

On the edge Residents ask for right to build their own seawall



NSW coastal erosion hot spots



Sea change: Malcolm Black's house is within 25 metres of the ocean due to devastating erosion. Photo: Scott Calvin

Yards swallowed by coastal erosion

■ Bellinda Kontominas

Malcolm Black bought his beachfront home on Lewis Street, Old Bar, 26 years ago, hoping he and his wife could enjoy their retirement by the sea.

But the dream wasn't to be. She died eight months later from cancer and now her ashes – buried in their front yard – have gone too, swept away due to devastating coastal erosion.

Most homes along the beachfront side of Lewis Street have lost about 25 linear metres of land to the sea and three houses had to be demolished after a wild storm in 2008.

The sleepy mid-north coast suburb is one of 15 coastal erosion "hot spots" identified by the state government, stretching from Belongil

beach near Byron Bay to Batemans Bay on the south coast.

The Old Bar Beach Sand Replenishment Group has raised \$55,000 towards building two offshore artificial reefs in an attempt to reduce the impact of waves on the beach. It is seeking support from Greater Taree City Council and plans to ask the state government for \$10 million to help fund the project.

Some property owners in Lewis Street have lodged a development application with the NSW Coastal Panel to build a permanent seawall in front of their homes. It is the first development application of its kind to be considered by the panel, which is made up of environmental experts who advise the state government. A decision is expected later this month.

On the web
Watch a video about Malcolm Black's struggle with the sea

Paul Burton, who bought the management rights of the Meridian Resort on Lewis Street with his wife five years ago, said the residents would pay for the installation and maintenance of the geotextile seawall out of their own pockets.

"We're not asking for any funding for this," he said. "We just want permission to do it and it's very hard to get permission to do stuff on your own property."

Current laws allow residents to build temporary protection works to reduce the impact of the waves on their property. But the chief executive of Sydney Coastal Coun-

cils Group, Geoff Withycombe, said the law undermined any chance of a cohesive statewide approach to coastal erosion.

"The act allows residents to help themselves and provides them with a solution that doesn't work," he said. "Not everyone on the coastal zone is rich, so the solution at the moment with the state government is that those who can afford it can protect their property. Well, that's hardly equitable."

Greater Taree City Council is calling on the state government for help.

"All of those options will need a feasibility study ... unfortunately, while people's houses are getting closer to the edge," said Richard Pamplin, the council's senior leader of strategic planning.

The state government no longer recommends statewide sea level rise benchmarks as this varies across regions. But a 2010 study commissioned by Greater Taree City Council found that, under current erosion rates, by 2100 the local school, surf life saving club, part of the caravan park and all properties on Lewis Street and Pacific Parade would be under water.

Environment Minister Robyn Parker said the government would consider any funding application from the council for emergency protection works. "The government provides over \$4 million annually in grants, as well as technical assistance through regional officers, to help councils prepare and implement their plans to manage coastal erosion," she said.

Business ticks carbon trading option

■ Tom Arup

A significant section of business prefers an emissions trading scheme to a fixed carbon tax to cut Australia's greenhouse gases, a survey has found, as federal cabinet considers on Monday an earlier move to carbon trading.

The survey was commissioned by Businesses for a Clean Economy – a pro-carbon pricing industry group – with 570 companies approached from among its own members, the ASX 100, and those paying the carbon tax. All up, 180 responses were received.

Asked to consider their support for a carbon price to reduce Australia's emissions, 64.7 per cent of respondents said they favoured a trading scheme with a floating price, while only 28.8 per cent favoured a fixed tax.

The survey, conducted by consultants AECOM, suggested little support for the Coalition's direct action climate policy. Only 3.3 per cent said they did not want any

form of carbon price, and another 3.3 per cent said they were unsure.

Monday will mark the one year anniversary of the carbon price taking effect, which was negotiated between Labor, the Greens and independent MPs by former prime minister Julia Gillard. The price for emitting a tonne of greenhouse gas will also rise on Monday from \$23 to \$24.15.

It would slash billions of dollars from government revenue.

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd said the scheme's future would be a significant issue when his new cabinet met. Mr Rudd had previously indicated his support for ending a three-year fixed-tax period early, bringing forward an emissions trading scheme with a floating price.

If implemented, the price would likely fall from \$24.15 a tonne to a mark close to the European carbon

price of about \$6. But it would have major budget implications, as it would slash billions of dollars from government revenue.

A number of lobby groups, such as the Australian Industry Group, called for the move, saying it would reduce business costs.

But former climate change minister Greg Combet said on Sunday that, while possible, moving to a floating price sooner would present significant administrative challenges.

Business for a Clean Economy spokeswoman Jennifer Lauber Patterson said the results showed a strong preference by business for a market-based carbon price.

"These results appear to be consistent with the Australian Industry Group's support for a move to a market-based trading scheme as the most effective way of achieving outcomes," she said.

Members of Business for a Clean Economy include Westpac, AGL, Ikea and multinationals Unilever, General Electric and Fujitsu.

Rudd rings in the changes

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implications, it bears directly on the operation of hundreds of very large companies. So it would be a complex policy proposition for us to work through."

Mr Butler declined to go into detail about when and how the change will happen, stressing there would be a "proper cabinet process". He refused to comment on whether the household assistance package designed to compensate Australians for the carbon price would be cut.

The carbon price – widely regarded as a deeply damaging policy for the government because of Julia Gillard's pre-election vow not to introduce a "carbon tax" – enters its second year on July 1, rising from \$23 to \$24.15 a tonne for major emitters.

At present the scheme does not change to a market-price trading scheme until July 2015, but Mr Rudd is aiming to bring that shift forward. Such a change could blow a hole in the budget because carbon permits on the international mar-

ket are selling at about \$6 – slashing billions of dollars from revenue.

It is understood that any change will become part of Labor's election platform. Changes would need legislation, meaning a recall of Parliament, which appears unlikely.

Mr Albanese said on Sunday this was an option but "I wouldn't book tickets to question time".

Mr Butler praised the work of his predecessor Greg Combet, who warned on Sunday that a quick shift to an ETS would be difficult and involve renegotiating carbon market links with the European Union.

Mr Butler said public opinion would bounce around on such a complex issue but he was confident Labor could win support for a revamped scheme.

More broadly, he said the dynamics for Labor had already changed noticeably in the four days since Mr Rudd's return.

"The mood has changed out in the community. The community now thinks this is a contest. Certainly within the caucus, there is a spring in people's steps," he said.