

### Why did we undertake this study?

Coastal communities are facing unprecedented risks due to population growth, urbanisation, and climate change. Innovation is key to supporting transformational change; yet is not a novel concept in the coastal zone. Past innovations have rarely considered social and ecological systems or reflected best practice integrated coastal zone management. Consequently, a deeper focus on human-environmental interactions and feedbacks to better understand the capacity for innovation is called for. This study met this call.

### How was it done?

We conducted semi-structured interviews with 68 coastal and community key informants in Australia’s most rapidly growing coastal communities. Key informants came from coastal management and community service sectors in which responding to vulnerability (ecological and social respectively) is core to their vocation. Interviews discussed themes of vulnerability, coastal governance, innovation, and community need. Inductive and deductive thematic analysis of interview transcripts was undertaken.

### What did we find?

Despite the high levels of individual capacity held by vulnerability managers, and the presence of good-practice policy, most innovations were limited in scale and insufficient for transformative change. Barriers to innovation were immense and reflected familiar barriers to best practice governance and change generally. Nevertheless, a small number of exemplars avoided barriers by:

- Implementing multi-sectoral, integrated strategies that were mutually beneficial and reflected a broad commitment to sustainability.
- Drawing upon extensive place-based or sectoral experience (>20 years)

Individual and community capacity for innovation was built prior to crisis events and consisted of experience/knowledge, extensive and diverse social networks, and resource mobilisation skills.

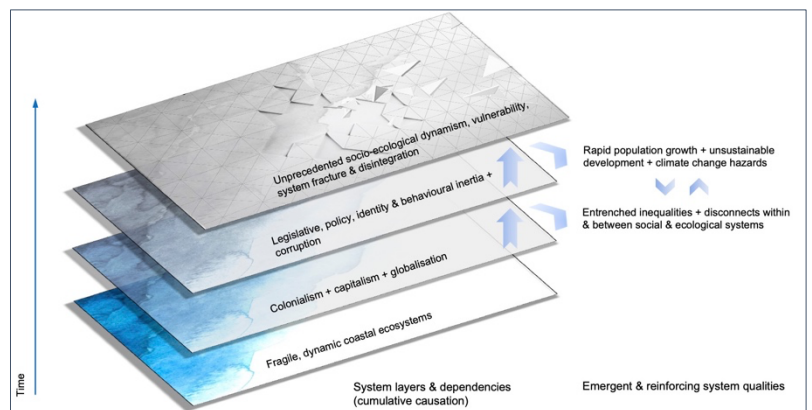


Figure: Historic and cumulative drivers of inequity and vulnerability, and feedback loops, in coastal Australia

### What are the implications?

The study uncovered critical attributes that support innovation – including individual and community capacity, and the ability to span boundaries (work across sectors) to achieve common, sustainability focussed, goals. Importantly, the attributes (e.g., the personal qualities, intentions, and resources that facilitate innovation) are available to many communities. A key barrier is emphasis on physical coastal vulnerability (neglecting social vulnerability) that frames the actions of public, private, and civil society actors and impedes cross-sectoral collaboration. For integration to work a long-term vision of the coast is needed; one that addresses its socio-ecological conditions more comprehensively, to develop systemic, rather than single sector/impact, solutions.

### Want more information?

The full paper is not currently available online. Keep an eye on the project website for updates.

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## Coastal Governance: Embracing Vulnerability and Change

