

Lake Cathie opening strategy

- **Aims to provide maximum benefits to the community while minimising siltation, ensuring high water quality and minimising environmental impact**
- **Opening level has been amended from 1.8m AHD to 1.6m AHD amongst other criteria**
- **Protects foreshore areas and infrastructure**
- **Allows public access to recreational facilities**
- **Enables minimal impact on the aquatic environment**
- **Provides for longer opening periods**
- **Is continually monitored by the Lake Cathie/ Bonny Hills Estuary Management Committee**



Port Macquarie-Hastings Council 2005

This brochure has been prepared by Hastings Council with advice and input from the Lake Cathie/Bonny Hills Estuary Management Committee and the Lake Cathie Progress Association

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A sustainable high
quality of life for all

Lake Cathie Opening Strategy



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Why do we need an opening strategy?

Lake Cathie is an area of high conservation value and serves a variety of users ranging from water birds habitat to recreational boaters and swimmers. A 'balanced' opening strategy, which would facilitate the decision making process with respect to the opening of Lake Cathie to the ocean, is vital to accommodate the conflicting environmental and social constraints on the lake. This will ensure minimal adverse impact on the ecology of the area, minimise build up of silts and sands and flooding, while providing residents and visitors opportunities for recreational activities.

Who developed the strategy?

The opening strategy was initiated by the Lake Cathie/ Lake Innes Estuary Management Plan developed by the Lake Cathie/ Bonny Hills Estuary Management Committee. The Committee comprises representatives from various Progress Associations, NPWS, NSW Fisheries, NSW Agriculture, DLWC, local community and Council. The Estuary Management Committee has the task of overseeing the ongoing management of the estuary and recommend to Council strategies and actions for the implementation of work within the estuary.

How was the strategy developed?

The Lake Cathie/Innes Estuary Management Plan recommended the preparation of an Entrance Opening Strategy. Accordingly, consultants were engaged to prepare the Strategy and a Review of Environmental Factors and after extensive community consultation the strategy was adopted in 1995. Several reports received by Council as a result of economic issues raised by the community and on the monitoring outcomes of the strategy lead to the review of the opening strategy in 2000.

What about a natural opening?

The lake front reserves, paths, boat ramps and residential development around the lake could be inundated if the water level were allowed to rise until it naturally breached the sand barrier between the lake and the ocean. The last 'significant' opening occurred in 1979 when cyclonic rains caused the water level in the lake to rise rapidly. The force of water demolished the road and causeway in Kenwood Drive.

Can the lake be opened permanently?

Lake Cathie is a naturally closed coastal lagoon system that occasionally opens to the sea. The entrance is in the middle of a long expanse of open surf beach and is not protected by a significant headland. Past proposals to construct permanent 'training walls' have not proceeded because of the high costs involved, the fact that a permanent opening is will hasten the siltation of the estuary and significantly modify the aquatic ecology of the Lake system.

When does Council open the Lake?

Council opens the Lake when conditions prescribed in the strategy prevail, i.e., lake height 1.6m AHD or greater, poor water quality or when high lake levels threaten breeding cycles of critical habitat. Artificial openings have occurred on average once every 12 months.

How is the Lake opened?

The opening of the entrance channel is undertaken by an excavator or a small bulldozer pushing the sand to one side to form a starter channel. Breakout , then proceeds. No sand is mechanically removed from the entrance area.



Lake Cathie Opening, December 2000

Who can open the Lake?

Council is authorised to open the Lake as Trust Managers of the Crown Reserve. Attempts by unauthorised individuals to open the lake may attract heavy fines.

Why does the lake water turn brown?

The brown colour seen in the lake after heavy rains is natural tannin from tea trees in the lake catchment area. The tannin is not harmful and it is believed that the tannin is one of the reasons why Lake Cathie prawns taste so good. (Prawns from Lake Ainsworth at Lennox Head have a similar taste for the same reason). Port Macquarie-Hastings Council regularly tests the water in the lake to make sure that the water quality meets acceptable standards.

Are there any other lakes similar to Lake Cathie?

Lake Ainsworth at Lennox Head, Smiths Lake near Forster, Wamberal on the Central Coast and Narrabeen Lagoon on Sydney's northern beaches are also intermittently closing and opening lakes like Lake Cathie.

Where can you get more information?

A copy of the 'Opening Strategy' flowchart has been displayed at the Lake Cathie Post Office. Copies of the Lake Opening Strategy and associated reports are also available at the Laurieton, Wauchope and Port Macquarie Libraries. The following Organisations can be contacted for further details:

- National Parks and Wildlife Service (DEC)
Tel: 02 6584 2203
- Department of Natural Resources
Tel: 02 6640 2000
- DPI Fisheries
Tel: 02 6581 4084



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