

Ugu Lwethu - Our Coast. A profile of coastal KwaZulu-Natal

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9.2 Development Pressure

Coastal lands are used for a range of activities, including human settlement, agriculture, trade and user amenities. They are also used as a base for a range of maritime activities such as shipping, fishing and mining. The coast is a favoured residential and holiday destination, resulting in it being under constant pressure for development.

As a result, development is taking place rapidly along the coast, particularly urban development. In fact, 14 of the world's 17 largest cities are located along the coast, and 40% of cities with populations greater than 1 million people are located near the coast.¹ This ever-increasing development pressure brings with it a number of impacts on the coastal environment. In addition, human settlements are often

concentrated around well-watered areas such as rivers and sensitive estuaries.² These settlements undoubtedly affect their surroundings through processes of production, consumption and disposal. This is further exacerbated by the fact that uses are not always compatible and often result in user conflicts and further pressure on the coastal environment.

Coastal development in KZN

Historically, coastal development was closely linked to the availability of existing infrastructure and services. As a result, coastal development in South Africa was concentrated in KZN and the Western Cape, where road and rail networks had been

New development in an already developed coastal zone, Durban.



Photo: Bronwyn Goble

established.³ This pressure is prominent along the KZN coast, which is considered to be one of the most densely populated coastal areas in mainland Africa.⁴

Development is driven by a number of economic, social and legislative drivers, thus development pressure is variable over time and space.⁵ In KZN, historical coastal development was concentrated along the southern sections of coast, being driven by its relative proximity to the Witwatersrand, ease of access due to existing road infrastructure, its safe beaches and year-round warm oceans and climate. It developed primarily as a middle-class, domestic and mostly white, tourist destination.⁶ While this development flourished along the south coast, the north coast remained virtually undeveloped and in a natural state. This can, in part, be attributed to the fact that much of the north coast (21%) was declared to be a “homeland area” and was inaccessible via the major road networks.⁷

Homeland areas in KZN, as with the rest of South Africa, have had a significant impact on historical spatial planning. Homeland areas were derived during the apartheid era, whereby towns and settlement patterns were structured based on race and class.

Since the 1970s, development along the coast has increased, driven by service industries, tourism, resort development and activities related to import/export from ports.² Evidence of this can be seen along the KZN north coast, with the opening of the Richards Bay harbour in 1976 (*Section 6.3*). This brought with it a range of associated industries such as the coal terminal, paper mill, fertilizer plant and aluminium smelter.⁸

That said, there are still large tracts of KZN coastal land, (almost 59% of the total coastline) that remain untouched, predominantly along the north coast, and within the protected area of the iSimangaliso World Heritage Site (some 30% of the total undeveloped coastal land). However, pressure for development and economic activities is increasing in these areas, being driven by improved road access and the new King Shaka International Airport. It is anticipated that this will result in an increase in the development of land north of Durban, in the Ballito areas.

Planned residential and tourist developments and mining activities are likely to absorb a significant proportion of this undeveloped coastal land in the near future. This presents an urgent challenge for the wise management of this land and careful assessment of future developments in the coastal zone.⁷

Managing coastal development

The management of urban expansion along coastal areas is one of the most difficult tasks for coastal planners. The enormous financial value attached to coastal land that has the potential for residential and tourist development often results in the widespread conversion of agriculture, forestry and other low intensity land uses to urban land. This often leads to “strip development”, as urban sprawl spreads up and down the coast from existing urban centres and small coastal towns; eventually resulting in the merging of cities and towns that were once kilometres apart.⁹ Evidence of this type of development can be seen in a number of regions along the KZN coast; notably between Durban and Umhlanga, and more recently the area between Umhlanga and Ballito.

Increasing demand on coastal goods and services

Coastal development places an increased demand on the goods and services provided by the coastal and marine environments. Poor planning results in the loss of natural habitat and functioning, which in turn limits the coastal environment’s ability to deliver the very services and resources that attracted people to the coast in the first place.

Coastal development has in the past been inappropriately located, often too close to the high water mark. This adversely affects the natural functioning of the coastal environment and often results in damage to, or loss of, the developments as a result of coastal hazards, discussed in *Section 9.5*.

Coastal managers and planners need to identify areas and corridors for coastal conservation. These need to be established as “no go” development areas. This can be further managed through the establishment of coastal set-back lines and the Coastal Protection Zone, as outlined in the ICM Act (Sections 1.2 and 10.2), which will prevent future development from being inappropriately located. Not only will this ensure the natural functioning of the coastal zone, it will also ensure that the developments and infrastructure themselves are not damaged by natural coastal processes. ■

