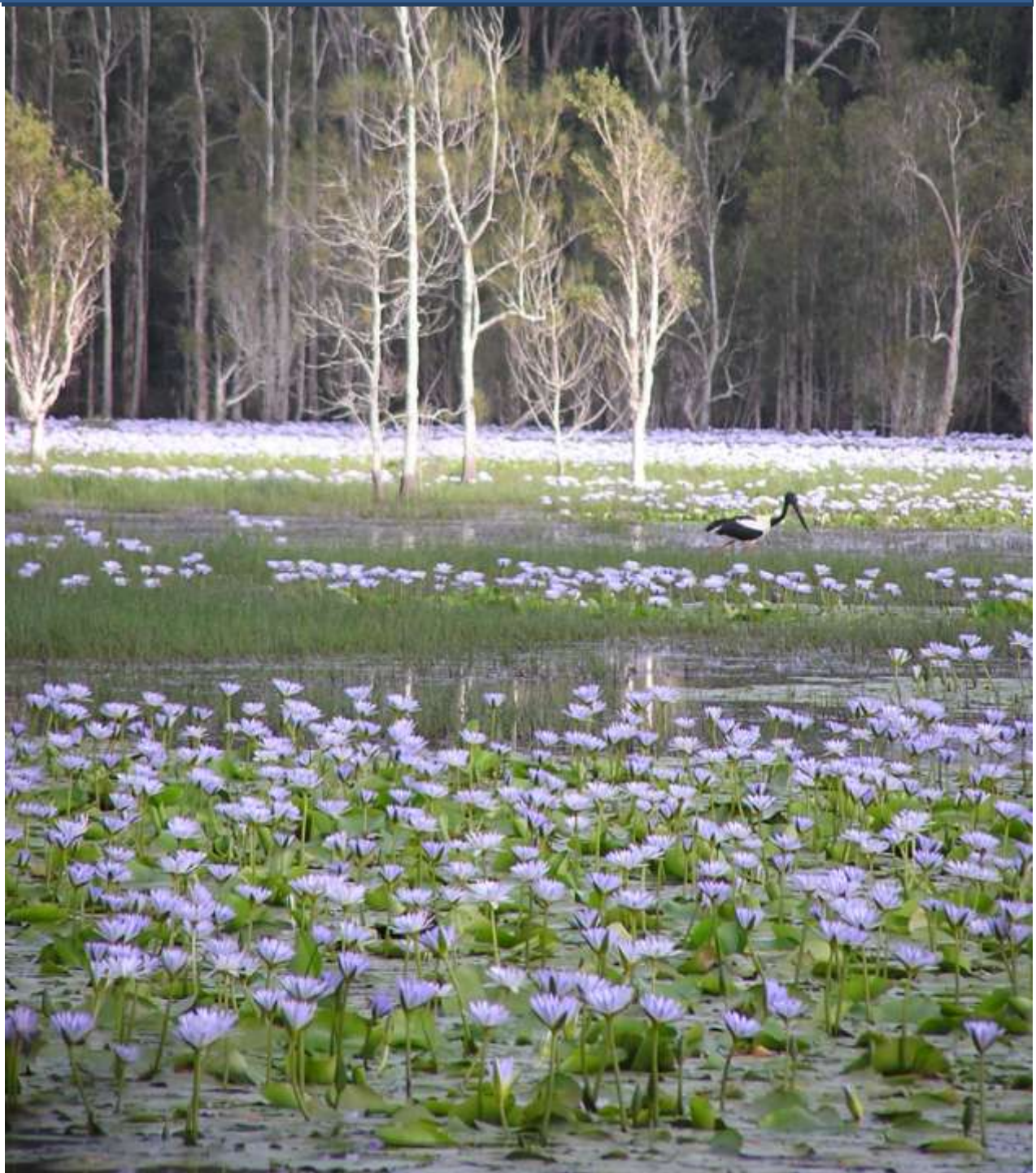


Environmental Action Plan



Community Engagement Strategy



1.0 Introduction

A draft Environmental Action Plan has been prepared in consultation with key stakeholders and the local community, which proposes a range of environmental projects to address priority environmental issues. Council is now keen on seeking further feedback from the community to validate the projects in the plan, and to gauge community support for the proposed funding mechanisms, including the option of introducing an environmental levy.

2.0 Background

The *Manning Valley Community Plan 2010-2030* identifies 'Respecting the Environment' as one of the Key Directions for Council. During the preparation of the Community Plan two community surveys were undertaken to identify areas of concern and attitudes towards funding the objectives of the plan. While many people rated the environment as a high priority during this process, one survey identified that around 60% of respondents were 'unsure' as to what environmental issues required action from Council. To explore this matter further in consultation with the community, Council sought and was subsequently successful in obtaining funding through the NSW Waste and Sustainability Improvement Payment Program to appoint a project officer to coordinate the development of an Environmental Action Plan.

Feedback obtained from the community through a series of public workshops and a survey has provided Council with a better understanding of the community's priorities for environmental projects, which has been used to assist in the development of the Environmental Action Plan. The community also voiced strong support for dredging of the Manning River estuary and to improve boating facilities. While a Maintenance Dredging Strategy and a Boating Infrastructure Plan have both been prepared, Council has had to rely heavily on external grants to fund the works, which has been limited due to some funding bodies requiring matching funding. As these types of projects can result in outcomes that benefit the environment they have also been included in the Environmental Action Plan, but under its own theme.

While a number of avenues are available to help fund the Plan, it is considered that the most sustainable option for Council is to introduce an environmental levy (Special Rate Variation). An environmental levy is considered the most effective way for Council to be able to provide matching funding for applications to external grant programs. Great Lakes Council has almost tripled their Environmental Levy this way since introducing it over ten years ago, which value adds to funding provided by the community.

Many of the environmental projects proposed in the plan, particularly those aimed at improving the water quality of the Manning River generate a range of other benefits for the community by supporting the local economy through increased tourism and recreational use and improving the productivity of our oyster and fishing industries.

3.0 Community Engagement Goals

In terms of community engagement, the project's goals are to:

1. Excite the community about the prospect of Council being pro-active in undertaking environmental projects in our region
2. Inform the community about Council's current capacity to deliver projects, and other funding mechanisms including an environmental levy to improve the ability for Council to undertake works proposed in the Environmental Action Plan
3. Positively engage residents in assisting Council to undertake environmental projects, through increased volunteering/participation in projects
4. Actively engage residents to increase their knowledge of the aims of the projects proposed in the Environmental Action Plan
5. Continue to build upon partnerships with agency stakeholders such as the Catchment Management Authority, Department of Primary Industries (Fisheries), NSW Forests, MidCoast Water, National Parks and the Office of Environment and Heritage
6. Continue to work with key interest groups (e.g. birdwatchers, oyster farmers, bushwalkers, boating groups, farmers) to identify opportunities for expanding and value-adding to the projects
7. Obtain community feedback on proposed funding mechanisms to implement the Environmental Action Plan (to build on the 80 responses supporting an environmental levy received during the development of the plan)
8. Use iconic sites such as Cattai Wetlands that are well known and appreciated by the community to demonstrate what types of projects could be achieved with additional funding
9. Demonstrate the broad range of community benefits that can be achieved by the projects proposed including local economic benefits by providing improved tourism opportunities for visitors to our region, and those that support our lifestyle and recreational pursuits

4.0 Project Opportunities

This project provides the opportunity to:

- promote the broader benefits of the projects (to improve the environment) for our local economy and lifestyles
- work with the community to bring the projects to their attention for consideration and support
- build greater community understanding of the environmental issues facing our local area
- enable environmental assets to be enjoyed by the community and tourists
- develop political and government support for the project at all levels through partnerships, funding and events

- showcase Council's approach to community engagement and participation
- communicate a clear vision for environmental project priorities over the next 5 years
- build understanding and trust with local groups and individuals to enable projects to be developed for implementation
- educate landholders about best practices as well as their legal obligations and approval requirements for different types of environmental remediation works

5.0 Who is involved?

The following nine target groups have been identified:

5.1 Broader community

This includes residents and businesses within the Greater Taree City Council area.

5.2 Local ratepayers

Local ratepayers will be asked to pay more if we introduce an environmental levy, so their support is vital if Council is to apply for a Special Rate Variation.

5.3 Directly affected landowners

There will be landholders who own sites identified by Council as priorities for projects, and it is crucial that their support and collaboration is obtained for such projects to proceed.

5.4 Nearby residents

The nearby residents are landowners that live near sites where environmental projects will be undertaken, and will benefit from improved access to facilities and improved conditions. They may also be interested in contributing to projects through volunteering.

5.5 Local recreational user groups

In our region the environmental assets which will benefit from improvement through the proposed works are utilised by a range of recreational user groups, particularly the boating and fishing groups who use the Manning River and Manning Estuary. These groups should be engaged to obtain their support for implementation of projects which will directly benefit them.

5.6 Key agency stakeholders

Agency stakeholders have been integral to the development of the actions in the Environmental Action Plan. The key stakeholders that will need to continue to be informed and involved in the project include:

- Office of Environment and Heritage (National Parks and Wildlife Service)
- Department of Primary Industries (Fisheries)
- Catchment Management Authority
- NSW Forests

- Crown Lands
- NSW Maritime

5.7 Local business & industry groups

Local business groups will be involved in the projects, particularly local Chambers of Commerce, Tourism Operators, Oyster Farmers and Commercial Fishers.

5.8 Environmental interest groups

Groups with a particular interest in seeing improvements in our local environment will need to be engaged to continue to seek their support and involvement in project development and implementation. These include local bird watchers, native plant societies, national parks association, Landcare and Coastcare groups, local service groups and other community interest groups.

5.9 Adjoining councils

Interest from adjoining councils will be able to be addressed through potential collaboration on projects.

6.0 Key Messages

Given the range of target groups, it is important to have key messages identified that are consistently provided through the development of the project. Some key messages may change as new information is developed or as the project progresses into implementation. As such, it is important to review these key messages over the life of the project.

6.1 Projects will improve our local environment

Work on the proposed projects will improve the local environment for residents and visitors.

6.2 Projects will improve the water quality of the Manning River

Work on the Manning River (and its estuary and tributaries) will improve water for residential and farm use, as well as for recreational uses (i.e. boating and fishing).

6.3 Projects will improve habitat for flora and fauna

Work will include active management of local Council reserves, improved habitat connectivity, as well as removal of environmental weeds.

6.4 Projects will improve Council's environmental performance

Works will reduce Council's carbon footprint, and improve information and processes used by Council to make decisions affecting the management of our environment.

6.5 Projects will improve boating and fishing opportunities

Works will increase river dredging for boat navigational purposes, and improve boating and fishing facilities for recreational users.

6.6 Council will collaborate with local landowners

Works will be done in a collaborative manner, working with landholders to implement projects on private land.

6.7 Council can use an environmental levy to leverage external funding

If supported by the community Council could use an environmental levy as seed funding to seek additional external funding, thereby improving local success rates in attracting grants for local projects.

7.0 Phases of communications

The proposed community engagement has been designed around the following project milestones:

1. August - October 2013: Public exhibition of the draft Environmental Action Plan.
2. November 2013: Report to Council on community support or otherwise of draft Environmental Action Plan and potential environmental levy.
3. November - December 2013: Council should consider whether it intends to make an application to the Division of Local Government for a Special Rate Variation (SRV) for an environmental levy.
4. December 2013 - March 2014: If Council does indicate intention to apply for a (SRV), extensive consultation should be undertaken to gain support for such an application.

The following table outlines the communication tools to be used for the phases of communication. These tools will change as the project progresses and new approaches are tested.

8.0 Evaluation

As the project progresses more performance indicators will be available that can be measured to determine the success of the community engagement. Currently the two measurable performance indicators are:

- **at a Council-wide level** – improving awareness of environmental issues faced by Council (currently over 60% of those surveyed were unsure of which environmental issue required action from Council); and
- **at a Project level** – maintaining support from local community groups to participate with Council in the development and implementation of projects.

9.0 Implementation and Review

The project manager will be responsible for the day-to-day running of the project, including the Community Engagement Strategy.

TABLE 1: Processes for engaging the community

What	Target groups	When	Details	Phase	Who
Survey	All	July – Oct 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop simple one page survey to seek support for Environmental Action Plan and funding mechanisms Survey distributed to residents via ‘Manning News’ newsletter Conduct surveys at key events – Dragon Boat Regatta, Wingham Town & Country Expo, Taree Busking Festival, and Wingham Akoostik Festival Conduct surveys at local markets – Krambach, Wingham, Bobin, Johns River, Nabitac, Taree and others Make survey forms available for media and web, and local tourism venues Distribute survey forms to local community and business groups Utilise Survey Monkey which enables easy access on-line 	All	Project Manager
Information talks	All	Aug - Oct 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> During awareness phase actively seek groups to present to (e.g. service clubs, Probus groups, gardening groups, Landcare / Coastcare groups) Provide survey form and encourage participation 	All	Project Manager
Media releases	All	July – Oct 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Actively publicise Environmental Action Plan, funding mechanisms, and survey 	All	Project Manager
Advertisements	All	July – Oct 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Utilise existing papers and community networks (e.g. gardening / birdwatching newsletters, local schools newsletters, Waterwatch newsletters etc.) 	All	Project Manager
Website	All	July – Oct 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish information on GTCC website Provide link to on-line survey 	All	Project Manager
Information sessions	All	Aug – Mar 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May be required when information is being sought from directly affected landowners and nearby residents regarding reports or Council’s approach Encourage drop-in sessions over a couple of hours – not community meetings Ensure information is provided in an easily understood format Survey people who attended to see how effective sessions were and make improvements as required Ensure they are located close to local community (e.g. local hall, school) Promote events where open to the whole community 	All	Project Manager
Landowner meetings	Affected landowners	Aug – Mar 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meetings to discuss potential projects and develop costings for possible future implementation Involve key agency stakeholders as technical advice is required to develop projects 	All	Project Manager
Community Group meetings	Community groups	Aug – Mar 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meetings to discuss potential projects and possible volunteer involvement 	All	Project Manager

Calendar of Events for Potential Promotion of EAP and Survey:

(Bold = Major event for special focus)

Aug 2013

- 3 Dragon Boat Regatta**
- 3 Wingham Farmers Market
- 10 Johns River Market, Wingham Community Market
- 11 Burrell Creek Market
- 17 Hub Market Taree
- 18 Krumbach Market & Cundletown Carboot Sale
- 25 Bobin Market & Old Bar Market
- 31 Nabiac Farmers Market

Sep 2013

- 7 Wingham Farmers Market
- 13/14 Wingham Town & Country Expo**
- 15 Krumbach Market
- 22 Old Bar Market
- 28 Nabiac Farmers Market
- 29 Crowdy Head – Harrington Market, & Bobin Market

Oct 2013

- 3-7 Taree Buskers Festival
- 5 Wingham Farmers Market
- 12 Johns River Market, Wingham Community Market
- 13 Burrell Creek Market
- 18 Krumbach Market
- 19 Hub Market Taree
- 19/20 Wingham Akoostik Festival
- 26 Nabiac Farmers Market
- 27 Old Bar Market, Bobin Market

Nov 2013

- 9 Johns River Market
- 16 Hub Market Taree
- 17 Krumbach Market, Cundletown Carboot sale
- 24 Old Bar Market, Bobin Market
- 30 Nabiac Farmers Market