

# Coastal Cliff and Headland Erosion

## Fact sheet

### Coastal cliffs and headlands

The Shoalhaven coastal zone is made up of diverse and picturesque areas, including sandy beaches, dynamic estuaries, vegetated dunes and coastal cliffs and headlands. Over geological timescales (millennia), soft sediments are eroded away, and hard, rocky headlands are exposed. In the Shoalhaven, there are many prominent headlands and coastal cliffs reaching up to 50 metres above sea level. These are commonly found in high-energy areas with strong wave action.



*Coastal headland at the northern end of Narrawallee Beach, October 2021.*

### Why does coastal cliff and headland erosion occur?

Coastal cliffs and headlands are susceptible to erosion and cliff fall. This can be caused by surface processes such as rock weathering, soil erosion, surface water runoff, rainfall, and landslides. It can also be caused by coastal processes such as undercutting by waves at the base of the cliff. The main trigger for most landslips is heavy rainfall. Deeper processes such as seismic movements can also result in cliff erosion.

While cliff and headland erosion occurs naturally, it can pose a serious hazard to people on the beach or headlands enjoying the coastline. Cliff fall can occur with little or no warning.

Hazardous landslides continue to occur in parts of the Shoalhaven in areas that are known to be hotspots for cliff and headland slope instability, on both public and private property.



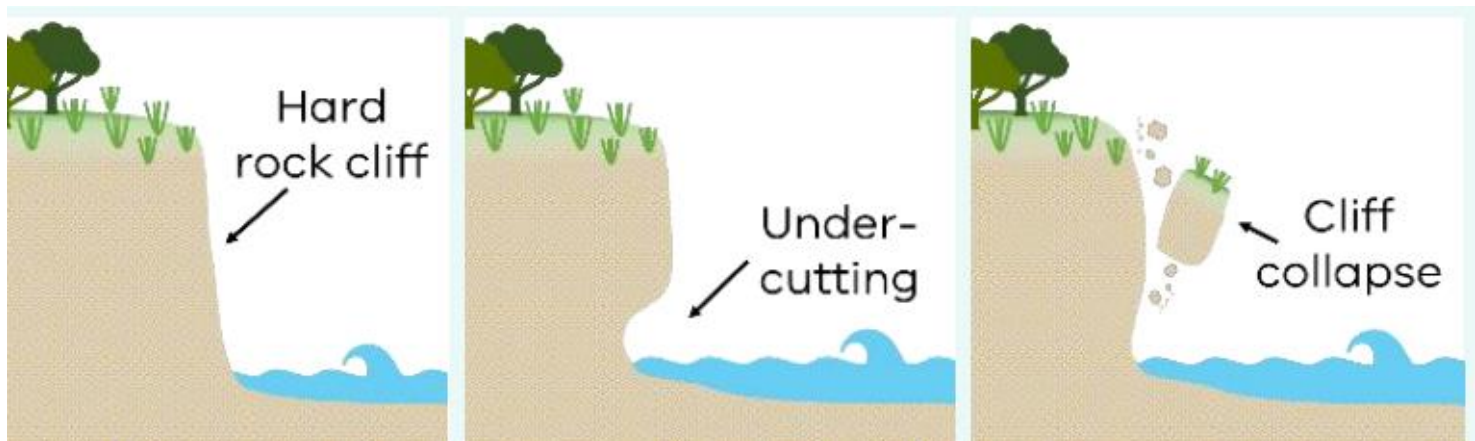
*Coastal cliff instability at Bannister Head, March 2022.  
Mollymook Beach.*

## What can be done to reduce the risk of cliff and headland erosion?

Council monitors known hotspots for cliff and headland erosion and takes action to prevent emergency situations.

You can help by:

- Following Council's warning signs in known hazardous areas.
- Avoiding known dangerous headlands after large rainfall events.
- Not crossing any netting or fencing on headlands where dangerous areas are blocked off.
- Appropriately managing surface runoff on your coastal property to reduce water runoff on headlands.
- Strictly adhering to development requirements and conditions of consent when building near headlands. The [Shoalhaven Development Control Plan 2014](#) provides information and controls for development in areas of coastal hazards and instability, including links to the [Shoalhaven Coastal Hazard Mapping](#).
- Helping protect vegetation on cliffs, which helps stabilise and enhance the natural resilience of the coastline.
- Notifying Council of any visual changes to cliffs and headland slopes, or nearby stormwater infrastructure in your local area.



Process of cliff fall (collapse) on rocky coastal headlands due to wave undercutting (from: The State of Victoria Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, 2021, Cape to Cape Resilience Project)



### Find out more

[getinvolved.shoalhaven.nsw.gov.au/foreshore-protection-management](https://getinvolved.shoalhaven.nsw.gov.au/foreshore-protection-management)

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### Contact Us

[coastal.management@shoalhaven.nsw.gov.au](mailto:coastal.management@shoalhaven.nsw.gov.au)

[shoalhaven.nsw.gov.au/contact](https://shoalhaven.nsw.gov.au/contact) | 1300 293 111

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