

# Residents 'doomed to lose homes' under council climate policies

EXCLUSIVE

By **DEBORAH CORNWALL**, JOURNALIST

12:00AM DECEMBER 22, 2018

A new battleground has opened up over the fate of up to 60,000 NSW homes along the state's coast and waterways with a warning that up to 20,000 families on the central coast are "doomed" to lose their homes under the state's new coastal management laws.

The NSW Coastal Alliance says the Central Coast Council's release in November of a draft climate change policy is a first step by the council to try to push for the "planned retreat" of residents in low-lying areas and stop them from protecting their homes from floods and coastal erosion.

Central coast co-ordinator for the alliance Pat Aiken said the council had also flagged that all properties that sit less than 4m above sea level should be reassessed as potentially "unviable for future habitation", or in planning speak, "sterilised".

"This means homeowners would be forbidden to build on their current homes and protect themselves from storm surges and flooding, which means people will be forced to abandon their homes," Mr Aiken told *The Weekend Australian*.

"We've got these three big lakes systems that are all densely populated with some of the oldest suburbs in Australia and all of a sudden it's all doomed," Mr Aiken said.

Central Coast Mayor Jane Smith dismissed the alliance's claims as premature and "alarmist". She said while the council couldn't "exclude planned retreat", it would also look at other options, including an adaptation program currently being rolled out by the neighbouring council in Lake Macquarie that has raised the height of land and buildings in some of its most vulnerable areas.

"This is just the beginning of a process," Ms Smith told *The Weekend Australian*. "What is clear at all levels of government is that we need action on climate change and

leadership at all levels.”

The Central Coast Council takes in a large tract of some of the state’s most prized beaches and waterways — from Tuggerah Lake in the north to Woy Woy and Brisbane Water in the south. Many of the low-lying houses in the area sit just 2m above sea level, including the entire suburb of Davistown on Brisbane Water.

Neil Mulcahy, an IT consultant whose waterfront home at Davistown looks straight across Brisbane Water, said the Central Coast Council’s “highly politicised” approach to managing climate change had been “disastrous” for residents.

“What is causing such concern and confusion is the total lack of clarity about what the council is planning to actually do,” he said.

Mr Mulcahy, 65, said he bought his Davistown home eight years ago with wife Doreen with plans to retire in the area.

“Worst-case scenario is we would have to abandon this house and pull it down at our expense with no compensation,” he said. “I’m certainly not a climate change denier, but this whole sea-level rise hysteria being pushed by the council just feels totally vindictive.”

CSIRO director of climate change Helen Cleugh said this week that sea levels in northern and southeast Australia were rising at higher rates than the rest of the globe, which is currently increasing at an average of 3cm a decade. Dr Cleugh said governments would need to plan for the impact that would have on infrastructure in Australia’s coastal regions.

Earlier this month, however, US climate scientist Judith Curry said predictions of a 21st-century sea-level rise of more than 60cm were increasingly difficult to justify, yet these “extreme” projections were driving policies and local adaptation plans.

NSW’s new Coastal Management Act (2016), which came into effect in April, has forced local councils across the state to develop their own response plans to rising sea levels and coastal management by 2020 .

Of the 60,000 homes now deemed to be in environmental “hot spots”, 90 per cent sit along lakes and coastal estuaries. That has sparked a series of clashes between councils and residents

Member for Bega and NSW Transport Minister Andrew Constance told *The Weekend Australian* yesterday he was so “vehemently opposed” to any planned retreat policy he had stepped in to a dispute between the Eurobodalla Shire Council and 150 property owners whose homes had been earmarked for retreat in the Batemans Bay area.

“We can’t just throw our hands up and walk away from people; their property rights have to be protected,” Mr Constance said.

**DEBORAH CORNWALL, JOURNALIST**

Deborah Cornwall is an award winning journalist, specialising in crime investigations and court reporting. She has worked as a national broadcast reporter, producer and writer for media organisations across the... [Read more](#)

