



LEADING SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

AN ACTION PLAN FOR CANDIDATES IN THE
2012 NSW LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS



Founded in 1955, the **Nature Conservation Council of NSW** is the peak environment organisation for NSW, representing more than 100 community environment groups across the state.

www.nccnsw.org.au



The **National Parks Association of NSW** is a not-for-profit conservation charity formed in 1957, seeking to protect, connect and restore the integrity and diversity of natural systems in NSW. NPA includes a network of 18 branches and more than 5,000 supporters.

www.npansw.org.au



TOTAL ENVIRONMENT CENTRE

The **Total Environment Centre** was established in 1972 as an action and information centre. It has run more than 100 successful campaigns, protecting the environment and improving urban sustainability. It alerts society about environmental problems, provides solutions and works with the community, business and government on an independent basis.

www.tec.org.au



Established in 1976, **The Wilderness Society** is a national, community-based, not-for-profit environmental advocacy organisation whose purpose is to protect, promote and restore wilderness and natural processes across Australia for the survival and ongoing evolution of life on Earth.

www.wilderness.org.au



The **Blue Mountains Conservation Society** is a voluntary organisation with approximately 900 members working to conserve the environment of the Blue Mountains since 1961. The Society runs conservation programs, a nursery, a bushcare group and a bushwalk programme.

www.bluemountains.org.au



The **Colong Foundation** works to ensure all wilderness and large natural areas in Australia are protected, well managed and held in high public regard. The Foundation's campaigns have secured more than a million hectares of national parks, most of which is wilderness.

www.colongwilderness.org.au



Formed in 1976, the **North Coast Environment Council** is the peak umbrella environment group in northern NSW for over 40 member groups, campaigning to protect natural areas, for social justice and ecological sustainability.

ncec.wordpress.com



Central West Environment Council is an umbrella organisation for environment groups, field naturalist societies and individuals with an interest in conserving the natural environment in central west NSW.



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The 2012 local government election provides exciting opportunities for visionary environmental leadership from local government candidates.

There is broad and enduring public support for action to protect the environment. Government research consistently demonstrates that the public consider protection of the environment and sound management of natural resources to be a top priority for attention by government.¹

Our unique environment underpins the social and economic fabric of this state. Healthy ecosystems provide billions of dollars of goods and services essential for the wellbeing of local communities and businesses. Protecting and enhancing these services is pivotal to the future prosperity of New South Wales.

The advantages we enjoy from our wild places, agricultural lands, fresh air and clean water are under threat from extractive and polluting industries, climate change and unsustainable development.

Local governments have a critical leadership role to play in reducing pollution, investing in natural infrastructure and restoring our environment to health. This election platform draws on far reaching experience from across NSW to offer our vision for local government areas and outline the bold steps needed to safeguard the benefits we receive from nature.

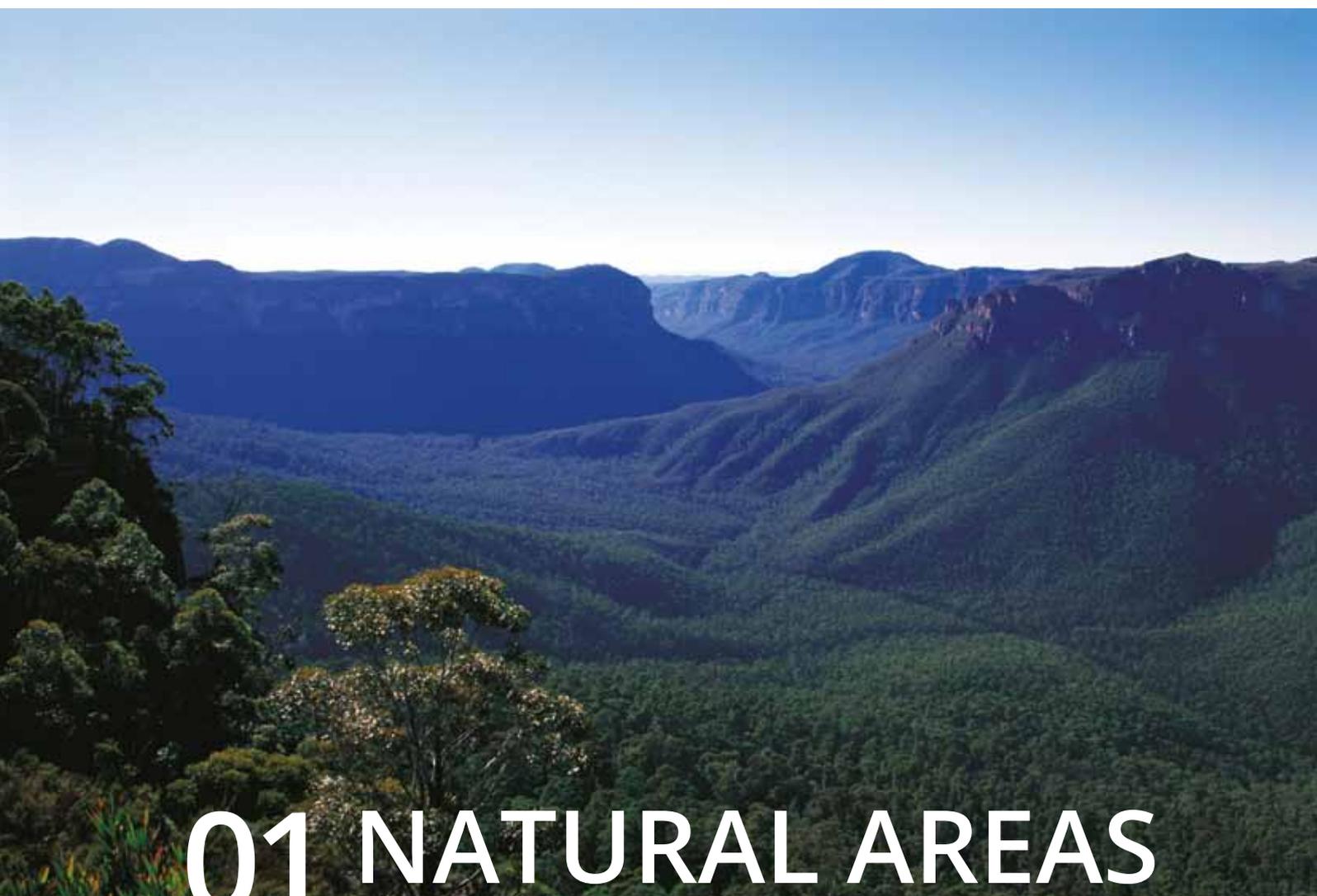
¹Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water (2010) Who cares about the environment? URL: www.environment.nsw.gov.au/resources/community/201056_WhoCares09.pdf, accessed 1 November 2010.

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01 NATURAL AREAS AND WILDLIFE

Natural area management is increasingly a core function of Councils, incorporating biodiversity considerations into their traditional responsibilities.

Long standing environmental programs of Councils such as weed and pest management are still a vitally important role. However, many Councils are now more proactive in expanding their environmental programs to include habitat protection and improvement programs and

creating urban biodiversity corridors that span highly urbanised landscape and link important remnant bushland areas.

Councils are committed to better management of the natural resources in their urban areas. To achieve this, Council has a range of functions, responsibilities and powers at its disposal for the development and implementation of natural resource policies and biodiversity conservation programs.



Bushland protection and restoration

Council is committed to conserving biodiversity and maintaining ecosystem function on as much of the local government area (**LGA**) as possible, in particular all remaining natural areas regardless of ownership. To achieve this Council will:

- zone bushland areas in good condition, threatened ecological communities and locally significant vegetation communities as Environmental Protection Zone (**EPZ**) E2
- zone critical areas along creek lines and other constrained areas such as land on steep slopes and wildlife corridors as EPZ E2
- provide for the restoration and regeneration of EPZs under the direction of Council in accordance with best practice techniques
- re-vegetate degraded areas with locally sourced indigenous plants
- re-vegetate degraded roadside areas and roadside corridors
- develop community education programs to raise community awareness and encourage people to identify and modify behaviours that cause stormwater pollution
- increase the public awareness and appreciation of the natural values of the Council LGA through education initiatives and training
- support bushcare volunteers by providing experienced and qualified bushcare officers on site to assist with training, basic plant identification, strategies and workplace health and safety responsibilities. The bushcare section should be adequately resourced to provide this for all groups
- support the efforts of bushcare volunteers by complementing their work with professional bush regenerators where specialised skills are required. Council should either have their own bush regeneration team or hire contractors (consistent use of the same team in an area and/or long term contracts is most cost effective)
- encourage and support bushcare volunteers to become involved in a variety of activities including bush regeneration, weed control, pest plant and animal control, storm water control, track and trail construction and maintenance, flora and fauna surveys, public and schools education, site assessment and environmental monitoring
- develop and fund programs that re-connect people with their natural areas and wildlife by retaining remnant vegetation (unless it has been completely degraded) then reconstructing habitat for wildlife in urban areas, after careful study and properly sourced indigenous species of the most appropriate genetic stock
- raise awareness of local biodiversity and encourage residents, businesses and schools to undertake actions to support local wildlife by planting native vegetation to create habitat for wildlife in urban areas

Invasive Pest Animals

Council recognises that pest animals and insects cause environmental degradation, serious economic losses to agricultural production, pose an unacceptable risk of exotic disease

and threaten the survival of many native species. Council will develop, fund and monitor their vertebrate pest management plans and cooperative management programs.

Invasive Weed Control



Council is committed to their role and responsibility for the management of invasive weeds, and will use appropriate support (financial, legislative and policy) to deliver the services required by the community.

Council will play a significant role in the management of weeds by investing more expenditure and resources to target weed management in bushland reserves and urban parks, roadside reserves and travelling stock routes starting with the prohibition from sale of all notifiable weeds in the LGA and enforcing the relevant provisions of the *Noxious Weeds Act 1993*.

Responsible Pet Ownership

Council recognises the threat to our native wildlife from pet animals such as cats and dogs, and that stronger policy should be developed to control this problem.

Council will develop and enforce policies for responsible pet ownership to reduce predation of native wildlife by cats and dogs. Council will consider a range of initiatives including:

- mandatory micro-chipping for both cats and dogs

- mandatory sterilization of all cats and dogs excluding animals maintained by registered breeders
- introducing mandatory nighttime curfews for cats where the animals are not allowed outside dedicated enclosed areas on the property
- introducing mandatory enclosures for cats to protect backyard birds and reptiles while observing existing animal welfare laws/ protections, for example section 9 *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1979*



Urban Native Forests

The social, environmental and economic benefits provided by urban native trees and shrubs as individuals, species and collectively as urban forests are well known.

In developing an Urban Forest Policy, Council will incorporate urban native forest planning and management into their parks and reserves strategy, to ensure that:

- communities receive maximum benefit from their urban forest by encouraging and facilitating community involvement in the promotion and development of urban forests
- locally sourced indigenous trees, shrubs and groundlayer are used to provide environmental amenity and wildlife habitat
- land degradation is minimised and provision of shade and shelter for humans and wildlife is maintained
- habitat trees are conserved for their ecological significance
- urban wildlife corridors for native flora and fauna and remnant riparian vegetation and habitat are conserved protected and improved by EPZs (with appropriate enforcement when breached)
- urban native forests are planted with locally sourced indigenous tree, shrub and groundlayer species with due consideration to the appropriate species for the community and the location conditions within urban, village, industrial, business and rural residential zones
- community education programs to raise community awareness and encourage people to identify and modify behaviours that cause stormwater pollution are implemented
- if koala habitat is present, a koala management plan is prepared under SEPP 44



Marine Conservation and Freshwater Aquatic Habitat

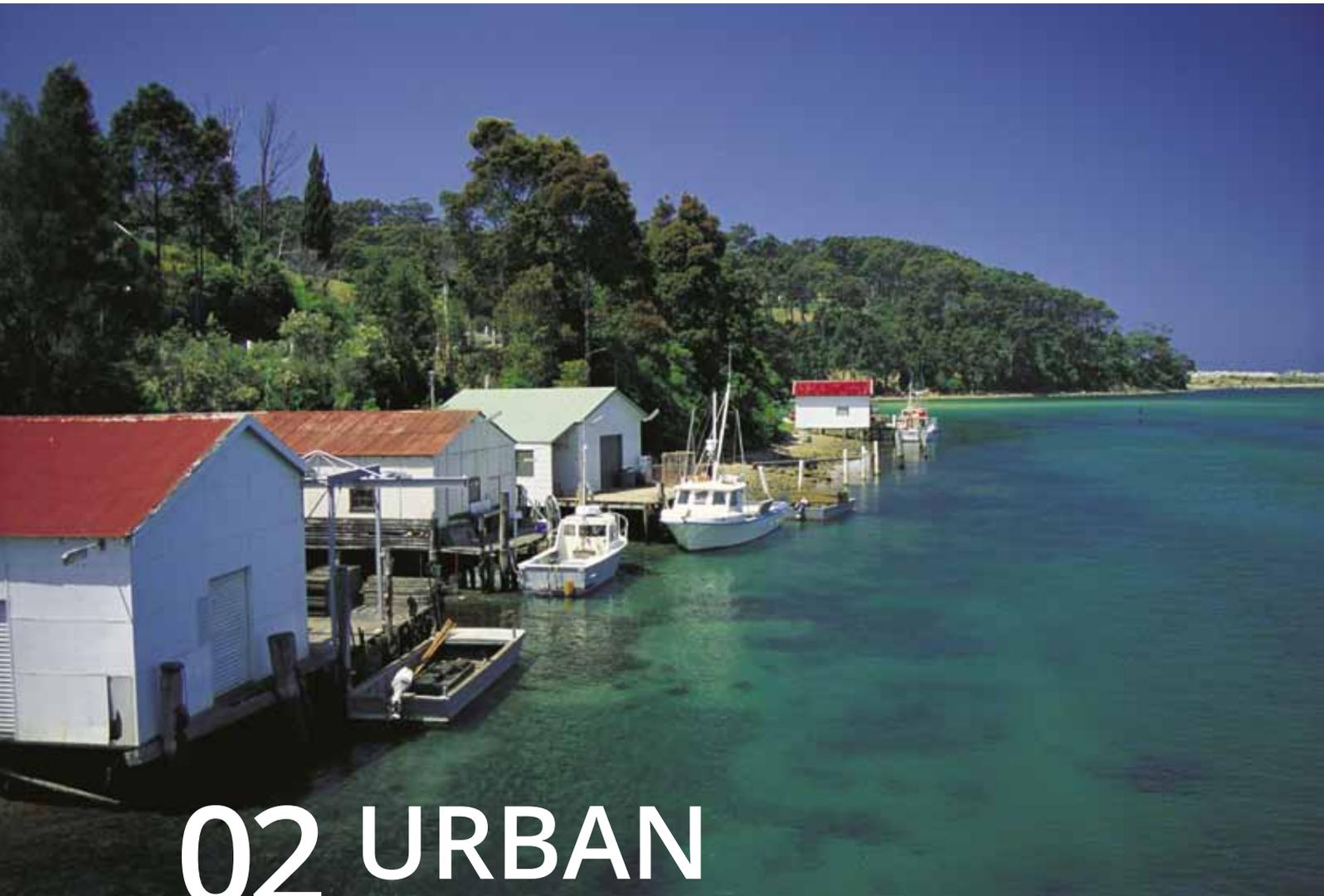
Population increase has created new and increasing pressures on the NSW coast including coastal development, pollution, and habitat modification. Coastal Councils will improve marine environments by:

- providing greater protection for beaches through the adoption of policy on inappropriate beach use by dogs, horses and 4WDs
- installing Stormwater Quality Improvement Devices (SQIDs) on all stormwater outlets that flow from Council managed land
- undertaking environmental engineering works and bushland management solutions to reduce erosion and sedimentation of creek systems, and to rehabilitate creeks and bushland areas
- developing community education programs to raise community awareness and encourage people to identify and modify behaviours that cause stormwater pollution
- provide Community Action Grants to assist local communities to participate in a diverse range of coastal restoration activities, from water monitoring to bush regeneration

Council will improve water quality in rivers and streams by:

- installing water sensitive urban design (WSUD)¹ on all stormwater outlets that flow into local creeks and river systems, and using WSUD to treat stormwater across the whole catchment
- supporting a planning and design framework that promotes sustainable development that integrates the built, natural and social environments while managing the water cycle in an integrated manner
- installing trash traps on all stormwater drains

¹<http://www.wsud.org/>



02 URBAN SUSTAINABILITY

Council is committed to reducing the environmental footprint of existing urban areas and ensuring that all new development encourages the adoption of best practice water, energy and waste systems.

Council will establish an urban sustainability committee and employ specialist staff, and publicly report on Councils footprint annually.



Energy and water savings

In addition to State targets, Council will encourage residential, commercial, and industrial development

to exceed these targets and make its town centres and residential areas leading green precincts.

Promote and utilise renewable energy and energy efficiency

Council will purchase green power for council operations and install energy efficiency measures. Council will link with various state and federal schemes to produce green energy plans and

assist businesses and residential precincts to be more energy efficient and use renewable energy sources.



Public transport and walking/cycling

Council will, in all its development decisions, require plans to mobilise and use public transport and walking/cycling as active measures to avoid traffic congestion, and free up areas for pedestrians and cyclists.

Council will actively campaign for all highways to have physically separated bicycle lanes or an alternative nearby.

Council will actively participate in regional public transport planning.



Community gardens

Council will develop and implement a community gardens strategy. Such gardens can be placed on rooftops, nature strips,² degraded public land and selected lots.

They improve amenity, help reduce temperature and energy use and provide a local food source.

² However where there is remnant native vegetation on 'nature strips' it is not appropriate to remove this for community gardens. Remnant native vegetation is the lowest maintenance option for "nature strips"



Procurement

Council will support green procurement of paper, building materials and services, as part of improving its environmental profile and supporting new local green industries.

Preference will be given to locally produced products where possible to reduce transportation.

Promote waste reduction & re-use

Council will support and promote re-use facilities (and seek State government financial support) to repair, maintain and reconstruct waste items.



Environmental levy

Council will support the use of an ongoing environmental levy for the provision of Council run or sponsored projects including, for example, on:

- climate change and/or energy efficiency, including mitigation and reduction.
- restoring ecosystems.
- sustainable business and suburbs.
- community engagement and action programs like bushcare and community gardens.³

³For a good example of how successful an environmental levy can be, see Willoughby Council's e.restore program: <http://www.willoughby.nsw.gov.au/Environment--Sustainability/e-restore/>.



03 POLLUTION AND WASTE

Council is committed to reducing air and water pollution through its development decisions, operations and shining a light on the operations of state government utilities and the activity of the Environment Protection Authority.

Council will assist the local community to participate in pollution monitoring and decision making and will take legal action to enforce pollution limits and prosecute pollution offences where Council is the appropriate regulatory authority under the *Protection of the Environment Operations Act 1997*.



Increase recycling

Council will improve separation of waste for residential areas and council/commercial facilities, for example 3-bin systems and separated food waste, and provide strong support for a container

deposits system. Waste to energy will not be regarded as recycling as it involves a single one-off use (downcycling).



Cumulative impacts of pollution

Council will consider the cumulative impacts of development on pollution, and require significant pollution reductions from both residential and commercial development (and insist that the state government does the same). Council will also consider the cumulative impact of stormwater

pollution and implement all steps identified in earlier sections to require significant stormwater pollution reductions.

Council will develop 'cumulative pollution maps' as part of its state of environment reporting.



04 PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Council has a key role in planning and development in its local area. Effective strategic planning must be based on rigorous environment and planning studies and Council should have a Local Environment Plan (**LEP**) which ensures development is sustainable and carried out within the physical capacity of the environment.

Council will continue to lobby State government for planning legislation that provides the tools to

take account of cumulative impact. Development should be ecologically sustainable and not be overridden by political interference. All development decisions should be transparent and open to appeal, subject to equitable appeal rights for community members/objectors and no discretionary powers given to Ministers without criteria that can be the subject of legal oversight and review.



Identify and protect important habitat

Council is committed to identifying and protecting important habitat, and will:

- undertake robust environmental studies in order to identify important habitat including wildlife corridors, endangered ecological communities and locally or regionally significant communities
- afford protection to these areas through its local environment plan (LEP), by zoning these areas as EPZs and providing effective and adequate buffers which also have strong EPZ coverage
- have EPZs which prohibit development and also other forms of degradation such as the planting of non indigenous plants or the introduction of animals not indigenous to the particular area, and to and ensure these prohibitions are strictly implemented and adhered to
- ensure that any development or activity that is carried out in EPZs maintains or improves the environmental values of that area
- work collaboratively with neighboring councils with respect to habitats that cross local government boundaries
- develop policy, resources and operational commitment to enforce environmental protection standards and provisions (for example against encroachments, illegal rubbish dumping, grazing of goats, planting of non-indigenous species in EPZs, introduction of non-indigenous animals to Council's LGA)
- if koala habitat is present, ensure a koala management plan under SEPP 44 is prepared



Threatened species assessment

Council is committed to protecting threatened species. Council will:

- identify listed threatened species and endangered ecological communities in its LGA
- afford protection of threatened species and endangered ecological communities through protections in LPIs, including providing effective and adequate buffers which also have strong EPZ coverage
- require robust environmental studies by experienced ecologists to assist the assessment of development applications and provide advice to Council for any development or activity that is likely to impact on threatened species or ecologically sustainable communities, whether or not these locations have been mapped
- in the LEP. Council must not approve a development unless it results in negligible impact on threatened species or ecologically sustainable communities
- upon listing of new threatened species or endangered ecological communities, review its environmental studies and planning policies
- have EPZs with clear prohibitions, which prohibit development and other forms of degradation such as planting non indigenous plants
- develop similar policy, resources and operational commitment to enforce environmental standards and protection provisions as that which covers important habitat

Restrict spot rezoning

Council recognises that spot rezoning is contrary to effective strategic planning and is committed to restricting spot rezoning in its LGA. Council will adopt a policy that requires:

- Council to take all reasonable steps to restrict the rezoning of land outside of the process of reviewing its comprehensive LEP
- all rezoning proposals to be supported by thorough environmental studies
- Council, before determining to proceed with a planning proposal, to be satisfied that the proposal improves environmental outcomes

Adopt model natural resource management (NRM) provisions

Council recognises the intrinsic link between development and planning and environment protection, nature conservation and NRM. In this respect, Council will adopt standard provisions in its LEP in order to effectively manage:

- impacts on land, including acid sulphate soils, salinity, contaminated land, sedimentation and erosion
- impacts on water resources, including wetlands, coast and estuaries, riparian land, creek lines, ground water and drinking catchments
- impacts on biodiversity including loss of habitat and threatened species and endangered ecological communities

Adopt a 'maintain or improve' environmental outcomes test

Council is committed to sustainable development that is carried out within the physical capacity of the environment. Council will adopt a policy that all development and activities must maintain or

improve environmental outcomes with respect to biodiversity and catchment health and water quality.



05 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION & ACCOUNTABILITY

Effective community engagement in local government requires opportunities for genuine, appropriate and timely public participation in all processes of local government.

Council will ensure that information created by or for Council is distributed in a timely, accessible and culturally appropriate manner.

Transparency

Council will provide opportunities for the public to engage with Council through providing better access to Council business, through:

- regularly updating the Council website
- encouraging a system of committees which have agendas available to the public, and in which members of the public can attend and participate
- Council Business Papers and agenda be available in hard copy and on website at least 6 full days prior to the meeting
- timely uploading of Council meeting – including Committee – minutes onto the website, including hyperlinks to relevant documents
- better advertising of meetings and all development applications (**DAs**), including longer exhibition periods where appropriate. Local non-designated development will be advertised under a Council notification policy at a minimum by a notice on the street boundary of the property which can be easily seen by passers-by, and listing the DA on Councils website
- the adoption of a policy for developments to raise the standard above statutory requirements
- seeking longer exhibition periods for all DAs involving complex environmental and/or community issues or concerns by lobbying State government to amend section 79 *Environment Planning and Assessment Act 1979* to extend the 30 day public exhibition period

Accountability

While carrying out its roles and functions Council will ensure the public has access to information they can ask questions about. Council will:

- provide opportunities for the community to provide input into Council decision-making at a strategic and policy level prior to decisions being made
- ensure the website includes clear information on how to address Council meetings and provide input into Council business between meetings
- encourage active accountability between bureaucrats and the community

Public access to Council information is critical to effective accountability. Council will ensure that the Council website, and relevant members of staff who deal with the public, are familiar with the *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009* (GIPA Act) and will assist stakeholders to access information, using the GIPA Act where appropriate.

Community engagement in council's strategic direction

Council will increase measures for public participation and accountability in its community strategic plan, through:

- offering opportunities for community members to become better informed about Council business, and for its leaders, planners and other officials to determine and communicate which programs and decisions are important for community participation
- facilitating the involvement of Councillors, the public, users of facilities and services and council staff in the development, improvement and co-ordination of local government
- ensure flexibility is maintained, by both Council and the community, accounting for group dynamics and altering timetables/timeframes as necessary
- develop benchmarks and performance monitoring of community engagement programs, developed through a negotiated process where the community is actively engaged to define strategic outcomes, expected accomplishments and acceptable results
- develop and monitor broadly accepted measures of success or progress, including renewal mechanisms and a plan for evaluation and accountability as part of the long term process for sustaining public participation, interest and momentum

When developing processes for community engagement⁴ Council will:

Public participation

Council will increase local decision making and local participation in decision making in accordance with Goal 32 of the NSW 2021 Plan 'involve the community in decision making on government policy, services and projects'.

Council will devolve decision making to local levels where appropriate, in accordance with a clear and transparent community strategic plan. Council will provide opportunities for interested community members to interact with Council on issues of

broad community concern or public interest. Council will adopt policies that clearly articulate the following principles:

- Exercise its functions in a manner that promotes social justice principles of equity, access and participation
- Ensure that public participation is provided for on an ongoing basis, rather than episodic and reactive

⁴ See Gibson, P, Lacy, D and Dougherty, M (2005) 'Improving Performance and Accountability in Local Government with Citizen Participation' accessed from <http://www.innovation.cc/volumes-issues/gibson1.pdf> on 29/3/12.

