026**

### **Waterway Planning Proposal PLN008-26**

Good evening and thank you for the opportunity to speak.

I represent the Woronora River Community Association and serve as a Council-appointed Community Representative on the Catchment and Waterways Reference Group.

There is strong, well-documented community opposition to this rezoning proposal. This is demonstrated by the open letter to Council, the numerous emails you have received, the verbal presentations at the March Council meeting, and public comment in the press.

Sonja Scherer, Chair of Southern Shores Reconciliation, so eloquently describes how the impacts would affect far more than individual properties. Quote “When land is placed into private control, it changes the edge of the waterway, the landscape, biodiversity, habitat protection – the waterway itself, and over time the entire system is affected. Rezoning ultimately shifts the balance from custodianship to ownership. The cost – environmental, cultural and long-term – is carried by the whole community. We are effectively giving away something that belongs to all of us. And once it is gone, it is not returned – and the community is left to carry the consequences of that loss.”

Unquote.

The community has clearly shown that this proposal is not only a poor use of Council resources but also poses a significant threat to the environmental assets underpinning our quality of life.

The Shire is defined by its natural waterways and scenic landscapes. This unique environment is fragile, and your decision tonight will either protect or undermine that environment, if private interests are put ahead of the public good.

What the community stands to lose is far greater than what a small number of private waterfront landholders may gain.

Residents, the State Government and experts have all raised concerns that the proposal poses unacceptable risks to our natural environment, including; damage to sea grass beds and to sand spits & islands, a decline in water quality, and harm to foreshore ecosystems.

Compromising these assets will harm recreational fisheries, threaten birdlife, and diminish the natural beauty that attracts visitors to our region, undermining our community's future prosperity. There is no shortage of heavily developed areas for investment, but what is truly valuable and irreplaceable are the natural landscapes of our W1 zones. Once these are lost, they cannot be recreated.

It is easy to dismiss those who oppose this proposal as anti-development and 'greenies'. This is a poor characterisation of who we are and what we stand for.

We are everyday Shire residents who value our quality of life, who care about our environment, and care about the legacy we are leaving for our children.

We stand for a positive future where our natural environmental assets are preserved and enhanced. These assets are essential to our quality of life and community prosperity. We want to invest in them—improving water quality, supporting healthy sea grass beds and abundant fish, and maintaining an environment that encourages outdoor activity, supporting both physical and mental health.

The addendum to the business paper does not accurately reflect the community's deep concerns. It fails to mention the open letter to Council and the rare collaboration of nine community organisations and three eminent and respected individuals who have publicly objected. Collectively, these groups represent hundreds, far surpassing the 142 letters of support coordinated by a waterfront development company.

This is not the first time Council has attempted major changes to our waterways. In 2013, similar plans faced widespread public backlash and prompted an Independent State Government Review. Interestingly, the 2013 proposal sought to exempt the Woronora River and parts of the Hacking River from the rezoning, recognising their sensitivity and vulnerability. It is reasonable to ask what has changed since 2013 to now warrant their inclusion in this rezoning.

The 2013 Independent Review also recommended Council adopt a new, open and transparent approach to restore public confidence, one that would require genuine commitment to community engagement and transparent decision-making.

When considering this proposal, four key questions arise:

- Does this ongoing process promote public trust and confidence?
- Does the proposal have strategic merit?
- Is this a prudent investment given increasing pressure on ratepayers and Council's budget?
- Does this decision strengthen our quality of life and the opportunities provided by our natural waterways and environment?

The answer to all four is clearly no.

For these reasons, I urge Councillors to reject the recommendation before you and instead adopt the option presented in the business paper to withdraw this planning proposal. Thank you.