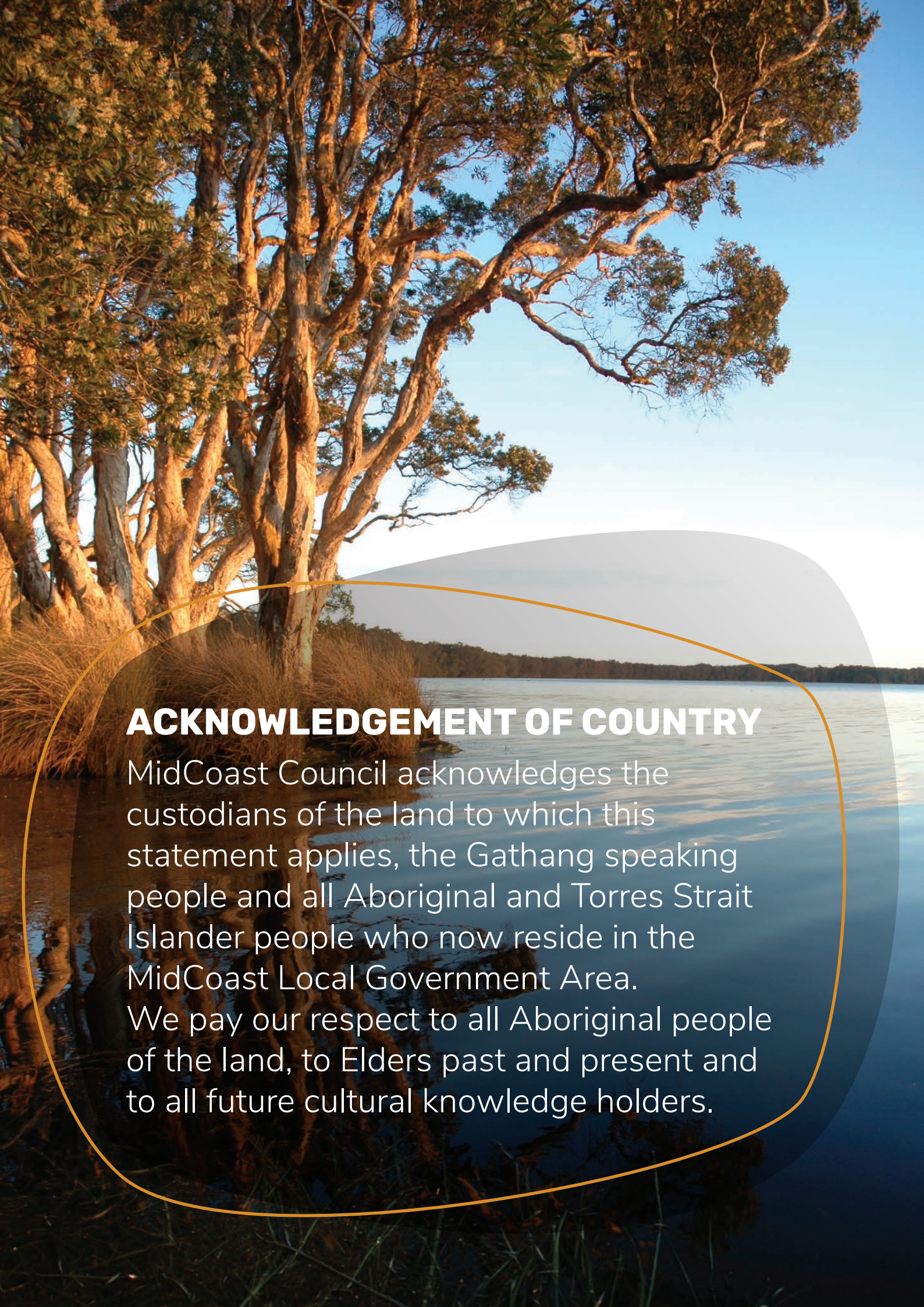
MIDCOAST
council



LOCAL STRATEGIC PLANNING STATEMENT

SEPTEMBER 2020



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

MidCoast Council acknowledges the custodians of the land to which this statement applies, the Gathang speaking people and all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who now reside in the MidCoast Local Government Area.
We pay our respect to all Aboriginal people of the land, to Elders past and present and to all future cultural knowledge holders.

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ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THIS PLAN

CSP	Community Strategic Plan
DCP	Development Control Plan
DPIE	Department of Planning, Industry and Environment
HRP	Hunter Regional Plan 2036
LEP	Local Environmental Plan
LGA	Local Government Area
LSPS	Local Strategic Planning Statement
MCC	MidCoast Council
NSW	New South Wales

Note: The MidCoast area is covered by three LEPs and DCPs for the former three regions being Great Lakes, Greater Taree and Gloucester Shire.

MAYOR'S MESSAGE



I am pleased to present the MidCoast Local Strategic Planning Statement.

This Statement sets out our vision for land use planning across the MidCoast, an area covering over 10,000 square kilometres that spans from the mountains to the sea.

In doing so, we are aligning our planning priorities with the key values identified by our community in our community strategic plan - MidCoast 2030: Shared Vision, Shared Responsibility.

These values are:

- strong leadership and shared vision
- unique, diverse and culturally rich communities
- connected communities
- our environment
- our thriving and growing economy

This Statement will guide our decisions on future planning, to achieve the community's vision and values.

It demonstrates how strong land use planning will provide our community with the right balance between the significant opportunities for tourism and economic development and the protection of our environment and local identities.

Councillors and staff recognise the value our community places on all these elements of life in the MidCoast.

This Statement is an important expression of the way we will move forward in the use of our land and provides a framework for the application of consistent strategic planning approaches.

It also links the vision of our MidCoast community with strategic regional priorities, including the NSW Government's Hunter Regional Plan 2036.

The MidCoast is a unique and beautiful part of the world and I commend this statement as one of the ways in which we as a Council are working to provide a better future for our residents, both now and for generations to come.

Cr David West
Mayor - MidCoast Council



INTRODUCTION

About this Statement

Purpose of this Statement

Policy context

How the Statement will be used by Council

Consultation

The MidCoast Challenge



ABOUT THIS STATEMENT

The MidCoast Local Strategic Planning Statement sets out a future vision for land use planning across the MidCoast.

The Statement outlines how growth and change will be managed to maintain the high levels of liveability, environmental amenity and rural character that the MidCoast is renowned for. It also reinforces that the unique characteristics that contribute to the local identity of our towns and villages should be maintained and enhanced.

It identifies ten planning priorities to achieve the vision, along with short, medium, long term, and ongoing actions to monitor and report on the progress of implementation

Based on the key values set out in MidCoast 2030: Shared Vision, Shared Responsibility (CSP), our Statement aligns with the aspirations of our community.

The Statement also aligns with the directions and actions contained in the Hunter Regional Plan 2036. The vision of the regional plan is *The leading regional economy in Australia with a vibrant new metropolitan city at its heart*. The MidCoast is identified as a suitable area for growing the economy of the Hunter.

PURPOSE OF THIS STATEMENT

The MidCoast Local Strategic Planning Statement is a pivotal tool for expressing the desired land use outcomes for the MidCoast.

The Statement acts as a link between the strategic priorities identified at a regional level and finer-grained planning at the local level as expressed in our Local Environmental Plans (LEPs) and Development Control Plans (DCPs), as illustrated below in Figure 1. Our Statement aims to ensure consistency in strategic planning approaches and identify where further strategic planning effort may be needed. It will guide how the MidCoast LEP and DCP are prepared and delivered to meet our vision and the growth aspirations of the NSW Government.

To manage this growth, the NSW Government's Hunter Regional Plan 2036 sets out a vision to grow the MidCoast region. The MidCoast community sets out its vision in MidCoast 2030: Shared Vision, Shared Responsibility. This Statement aligns with both of these plans as indicated in Figure 1.

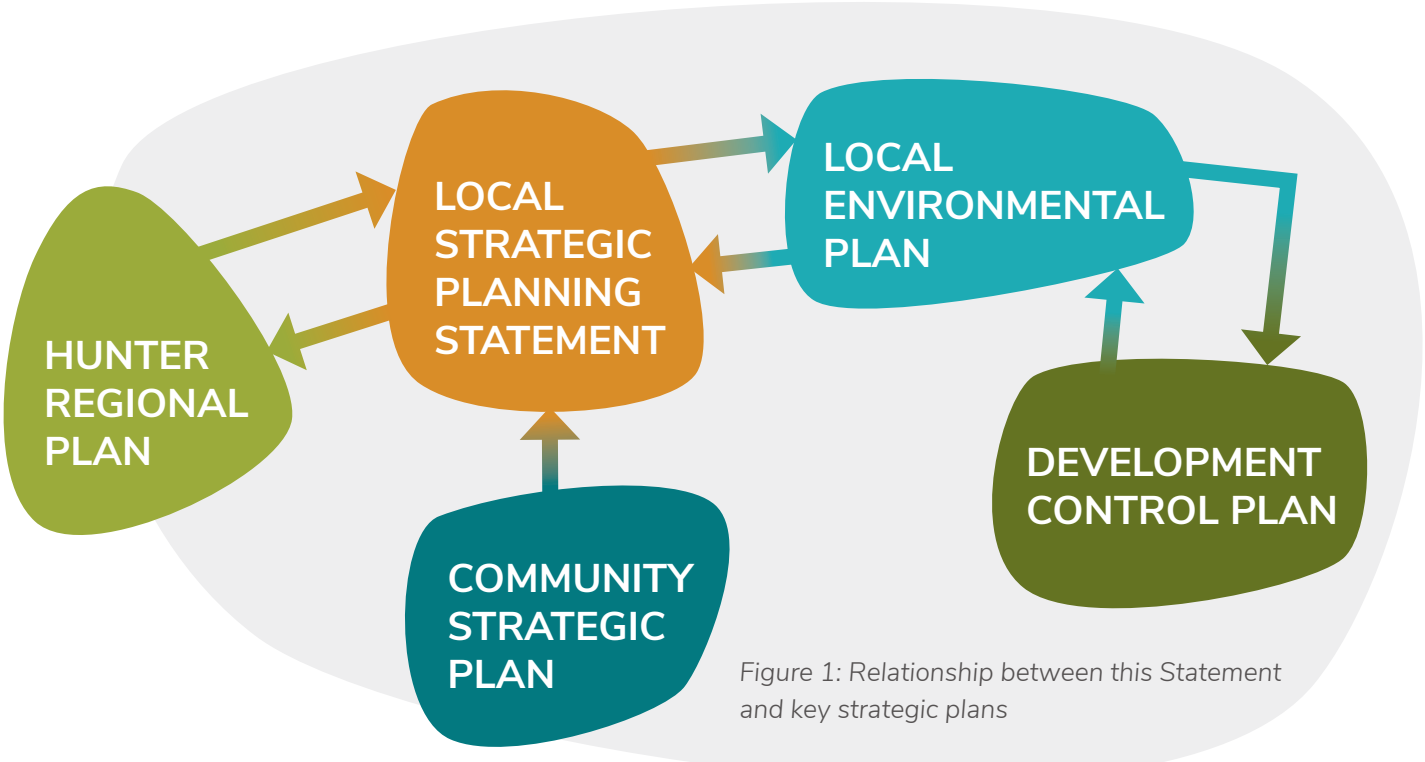


Figure 1: Relationship between this Statement and key strategic plans

POLICY CONTEXT

This Statement has been prepared in accordance with Section 3.9 of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*.

All Councils in New South Wales are required to prepare a Local Strategic Planning Statement (LSPS). The Act requires that the following be included in the Statement:

- challenges and opportunities faced by the region
- planning priorities that are consistent with regional and strategic planning for the area and the community strategic plan
- actions required to meet the planning priorities
- evaluation and monitoring process to track the progress of the Statement.

The Statement must be reviewed at least every seven years in accordance with Section 3.9(1) of the Act.





HOW THE STATEMENT WILL BE USED BY COUNCIL

The MidCoast LSPS outlines the planning priorities for implementing the vision for the MidCoast.

It builds on how the land use planning elements identified in MidCoast 2030: Shared Vision, Shared Responsibility (the CSP) will be achieved, and will guide Council's decisions on future planning. It will demonstrate how Council can take the lead role in facilitating growth, while balancing environmental, social and economic outputs for the MidCoast.

The Statement will inform several Council processes and procedures, including:

- the roll-out of strategic projects in the MidCoast Delivery Program and Operational Plan
- infrastructure priorities
- effectively engaging with our community and involving them in our long term planning
- retaining and enhancing the character of our towns and villages
- advocacy with the NSW Government for increased provision of infrastructure and services to support growth
- amendments to planning controls and the delivery of the MidCoast LEP and DCP

While our Statement sets the direction for our activities as a Council, partnerships with the NSW Government, businesses, community groups and the community are also crucial in delivering our community's aspirations.



CONSULTATION

Council prepared this Statement by building on the results from a range of community engagement activities.

MidCoast 2030: Shared Vision, Shared Responsibility (the CSP) was developed from an extensive consultation process that spanned over 18 months after the formation of MidCoast Council. Building on this strong foundation, we examined community engagement findings from consultation activities for:

- our 'Zoning In' consultation on urban lands in early 2020;
- the 2020 Customer Satisfaction Survey;
- the MidCoast Regional Economic Development Strategy;
- Council's Community Conversation 6 monthly roadshow; and
- Local Community Plans.

This engagement has been invaluable in determining the planning priorities for the MidCoast.

The NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment and other State government agencies including Transport for NSW and Heritage NSW have provided advice to support preparation of this Statement.

The draft Statement was placed on public exhibition from 9 July to 17 August 2020, seeking feedback from the community and other stakeholders.

Submissions received during the public exhibition period have been used to inform the finalisation of this Statement.

THE MIDCOAST CHALLENGE

Strategic plans are building on our understanding of the MidCoast.

Formed by the merger of three general purpose Councils with different planning approaches, and a County Council, we are currently creating a clear, consistent, evidence-based planning approach for the MidCoast. Figure 2 shows the extent of the former Councils and the relevant planning controls.

Strategic planning frameworks are being established for all aspects of planning – our urban, environmental and rural land; and our economy, infrastructure and transport. A key challenge is ensuring that future residential and employment land requirements can be delivered in a manner which can maintain the high levels of liveability, environmental quality and rural character that our region is renowned for.

On this basis, the Statement reflects the large body of strategic planning work being undertaken to establish a new planning vision for the MidCoast – it adopts an 'interim' approach. Once this strategic planning work is completed, the Statement will be reviewed, in conjunction with the development of a new CSP, to provide an evidence-based approach to implementing a 20-year vision for the MidCoast. This will be undertaken prior to the 7-year review timeframe.

Figure 2: Extent of the former Councils and the relevant planning controls





CONTEXT

The Hunter Region

Our region

Our community

Our economy

Our environment

THE HUNTER REGION

The Hunter is the leading and largest regional economy in Australia, with thriving communities and a biodiversity-rich natural environment.

The Hunter is home to more than 860,000 people and is still growing due to its reputation as one of the great places to live and work. Growth in the Hunter is guided by the Hunter Regional Plan 2036, a 20-year blueprint for the future. The geographical extent of the Hunter is shown below in Figure 3.

Greater Newcastle is the centrepiece of the region, renowned as a connected metropolitan City. Beyond Greater Newcastle are vibrant centres, towns and villages, many of which have benefited from emerging job opportunities in the health, agriculture, tourism, defence, energy and transport sectors.

Infrastructure investment is the linchpin of economic development across the Hunter. It supports freight, health and education services, agribusiness and tourism, as well as building resilience to global economic cycles and climate change.

Greater housing choice is available in existing and new communities, there is proximity to jobs and services and residents are well supported by public transport and walking and cycling options. More housing has reduced the upward pressure on house prices.

Communities are enjoying a green grid of open space and recreational facilities – including more walking and cycling networks – as well as the distinctive character and heritage of their areas. The region's protected natural environment enriches the experience of living in the Hunter, sustains the region's water supply and protects biodiversity.

The MidCoast is one of ten local government areas that make up the Hunter.

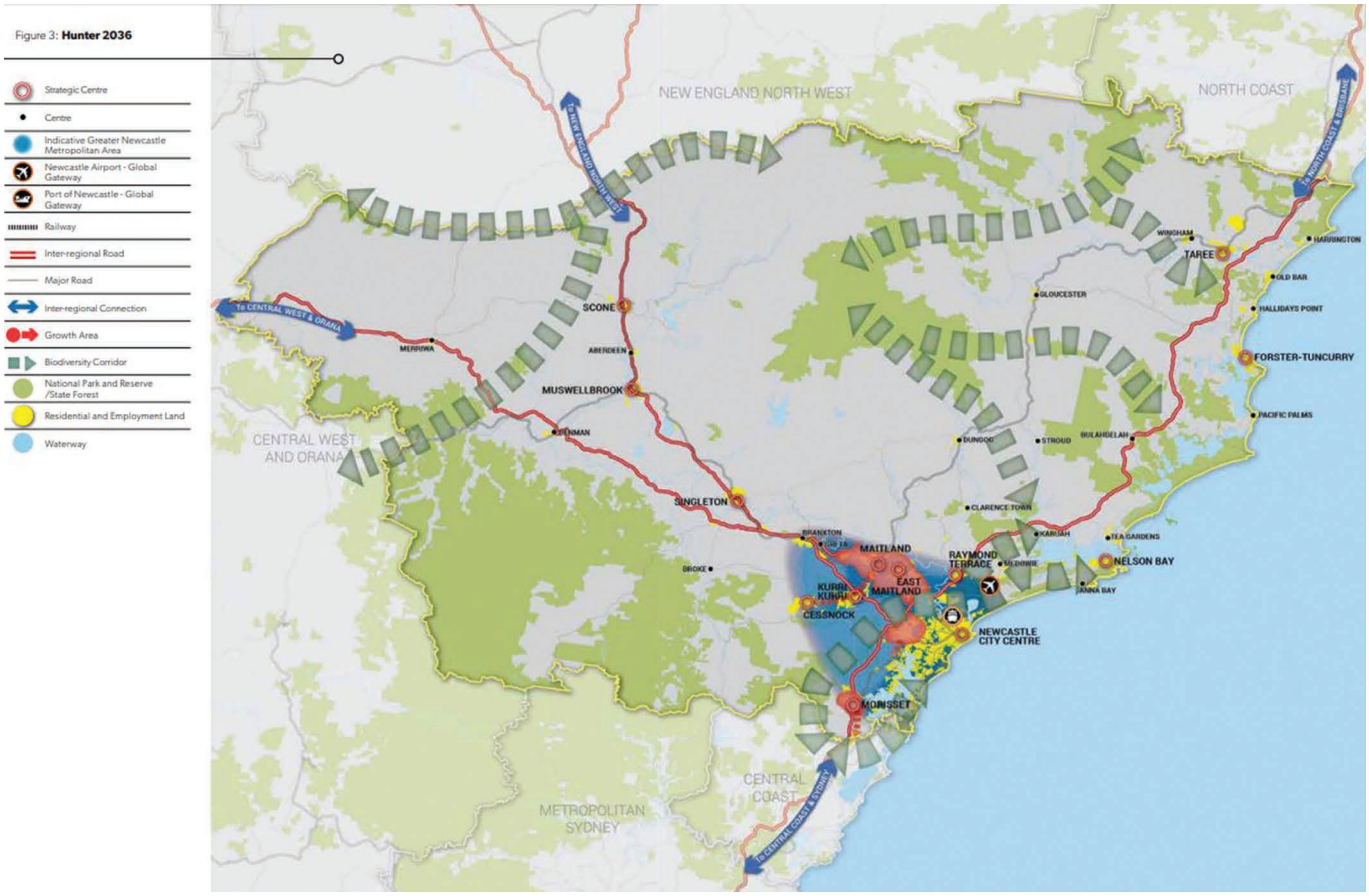
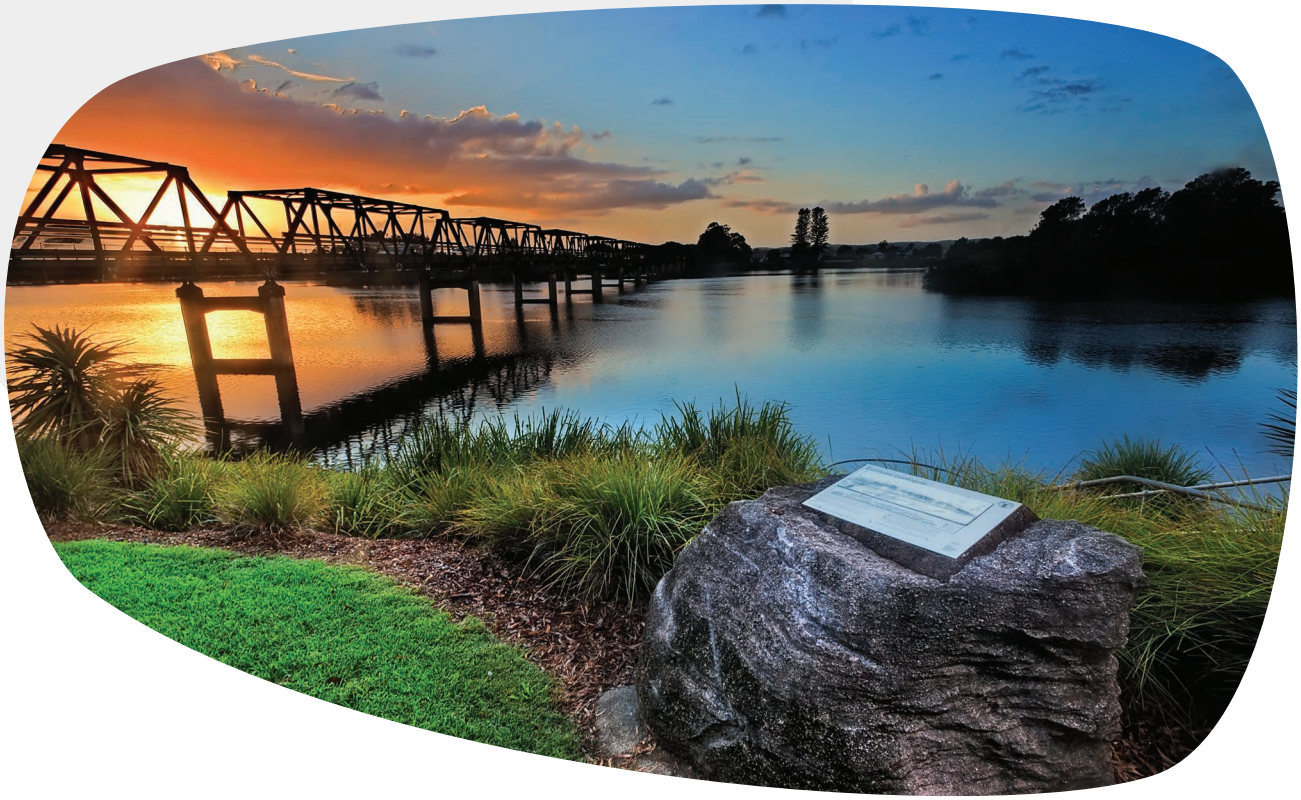


Figure 3: Geographical extent of the Hunter as shown in the Hunter Regional Plan



OUR REGION

The MidCoast contains 196 towns, villages and localities.

Spanning an area of 10,052km^2, MidCoast Council is the largest Council area in the Hunter covering 30.5% of the region and 1.25% of NSW. Almost the size of Jamaica, it is a large and diverse area, ranging from beaches and coastline, to mountains and hinterland, with green spaces and national parks in between. This landscape is characterised by pristine waterways, striking scenery and an abundance of natural treasures.

The MidCoast is home to the Gathang speaking Aboriginal people, the Biripi and Worimi. We are a region rich in cultural pride and connection to the landscape and we embrace the spirit of reconciliation.

The MidCoast has a population of approximately 93,800 people living in around 40,000 households.

Unique to the MidCoast, there are two main population centres, Taree and Forster-Tuncurry, each with differing economic drivers. Taree offers a wide range of regional services and facilities that are utilised across our region, including the Manning Base Hospital, Taree Regional Airport, schools, sporting and entertainment facilities. Large tracts of industrial land also support a focus on industry. In contrast, Forster-Tuncurry centres around lifestyle. Ideally located between the coast and lakes, both tourism and retirement living drive the economy. This has led to extensive shopping, entertainment and service facilities to support both residents and visitors.

There are rural and coastal centres that support the main centres - some are ‘satellite suburbs’, while others are self-reliant given their distance from the larger centres. These centres include Tea Gardens-Hawks Nest, Gloucester, Wingham, Hallidays Point, Harrington and Old Bar (refer to Figure 4). Our rural centres like Gloucester play a significant role for the economy and the industry they provide. In addition, there are a large number of villages and localities, each with their own unique character and qualities.

Older towns and villages like Taree, Gloucester, Stroud and Wingham have a historic charm. They showcase heritage in their town centres, older neighbourhoods, some industrial buildings and facilities like halls, memorials and railway stations.

10,052 km²

POPULATION 93,836

(ABSERP 2018)

47,400 DWELLINGS (NIEIR)

196 towns villages & localities

192km of coastline

ROADS 3,599KM

1,845KM OF SEALED ROADS

1,754KM OF UNSEALED ROADS

657 BRIDGES

84 PLAYGROUNDS

RIP 30 CEMETERIES

3,000HA OF PARKS & OPEN SPACE MANAGED

45 WATER RESERVOIRS

1 REGIONAL AIRPORT

58 FULL SIZE PLAYING FIELDS

13 SKATE PARKS

OVER 750HA OF MOWING

10 CHLORINATED POOLS

2 OCEAN POOLS

14 HERITAGE CONSERVATION AREAS

487 HERITAGE ITEMS

26 SPORTING COMPLEXES

New housing precincts are proposed at Brimbin and North Tuncurry which combined are anticipated to provide an additional 10,000 dwellings for future residents.

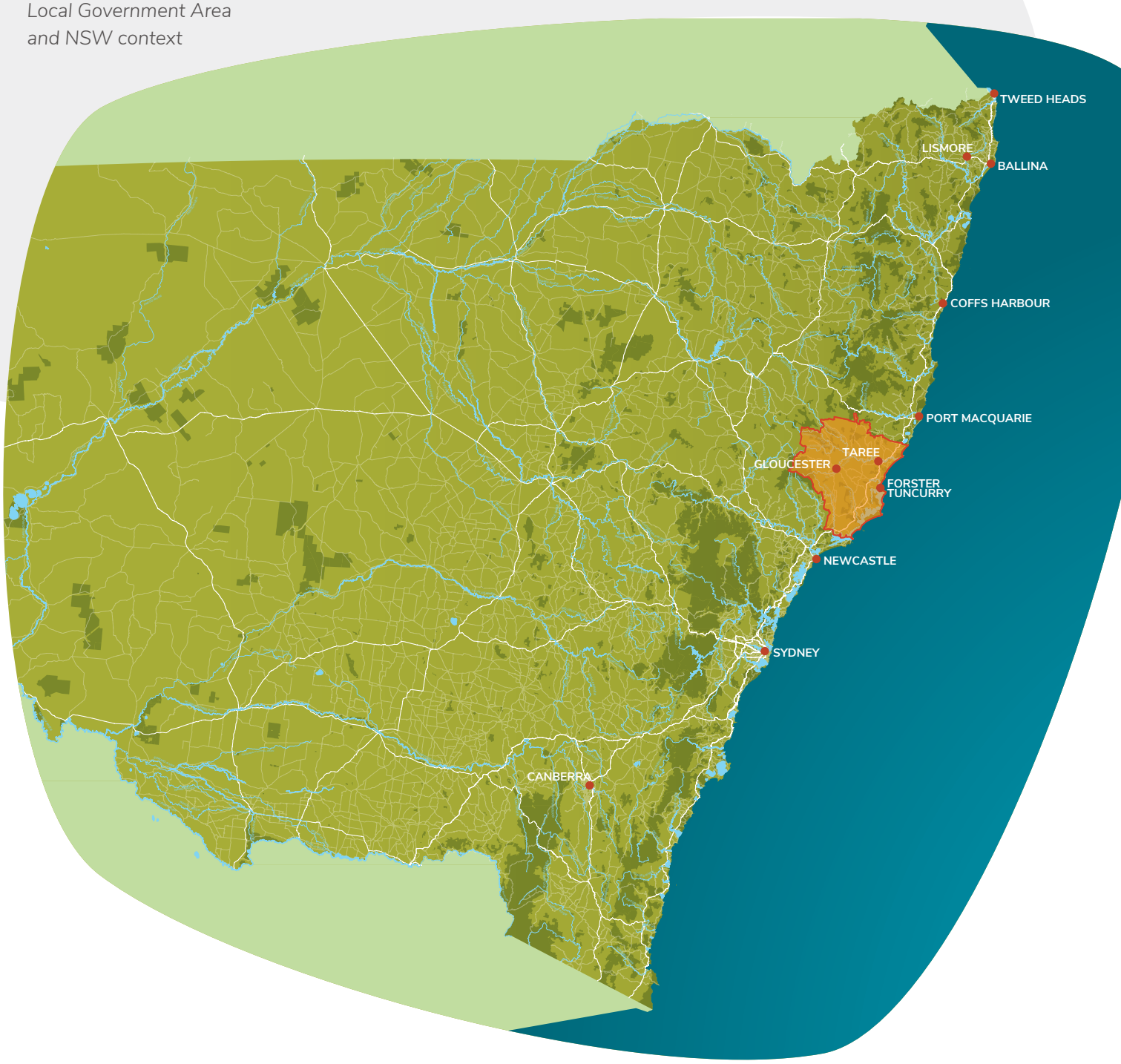
The MidCoast is ideally located, approximately 3 hours drive north of Sydney and 1.5 hours north of Newcastle (refer location map in Figure 5) via the Pacific Highway, offering easy access to specialist services and facilities. Alternatively, Taree Regional Airport provides quick connection to Sydney, and from there travellers can access a range of domestic and international routes.

The North Coast Rail Line connects Gloucester, Wingham and Taree to both Sydney and Brisbane. We have a road network of 3,599km, with the Pacific Highway, The Bucketts Way, Thunderbolts Way and The Lakes Way providing important transport connections for freight and tourism.



Figure 4 – Location of MidCoast centres

Figure 5: MidCoast Local Government Area and NSW context





OUR COMMUNITY

The MidCoast is home to over 93,800 people.

The population of the MidCoast is forecast to grow to 100,100 people by 2041, generating the need for approximately 8,000 more dwellings (DPIE, 2019). This is an estimated growth rate of 0.3% over a 25-year period. Much of this growth is expected to occur in or near our coastal towns and villages.

The MidCoast is a popular location with many retirees moving from the Central Coast and the Sydney basin. They are seeking a 'sea change' or 'tree change', while still being close to Sydney and Newcastle. Most of our population growth has occurred in people aged 60 and over who make up 38.5% of our population. The median age of our population is 52, well above the National and State median of 38, making the MidCoast population one of the oldest in NSW.

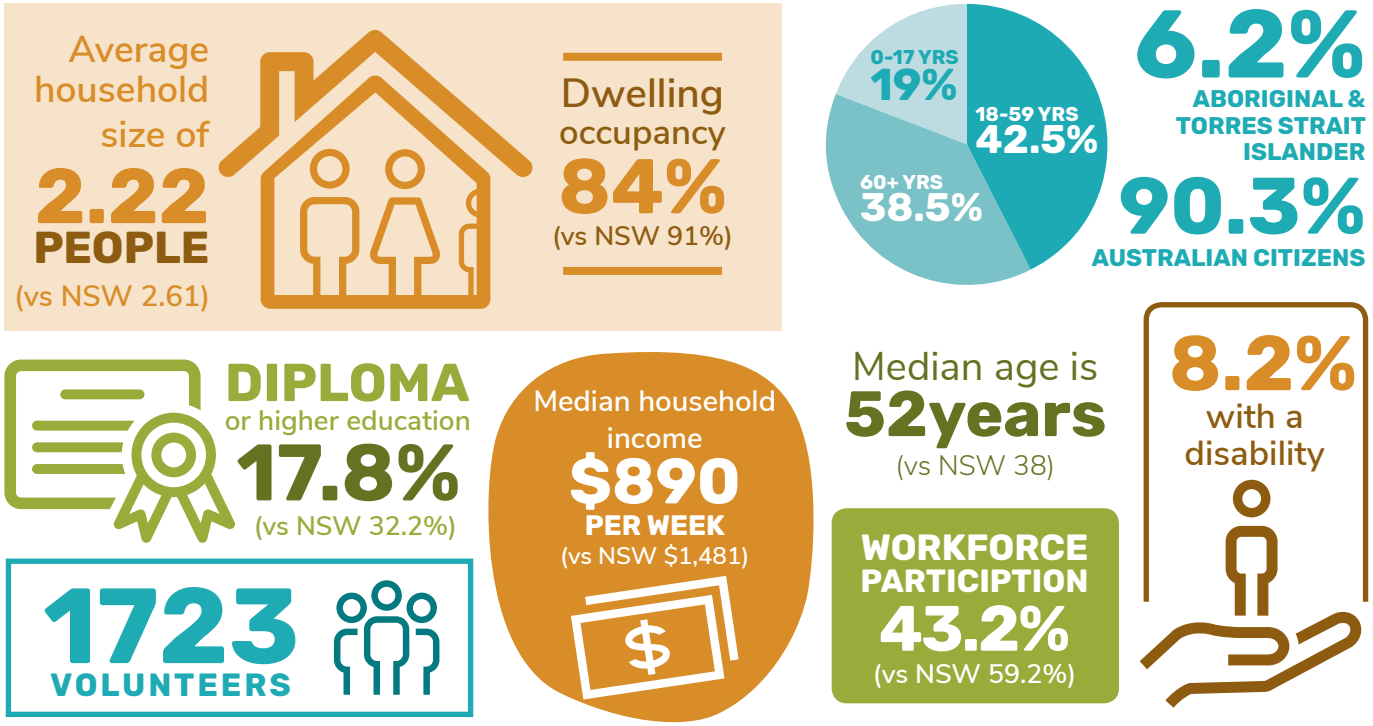
While the region is a popular place for raising young children, who make up 19% of the population, we experience a sharp decrease in numbers of youth (aged 18 and over). Although educational opportunities are improving, there is still often a need for young people to leave the region to pursue higher education or employment opportunities.

In our community, 6.2% identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, more than double the State and National averages (2.9% and 2.8% respectively). There is significant opportunity to embrace Indigenous cultures and enhance the inclusiveness of our community.

With 8.2% of our population reporting they need assistance with their day-to-day lives, we have higher than the NSW average of people living with a disability. Through our Disability Inclusion Action Plan, we are committed to continually seeking ways to improve the accessibility and inclusiveness of our community.

We also have a supportive community, with 20% of our population volunteering. The recent 2019 bushfire events showcased our incredible community spirit as we came together to assist those affected by bushfires.

There are a number of challenges that impact on the socio-economic health of our community. With high levels of retirement and unemployment, and low levels of education attainment, the household incomes in the MidCoast are significantly lower than other regions. The MidCoast is the 25th most disadvantaged Council area in NSW (out of 131 areas) with a SEIFA index of 928. This increases the importance of planning to provide opportunities for job growth, accessibility across the region and housing affordability.





OUR ECONOMY

The MidCoast is a self-contained functional economic region, with the vast majority of workers in the region also residing in the region.

Our region's economic strengths are our land and water assets, local infrastructure, and our location, lifestyle and amenity. These strengths were identified in the MidCoast Regional Economic Development Strategy (REDS) which is aimed at collaborating to build sustainable economic development in the MidCoast.

Employment is largely service-based with healthcare and social assistance being our biggest industries, followed by retail trade, accommodation, food services, and construction. Our ageing population drives the demand for health-related industries. Developing a health precinct around the Manning Base Hospital is important to ensure that the co-location benefits of health industries are realised.

Our rural landscape supports a range of primary industries including dairy, beef, timber and poultry farming. Fishing and oyster farming are significant industries on our coast. There has been some growth in poultry industries as they relocate from the expanding edges of larger cities. In support of our agricultural industries, the development of the Northern Gateway Transport Hub in Cundletown aims to promote transport industries that can move our produce and goods efficiently to other markets.

Our region is also a key holiday destination with 2.2 million visitors enjoying the MidCoast in 2018. Our Destination Barrington Coast tourism brand promotes our diversity of experiences. We welcome visitors to the Barrington Coast, *where the leaves touch the waters from the mountains to the sea* and encourage them to indulge their curiosity, seek the road less travelled and take delight in the wonders of our region.

We are seeing an emerging growth sector in nature- and adventure-based tourism, taking advantage of our natural landscapes. The coastal experience still attracts significant visitors over the summer months when the population swells with tourists coming to enjoy the region's pristine coastline and beaches, coastal lakes, lagoons and other attractions. We use these assets to encourage visitors to explore high-altitude ancient rainforests and fertile valleys rich in agriculture; embrace charming towns with welcoming smiles; discover mighty rivers, untouched waterways and breathtaking beaches.

The major towns of Taree and Forster-Tuncurry provide for a significant share of the region's housing and jobs. They deliver a variety of high level services and operate as service centres for the surrounding area, providing civic, sporting, entertainment and cultural venues.

The MidCoast has an annual gross regional product of $3.16 billion (2019). This is anticipated to decrease in 2020 given the economic impact of Covid-19 on our region.

GRP $3.16B
(NIEIR 2018)

Over **6,812** **businesses**
(ABS 2018)

32,790 LOCAL JOBS
35,728 EMPLOYED RESIDENTS
(NIEIR 2018)

2.1 MILLION VISITORS
(TRA 2018 LGA Visitor Profile)

12.6% retail trade
(profile ID)

ONE OF THE LARGEST PRODUCERS IN NSW OF SYDNEY ROCK OYSTERS

47.3% FULL-TIME EMPLOYED
(ABS 2016)

39.4% employment in Healthcare Social Assistance **(17.3%)**
(profile ID)

9.5% construction
(profile ID)

126 ANNUAL EVENTS

Supply over **25% OF NSW MILK**

VIBRANT SPACES AWARD WINNING PROGRAM



OUR ENVIRONMENT

The MidCoast region is a significant, diverse and beautiful part of New South Wales.

We are famous for our forests, waterways and beaches. We have 58 national parks, nature reserves and conservation areas; 63 State Forests and eight Aboriginal Places. Our lands are watered by 38 rivers including the only double delta in the southern hemisphere and we can lay claim to having the state's tallest single drop waterfall. We also enjoy an incredible triple lake system and 192 kilometres of pristine coastline. All of this is located between the Pacific Ocean and the Great Dividing Range.

The Great Dividing Range frames the western boundary of our region, along with Barrington Tops National Park which forms part of the magnificent Gondwana Rainforests of Australia, recognised as a World Heritage Area.

Our landscape supports unique and rich biological diversity, due in part to both tropical and temperate climatic influences. It provides a broad range of habitats for the plants and animals of our region. Altitudes vary dramatically from sea-level on the coast to 1,586 metres at Brumlow Tops, the highest point in Barrington Tops National Park.



Many of the State's threatened plants and animals reside in our region, including species found nowhere else in the world, like the Manning River Helmeted Turtle and the Tuncurry Midge Orchid.

Our natural environment is integral to healthy communities, economies and our way of life. The community recognises this importance, with protection of the natural environment forming one of the five core values in the CSP. This was supported in our most recent Community Satisfaction Survey (2020) in which lifestyle, natural environment and location were the most valued aspects of living in the MidCoast.

Due to the desirable lifestyle our region offers, we will continue to experience pressures on our environmental and rural land. Council has an integral role in providing a land use planning framework that balances competing interests, while protecting our lifestyle and natural environment.

Natural disasters such as fire, drought and flooding are a common occurrence across the MidCoast. Since 2009, the MidCoast had 23 natural disaster declarations; the second worst affected Council in NSW (NSW Office of Emergency Management, 2020).

Approximately **1330 NATIVE PLANT SPECIES** in the area

58 NATIONAL PARKS

13 MAJOR WATER CATCHMENTS

261km MANNING RIVER

THE ONLY DOUBLE DELTA RIVER IN THE SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE

200M DROP ELLENBOROUGH FALLS

1 INTERNATIONALLY RECOGNISED WETLAND - MYALL LAKES

2 AWARD WINNING REMEDIATED WETLANDS DARAWANK (900HA) & CATTAI (1500HA)

WALLIS LAKE 35% OF NSW SEAGRASS

1 WORLD HERITAGE LISTED AREA, GONDWANAN RAINFORESTS (BARRINGTON TOPS)

1 MARINE PARK PORT STEPHENS GREAT LAKES

5 COASTAL LAKES & LAGOONS

MYALL, WALLIS, KHAPPINGHAT, SMITHS & BLACKHEAD

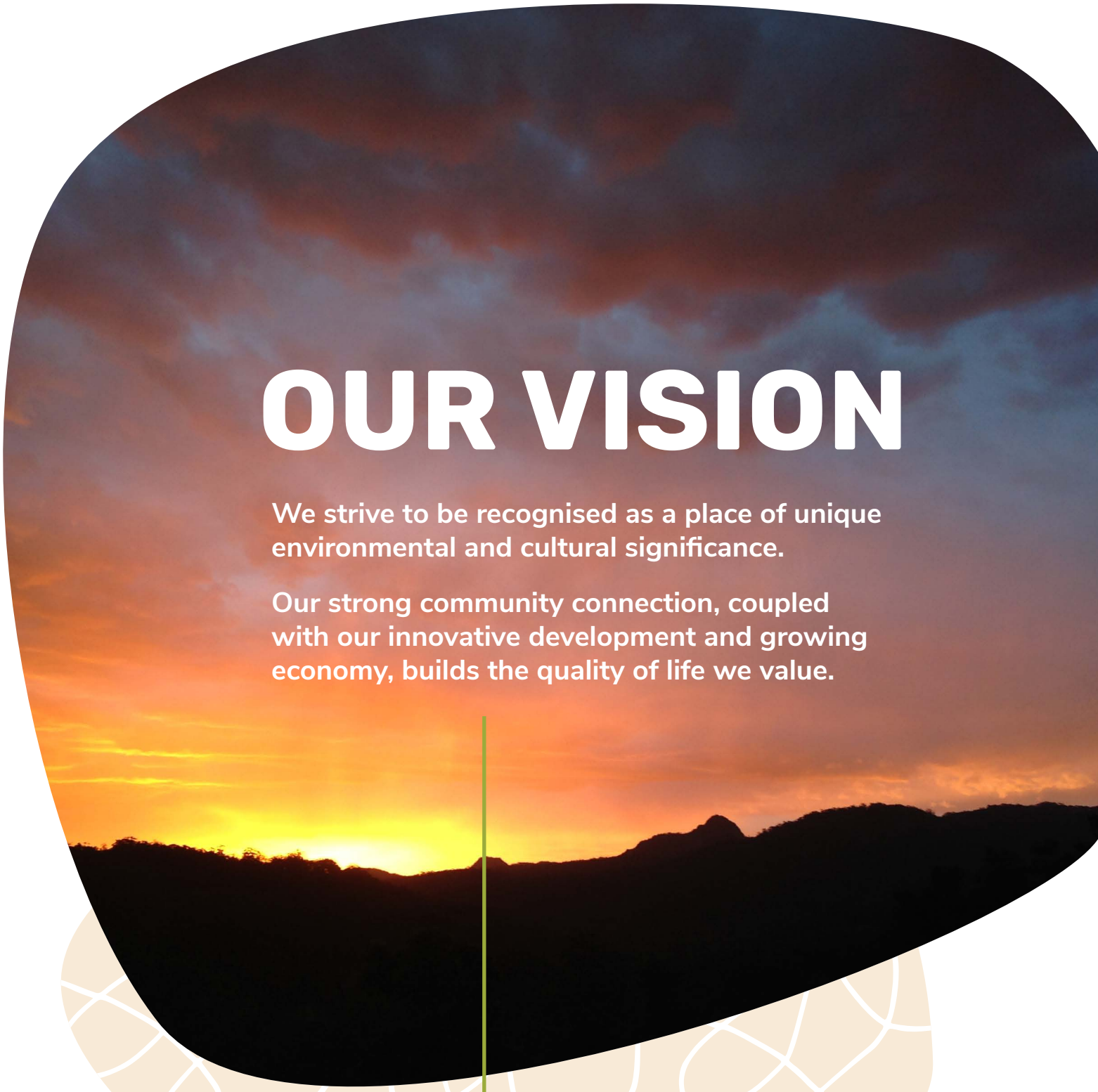
5 WETLANDS OF NATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE

CROWDY BAY NATIONAL PARK, WALLIS LAKE AND ADJACENT ESTUARINE ISLANDS, MYALL LAKES, PORT STEPHENS AND BARRINGTON TOPS SWAMPS

192km of coastline

(10% OF THE NSW COASTLINE)

17 LISTED THREATENED ECOLOGICAL COMMUNITIES



OUR VISION

We strive to be recognised as a place of unique environmental and cultural significance.

Our strong community connection, coupled with our innovative development and growing economy, builds the quality of life we value.

MidCoast's Vision

MIDCOAST'S VISION

The 20-year strategic planning vision for the MidCoast is shown in Table 1 (next page).

This vision is identified in MidCoast 2030: Shared Vision, Shared Responsibility (the CSP), which is the community's plan for the future of our region. It was developed from an extensive consultation process that spanned over 18 months following the formation of MidCoast Council.

The CSP expresses the vision and values for the MidCoast and outlines how we must work with our community to make these become a reality. The CSP includes five key values:

- strong leadership and shared vision
- unique, diverse and culturally rich communities
- connected communities
- our environment
- our thriving and growing economy

Under these values we outline where we want to be, how we will get there, who can help and how we will know once we have arrived.



The CSP provides the foundations for this Statement – the vision and the key values. The CSP strategies relating to land use planning are identified in Table 1 below.

STRONG LEADERSHIP AND SHARED VISION:

- Partner with State and Federal Governments in delivering local priorities and services
- Improve community understanding of decision making
- Empower the community to participate in decision making
- Participate in initiatives for regional cooperation and collaboration

OUR UNIQUE, DIVERSE AND CULTURALLY RICH COMMUNITIES:

- Support a diverse housing mix
- Empower our towns and villages to retain and celebrate their unique identity
- Support communities to be sustainable into the future
- Preserve our unique history and cultural heritage

A CONNECTED COMMUNITY:

- Encourage public spaces, facilities and events that strengthen social connections
- Use technology to improve the way we live, learn and connect
- Encourage the use of alternate transport options
- Promote and enhance community safety

OUR ENVIRONMENT:

- Protect and manage the health and diversity of our natural assets, wildlife and ecosystems
- Understand and manage climate change impacts and risks
- Protect, maintain and restore water quality
- Manage our resource consumption
- Ensure new development and growth compliments our natural, cultural and heritage assets
- Optimise land use to meet environmental, social, economic and development needs
- Greater utilisation of sustainable design
- Encourage well-designed streetscapes in centres

A THRIVING AND GROWING ECONOMY:

- Develop our region as an attractive visitor destination
- Innovative projects and programs to create vibrant spaces
- Develop strategies and processes that foster sustainable economic growth
- Encourage growth in agribusiness

Table 1 – Summary of key Community Strategic Plan strategies relevant to this Statement



In order to identify planning priorities from these strategies, we examined findings from our recent consultation ('Zoning In' 2020 and the Community Satisfaction Survey 2020). This re-affirmed our planning focus to achieve the vision. In summary, our planning needs to:

- enhance our liveability – people love where they live and they feel safe. They have a passion for retaining and enhancing local character and seek better access to services and facilities.
- protect our natural environment – with 98% of the MidCoast area being rural and environmental lands, protecting our natural environment is important as it has strong links to our liveability, tourism and economic growth.
- increase economic opportunities – supporting local businesses and jobs rates high with the community in importance.
- empower our community to shape our future – the community seeks improved information and involvement in decision making and long-term planning.

The MidCoast Regional Economic Development Strategy (REDS) guided the development of the economic priorities. REDS identifies our three regional strengths which are built upon in this Statement, being:

- our land and water assets
- our infrastructure, and our location
- lifestyle and amenity.



ACHIEVING OUR VISION

Overview

Strong leadership and shared vision

Our unique, diverse and culturally rich communities

Our connected community

Our environment

Our thriving and growing economy



OVERVIEW

This Statement provides a blueprint for how the vision outlined in the CSP can be achieved.

This Statement aligns with the strategic directions of the Hunter Regional Plan 2036 and MidCoast 2030: Shared Vision, Shared Responsibility (CSP). In order to refine how the vision will be achieved, we have developed ten specific planning priorities, as follows:

- Planning Priority 1 (P1): One Council, one plan
- Planning Priority 2 (P2): Foster planning partnerships
- Planning Priority 3 (P3): Deliver housing supply, choice and diversity
- Planning Priority 4 (P4): Place making in our towns and villages
- Planning Priority 5 (P5): Connect people and places
- Planning Priority 6 (P6): Protect and improve our environment
- Planning Priority 7 (P7): Improve our resilience
- Planning Priority 8 (P8): Managing our land and water assets
- Planning Priority 9 (P9): Improving our infrastructure and becoming a location of choice
- Planning Priority 10 (P10): Leveraging our lifestyle and amenity

The planning priorities include actions, that when implemented will achieve our vision. The actions are applied over the following timeframes:.

- Short term (2020-2023)
- Medium term (2024-2029)
- Long term (2030+)
- Ongoing

These actions are discussed in detail in the following sections.

The success of this Statement requires alignment with the CSP and the Hunter Regional Plan 2036. Table 2 shows this alignment (see next page).

WE VALUE	LSPS planning priorities	Alignment with CSP	Alignment with Hunter Regional Plan 2036 Directions
STRONG LEADERSHIP AND SHARED VISION 	P1: One Council, one plan P2: Foster planning partnerships	L1: We work in partnership with our community and government to ensure council is a trusted and flexible organisation that delivers on their needs L2: We make opportunities available for the community to inform decisions that shape our future L3: We develop and encourage community and civic leadership	D26: Deliver Infrastructure
OUR UNIQUE, DIVERSE AND CULTURALLY RICH COMMUNITIES 	P3: Deliver housing supply, choice and diversity P4: Place making our towns and villages	C1: We are a diverse community that works together to care for all our members C2: We will embrace the uniqueness and creativity of our communities	D19: Protect the region's heritage D20: Revitalise communities D21: Compact settlements D22: Housing diversity D25: Monitor housing and employment land
A CONNECTED COMMUNITY 	P5: Connect people and places	CC1: We feel connected to each other CC2: It is safe and easy to get around our region CC3: We utilise technologies to connect us locally and beyond CC4: We protect the health and safety of our communities	D17: Healthy built environments D18: Recreation/open space D27: Aboriginal communities
OUR ENVIRONMENT 	P6: Protect and improve our environment P7: Improve our resilience P8: Managing our land and water assets	E1: We protect, maintain and restore our natural environment E2: We manage resources wisely E3: We balance the needs of our natural and built environments	D10: Agricultural productivity D11: Manage natural resources D14: Protect and connect natural areas D15: Sustain water D16: Hazards and climate change
OUR THRIVING AND GROWING ECONOMY 	P9: Improving our infrastructure and becoming a location of choice P10: Leveraging our lifestyle and amenity	GE1: Our region is a popular place to visit, live, work and invest GE2: Our villages and business precincts are vibrant commercial, cultural and social hubs GE3: We encourage greater rural and agricultural economic diversity	D4: Inter-regional linkages D6: Grow the MidCoast economy D7: Develop manufacturing hubs D8: Innovative small business and growth in service sectors D9: Grow tourism D12: Grow the energy sector D13: Land use compatibility D23: Grow centres D24: Protect employment land

Table 2 – Alignment with the CSP and Hunter Regional Plan 2036

STRONG LEADERSHIP AND SHARED VISION

Planning priority 1 – One Council, one plan

Consistency is an important element of any planning system. We currently have three sets of planning controls – one for each of the three former regions which makes planning inconsistent across our region.

The zones and land use tables in the LEPs and the development standards in the DCPs can differ significantly, for example:

- the General Residential zone is only used in the Greater Taree LEP, whereas the Great Lakes and Gloucester LEPs use the Low Density, Medium Density and High Density (Great Lakes only) Residential zones
- the Primary Production zone is used in the Greater Taree and Gloucester LEPs, while the Rural Landscape zone is used in the Great Lakes LEP
- the development standards in the DCPs vary, resulting in different development outcomes, for example the minimum land size varies for different types of housing.

The 'Zoning In' project aims to establish a MidCoast-wide plan to provide a consistent approach to planning. With some of our planning controls being over 10-years old, this is an opportunity to renew our planning, apply new approaches and provide flexibility to cater for a variety of different forms of development in our region.

The 'Zoning In' project has three stages:

1. Understand the MidCoast through a Housing Strategy and Rural Strategy to establish the new planning vision. This is accompanied by reviews of the employment, recreation and infrastructure zones.
2. Write the plan – convert the findings into a new MidCoast LEP and DCP.
3. Review the LSPS to align with the defined MidCoast approach.

Further details on each strategy and zone review (from Stage 1) are provided under the relevant Planning Priorities.



‘Zoning In’ is not the only consolidation project being progressed for the MidCoast, with a review of the Infrastructure Contributions Plans also proposed. These plans identify future infrastructure needs and apportion costs to future development. Currently there are ten plans across our region. The philosophy and construct of each plan differs, resulting in significant differences in the charges applied to land across the three former regions. A consistent approach to these plans, and public and private partnerships, is important to ensuring that infrastructure can be provided in the right place and at the right time to facilitate and support growth.

Other consolidation projects are underway that will inform our approach to environmental areas, open space, transport, and climate change (these are detailed in relevant Planning Priorities). Land use planning findings and recommendations from these plans will be incorporated into the MidCoast LEP and DCP.

This Statement reflects the large body of strategic planning work being undertaken to establish a new planning vision for the MidCoast – it adopts an ‘interim’ approach. Once this strategic planning work is completed, the Statement will be reviewed, in conjunction with the development of a new CSP, to provide an evidence-based approach to implementing a 20-year vision for the MidCoast. This will be undertaken prior to the 7-year review timeframe.



ACTIONS:	TIMEFRAME:
1.1 Provide consistent and renewed planning controls that reflect the diversity and character of the MidCoast through the establishment of the MidCoast LEP	Short term
1.2 Renew development standards and provide a consistent approach to development through the establishment of the MidCoast DCP	Short term
1.3 Prepare a MidCoast Infrastructure Contributions Plan to ensure a consistent and equitable approach to the provision of infrastructure across the MidCoast	Short term
1.4 Ensure public and private partnerships enable infrastructure to be built to facilitate and support growth by preparing and implementing a policy for Planning Agreements	Short term and ongoing
1.5 Review the LSPS to incorporate the findings of the planning studies underway across the MidCoast and reflect the CSP	Short term

Relationship to other plans:
Hunter Regional Plan 2036 – D8, D9, D10, D12, D13, D14, D16, D17, D19, D20, D21, D22, D23, D24, D26
MidCoast 2030 Shared Vision, Shared Responsibility – L1, L2, L3, C1, CC1, CC3





Planning priority 2 – Foster planning partnerships

A population over 93,800 residents, across an area of 10,052km^2, presents challenges for engaging with our community. The Customer Satisfaction Survey 2020 identified the need to do more to involve our community in planning and decision making. Three of the five key drivers for change related to:

- provision of information to the community
- opportunities to participate in council decision making
- council decision making reflecting community opinion

A number of key initiatives commenced in 2019 to address these issues.

The Community Engagement Strategy 2019-2022 commits Council to engage with our community in a meaningful way to support decision making, plan for projects, and to strengthen our communities. Through responsive engagement it aims to create a sense of belonging, connection, involvement and ultimately greater ownership of decisions by the whole community. The approach is based on the core values and levels created by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2). Council's Community Participation Plan is incorporated into the Strategy.

'Community Conversations' are undertaken twice a year across twelve locations. It is an opportunity for Councillors and senior Council staff to discuss local issues with each community. These conversations identify what is important for each community and feed actions back into Council's Delivery Program and Operational Plan.

MidCoast Reference Groups have been established for key initiatives. The groups include community members, government agencies and community groups. They work together to identify key issues and options for improvements. Some of the current Reference Groups include:

- Community Inclusion and Wellbeing
- Barrington Coast Destination Management
- Heritage
- Sport and Recreation
- Economic Development
- MidCoast Cultural Plan 2036

Reference groups are also established for specific projects, for example the: Housing Strategy, Bushfire Community Recovery and Old Bar-Manning Point Coastal Management.

The implementation of the above initiatives will be monitored and reviewed to measure the community's confidence in our plan making and decision making. The ongoing Customer Satisfaction Surveys will provide long term benchmarks for improvement.

ACTIONS:	TIMEFRAME:
2.1 Continue to undertake Community Conversations and work with Reference Groups to identify strategic issues and develop actions	Ongoing
2.2 Implement the MidCoast Community Engagement Strategy 2019-2022 and monitor improvements through the Community Satisfaction Survey	Ongoing

Relationship to other plans:
Hunter Regional Plan 2036 – D7, D11, D19, D26, D27
MidCoast 2030 Shared Vision, Shared Responsibility – L1, L2, L3, C1, CC1, CC3



OUR UNIQUE, DIVERSE AND CULTURALLY RICH COMMUNITIES

Planning priority 3 – Deliver housing supply, choice and diversity

Our housing needs are as diverse as the people who make up the MidCoast community and will continue to change into the future. The MidCoast has one of Australia's oldest populations with a median age of 52, well above the NSW and Australian median of 38. With high levels of retirement and unemployment, low levels of educational attainment and low income levels compared to other regions, housing affordability and the diversity of housing are particularly important.

Being a holiday destination, some coastal villages also experience vacancy rates up to 64%, reflecting the high portion of holiday homes. Tourism accommodation is also experiencing change, with more people choosing to make their homes available to visitors, through on-line booking services.

In addition, the three sets of planning controls applying to the MidCoast can lead to inconsistent housing outcomes.

The Housing Strategy aims to develop a new planning framework for housing in the MidCoast to address these challenges. It examines:

- housing for an ageing population
- making housing affordable
- catering for tourism, social and community housing
- sustainable living.

Given the diverse and unique character of the towns and villages across our rural and coastal areas, a new suite of zones is proposed in the Housing Strategy that utilises the full extent of residential zones available. This enables zone intents and planning controls to vary based on the character of each location; providing guidance as we move towards writing the MidCoast LEP and DCP.





To clearly indicate where future housing is proposed, the urban footprint for our towns and villages is defined in the Housing Strategy. It includes urban zoned lands, urban infill and potential urban lands (identified in former Mid North Coast Regional Strategy 2006-2036 and local strategies). The MidCoast Urban Land Monitor 2016-2036 examined our housing supply and demand within the urban footprint, finding sufficient supply to cater for our population growth until 2036. We will continue to monitor residential supply, particularly in Harrington and Forster.

Two major housing precincts are proposed in the MidCoast. Together, the major release areas of Brimbin and North Tuncurry are anticipated to provide an additional 10,000 dwellings for our region. The two landowners are working with Council as they move towards master-planning these precincts.

Rural residential living is a popular form of housing in the MidCoast. Many people moving to the MidCoast seek a sea change or tree change or to retire, often on larger properties. The Large Lot Residential Supply and Demand Report 2019, identified a shortage of this type of development in our coastal locations. Both the report and the Housing Strategy noted that additional planning is needed to establish a consistent MidCoast approach in terms of criteria and locations for future rural residential development (land included in the Large Lot Residential zone).

There has been an increased number of development applications lodged for manufactured home estates. These estates often provide an alternative to retirement villages, and given our ageing population, there is a market for this type of housing. These recent applications have identified inconsistencies between our planning controls, highlighted significant community concerns and recognised the need for a State-wide approach. MidCoast Council has a number of cases before the Land and Environment Court, which demonstrates the importance of resolving this issue. Council will continue to work with the NSW Government to develop a consistent location- and merit-based approach for manufactured home estates.



ACTIONS:	TIMEFRAME:
3.1 Finalise and implement the Housing Strategy to provide a consistent and renewed approach to housing that caters for our diverse housing needs and character in the MidCoast and enables the growth of our towns and villages	Short term
3.2 Review the MidCoast Urban Land Monitor to ensure there is sufficient land to cater for future population growth	Short term
3.3 Work with the landowners of Brimbin and North Tuncurry and the NSW Government to develop master-plans for these future residential precincts	Short term
3.4 Work with the NSW Government to identify an approach to manufactured home estates to ensure they are appropriately located and designed	Short term
3.5 To provide a diverse mix of housing opportunities, undertake a Large Lot Residential review to identify criteria and locations for future rural residential development	Medium term

Relationship to other plans:
Hunter Regional Plan 2036 – D6, D9, D13, D21, D22, D23, D25
MidCoast 2030 Shared Vision, Shared Responsibility – L1, L2, C1, C2, E3, GE1, GE2



Planning priority 4 – Place making our towns and villages

The 196 towns, villages and localities that make up the MidCoast each have their own character and identity. This ranges from the historical charm of Gloucester through to the coastal setting of Seal Rocks. Our residents are passionate about where they live.

Lifestyle is the most valued aspect for our community (Community Satisfaction Survey 2020). Our community loves the rural, quiet and relaxed nature of living in the MidCoast, and the proximity to work, cities, family and services. The MidCoast offers a relaxed lifestyle amongst a beautiful natural setting, with important metropolitan services and facilities offered nearby in Newcastle and Sydney.

The 'Zoning In' consultation (early 2020) highlighted the importance of local character. It was accepted that the larger towns of Taree and Forster-Tuncurry would experience change, but the charm and character of our villages needed to be retained. Some communities continue to feel that through the formation of MidCoast Council, they lost their local identity given the vast size of the MidCoast.

While strategic planning projects are underway to consolidate plans and gain a better understanding of our region (refer to Planning Priority 1), the continued focus on our towns and villages is crucial.

A program for Community Plans is underway in accordance with the MidCoast Local Community Planning Framework, which recognises that local people are the experts when it comes to their own communities. It is a process that allows local residents to come together to explore what is important for the future of their community, to set out what projects and initiatives they want to see come to life, and to develop a plan that sets priorities for progress. Parks, bikeways, safety and centre improvements can all form part of a community plan.

While the plan is owned and driven by the local community, Council provides support and guidance throughout the development of the plan. Once in place, the community plans help Council understand local priorities, and can support funding applications for specific projects. Currently there are four underway, with an ongoing rolling program for future plans.

The MidCoast DCP will reflect local community character through character statements, design provisions and the local area plans. Building on the findings from the community plans and Community Conversations, we will work with local communities to include character statements and design standards that are to be considered by future development. The MidCoast LEP and DCP form part of the 'Zoning In' project as outlined in Planning Priority 1.

Heritage plays an important role in local character. With 8 Aboriginal places, 767 recorded Aboriginal sites, 487 local heritage items, 11 state heritage register items and 14 heritage conservation areas across the MidCoast, we need to consolidate our heritage provisions. We will review our heritage conservation areas and



DCP heritage provisions to ensure they are achieving the desired outcome and a consistent approach. The Heritage Reference Group, which includes ten Historical Societies and Family Research Groups, will assist in this process.

Our centres are often the heart of our towns and villages; a place to be entertained, shop, dine and catch up with friends and family. Through the Vibrant Spaces program, businesses can use the footpath, free of charge, in return for some innovative thinking and a common sense approach to adding colour, products, comfortable seating and lively entertainment onto our streets. The aim is to encourage people to stop, linger, shop and dine, which not only benefits local businesses, but makes for a more pleasant shopping experience. The Vibrant Spaces program will continue to explore ways for businesses to activate our streets in centres.

Place making has direct correlation with Planning Priority 5 – Connect places and people.

ACTIONS:	TIMEFRAME:
4.1 Identify and enhance the character of our towns and villages through the implementation of the Community Plan program across the MidCoast	Ongoing
4.2 Develop character statements for the towns and villages, review the Local Area Plans and design standards for the MidCoast DCP to retain and enhance the local character	Short term
4.3 Protect the MidCoast's heritage by reviewing the heritage conservation areas and items for the MidCoast LEP and heritage guidelines for the MidCoast DCP	Short term
4.4 Encourage activity in our town centres by continuing to implement the Vibrant Spaces program	Ongoing

Relationship to other plans:
Hunter Regional Plan 2036 – D8, D9, D17, D18, D19, D20, D21
MidCoast 2030 Shared Vision, Shared Responsibility – L1, L2, L3, C1, C2, CC1, CC2, CC4, E1, E3, GE1, GE2, GE3

OUR CONNECTED COMMUNITY

Planning priority 5 – Connect people and places

Many residents in the MidCoast face mobility and access challenges. Our older population, high numbers of people with disability, low employment and income levels make it difficult for many in our community to move around our region, connect with community groups and be active in the outdoors.

Public transport is important for our community, but services are limited. Often linked to school routes and timetables, there is limited capability to travel to work or access services via the bus network. The MidCoast is largely a car-reliant community. We will pursue opportunities with the NSW Government to seek improvements to our public transport network. Trials moving to an on-demand public transport system (rather than set bus routes) have been effective in other regional locations and should be explored in the MidCoast. Within the planning timeframe (twenty years), it is anticipated that new technologies, such as driver-less cars will significantly improve our community's connections and will be considered in future planning.

During Community Conversations in 2019, communities across our region were united in their desire for greater pedestrian and mobility access, and improved footpath and cycleway connections. In response, two plans are being developed to work alongside each other: a Pedestrian Access Mobility Plan (PAMP), and a Bike Plan. The aim is to review existing plans, and identify improvements and opportunities for related activities/ attractions (e.g. mountain biking, road cycling). Stakeholders and the community will assist in establishing the priorities. Connections within and between our local communities will provide significant benefits.

Recreation is such an important part of our lifestyle, with over 3,000ha of Council managed parks and open space across the MidCoast. Not only does this benefit local communities, open space and recreation facilities can attract visitors to the region for major events like rowing and hockey, and can also form part of our tourist attractions like Forster Main Beach. A review of our open space network is important to understand the supply, connectivity and quality of the parks and recreational facilities across the MidCoast. It can also identify opportunities for an open space network, potential funding mechanisms, and ensure that there is a suitable



supply for future generations. This will be achieved by first undertaking an Open Space and Recreation Needs Assessment and then using the information gathered to develop an Open Space Strategy for the MidCoast. In addition, the Recreation Zones Review examines the planning controls that apply to recreation lands and recommends a consistent approach for the application of the controls.

With 6.2% of our population identifying as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, we aim to acknowledge, celebrate and empower our local Aboriginal communities. We are developing an Aboriginal Action Plan in partnership with key stakeholders, to develop community connections for Aboriginal people, build social capital and local networks, and promote tolerance and understanding of diversity. We meet with Local Aboriginal Land Councils to build a working partnership to implement improvements. One initiative for this partnership is to identify sites that would be suitable for potential development or commercial use.

We are developing a Cultural Plan to strengthen our creative community and invigorate our local economy. The cultural plan is a roadmap for supporting and celebrating arts, culture and creativity in our everyday lives. It will describe the current situation, identify what matters to our community, where improvements can be made and how we can get there in the future. Outcomes from the Cultural Plan will also influence Planning Priorities 4 and 10.

By connecting people and places, we are aligning with the principles of Council's Disability Inclusion Action Plan 2017 which seeks ways to improve the accessibility and inclusiveness of our community. With 8.2% of our community identifying as needing assistance it is an important element of our planning, and a key consideration of the Housing Strategy (refer to Planning Priority 3).

When the strategies and plans are finalised, findings relating to land use planning outcomes will be incorporated into the MidCoast LEP and DCP, and future infrastructure can be included in Infrastructure Contributions Plans (refer to Planning Priority 1).





ACTIONS:	TIMEFRAME:
5.1 Pursue opportunities through NSW Government partnerships for improved public transport and active transport	Ongoing
5.2 Improve access in our communities through the development of the MidCoast Pedestrian Access Mobility Plan (PAMP), and a Bike Plan	Short term
5.3 Ensure there is sufficient and suitable open space for our communities through the development of the MidCoast Open Space Strategy	Short term
5.4 Develop partnerships and opportunities with our Aboriginal community through the development of the Aboriginal Action Plan	Short term
5.5 Provide consistent planning controls for recreation land by implementing the Recreation Zones Review	Short term
5.6 Expand the cultural opportunities in the MidCoast, by finalising and implementing the MidCoast Cultural Plan 2036	Short term
5.7 Ensure inclusiveness in our planning through the implementation of the Disability Inclusion Action Plan	Ongoing

Relationship to other plans:
Hunter Regional Plan 2036 – D6, D17, D18, D27
MidCoast 2030 Shared Vision, Shared Responsibility – L1, L2, L3, C1, C2, CC1, CC2, CC3, CC4, E1, E3, GE1, GE2

OUR ENVIRONMENT

Planning priority 6 – Protect and improve our environment

The natural environment is a priority for our community (Customer Satisfaction Survey 2020). Relative to other areas of the Hunter, the MidCoast contains extensive waterways, coastal landscapes and diverse natural areas with high levels of biodiversity.

Whilst having diverse landscapes and species, our biodiversity is under pressure. Habitat loss, degradation and fragmentation from clearing, introduction of invasive plants and animals, the impacts of climate change and catastrophic bushfires have pushed biodiversity and natural ecological systems into serious decline, undermining their uniqueness, quality, productivity and amenity value.

Alongside these environmental lands and waterways, our rural activities contribute to our region's landscape and economic viability. Together these areas make up 98% of the MidCoast.

The level of environmental base data and the approaches used to manage the environmental values of the land across the three sets of planning controls differs significantly. For example:

- the Great Lakes LEP incorporates numerous clauses and mapping layers to identify the environmental values of the land, including wetlands and watercourses
- tree preservation orders are applied to areas of the Great Lakes region only
- environmental clauses are included in both the Great Lakes and Greater Taree LEPs, focusing on improved environmental outcomes. The Greater Taree clause is limited, only applying to the 'Big Swamp' location.





Council has a range of strategic documents underway to provide a coordinated, adaptive and consistent platform to remediate, restore and protect our catchments, natural areas and biodiversity across the MidCoast. In collaboration with stakeholders and the community, these strategies will assist Council to conserve the region's natural assets in a measured, appropriate and efficient way.

The MidCoast Biodiversity Framework will provide an evidence based framework for retaining and improving biodiversity. A key initiative will be the development of planning controls to guide future development, which will be incorporated into the MidCoast LEP and DCP. The success of the Biodiversity Framework is reliant on the development of partnerships with community groups, landowners, the NSW Government and neighbouring councils, to ensure important habitats and their connections are maintained.

The Greening Strategy aims to protect and increase vegetation in and around our urban areas to improve environmental, community and economic outcomes. Looking at opportunities to green our open space and urban spaces, this project will develop partnerships with local communities to 'green' their neighbourhoods.

Both the Biodiversity Framework and Greening Strategy will build upon the NSW Government's Hunter Blue Green Grid Project aimed at improving the quality and connectivity of our environmental lands and open spaces across the Hunter.

Coastal Management Plans and climate change planning are outlined in Planning Priority 7. The review of the environmental zones forms part of the Rural Strategy (refer to Planning Priority 8), with the aim being to consistently apply our environmental zones across the MidCoast and renew our planning controls to ensure they are protecting important ecological habitats and corridors. These planning controls will be incorporated into the MidCoast LEP and DCP.



ACTIONS:	TIMEFRAME:
6.1 To protect the biodiversity of the MidCoast, by developing and implementing the MidCoast Biodiversity Framework	Short term
6.2 Work with the NSW Government, neighbouring Councils, landowners and community groups to improve environmental, water quality and biodiversity outcomes for the MidCoast	Ongoing
6.3 Prepare and implement the MidCoast Greening Strategy aimed at greening our neighbourhoods	Short term
6.4 Work with the NSW Government and other Councils to develop the Hunter Blue Green Grid Project	Short term

Relationship to other plans:
Hunter Regional Plan 2036 – D14, D15, D18, D20
MidCoast 2030 Shared Vision, Shared Responsibility – L1, L2, L3, C1, C2, CC4, E1, E2, E3, GE1

Planning priority 7 – Improve our resilience

Natural disasters are a common occurrence across the MidCoast. Since 2009, the MidCoast had twenty-three natural disaster declarations; the second worst affected Council in NSW (NSW Office of Emergency Management, 2020). These disasters include bushfires, storms and flooding, and issues associated with coastal erosion. The drought experienced in recent years and Covid-19 in 2020, have both significantly impacted our residents and businesses.

Bushfire

In late 2019, the MidCoast suffered a catastrophic bushfire event with the loss of life, and 617 properties damaged or destroyed. Many of the losses occurred in our rural and natural environments, and threatened a significant number of our towns and villages. The fire burnt through 2,371km^2 representing 23.5% of the Council area. With learnings from this event and others across NSW, we will work with the NSW Government to establish a more strategic approach to planning and managing bushfire risk in accordance with the NSW Government's Planning For Bush Fire Protection. Council will continue to work with the NSW Government and landowners to ensure that they are prepared for the threat of bushfire, and that there is adequate infrastructure to support them in the event of fire.

Flooding

Flooding is a common occurrence given the extensive river catchments in the MidCoast, which include the Manning River, Wallis Lake and the Karuah River. Across the three former Council areas, the level of flood information and assessment tools varied. A schedule for the development of Flood Risk Management Studies and Plans for the Manning River, Gloucester River, Karuah River, Stroud, Bulahdelah, Port Stephens, Wallis Lake and the Wallamba River is currently underway. Land use planning outcomes will be included in the MidCoast LEP and DCP. Projects with State Emergency Services (SES) aim to achieve improved access to information and greater clarity for evacuation thresholds during flood emergencies.





Coastal hazards

Beaches, headlands, littoral rainforests, dunes, creeks and estuaries are all key assets for our community. Storms, waves and large tides have caused erosion and the loss of land, while wave over-wash can inundate assets. The frequency and intensity of these coastal hazards are expected to increase in the future, increasing our exposure to coastal risk.

The NSW Government identified fifteen coastal 'hotspots' along the NSW coastline where the impact of coastal hazards and the risk to assets is high. Two of these hotspots are located in the MidCoast - at Jimmys Beach near Hawks Nest and at Old Bar/Manning Point.

Under the NSW *Coastal Management Act 2016*, we are consolidating and updating our approach to coastal management. A Coastal Management Plan is being developed for Old Bar/Manning Point, alongside an Open Coast Coastal Management Plan that will cover the remaining MidCoast coastline. By 2025, a unified MidCoast Coastal Management Plan will be completed. The outcomes of these plans will be incorporated into the MidCoast LEP and DCP and may result in amendments to the *State Environmental Planning Policy (Coastal Management) 2018*.

Water security

Recently NSW experienced one of the most severe droughts on record with some of the lowest recorded river flows in history. In our region, we experienced reduced water security across our five water supply schemes, leading to severe water restrictions, involving the restriction of outdoor water use.

In 2019, improvements to the Nabiac Aquifer Water Supply System increased the water security of the Manning Water Supply Scheme, being the largest of the five water supply schemes.



Additional long term solutions are required in order to provide a secure supply and ensure water resilience for the region. Solutions include off stream storage for the Manning, Gloucester, Bulahdelah and Stroud Water Supply Schemes. Increasing the use of recycled water for non-potable uses will also contribute to water resilience, by reducing the pressure on drinking water supplies.

Climate change

MidCoast Council resolved to declare a 'Climate Emergency' in October 2019, recognising that a state of climate emergency currently exists. Council affirmed that urgent action is required by all levels of government to take clear steps to avert a climate crisis.

This declaration recognised Council's commitment to mitigating the impacts of climate change by planning for unavoidable impacts that include:

- an increase in the number of extreme fire weather days and bushfire risk
- sea level rise resulting in inundation of low-lying areas, wave over-topping and accelerated coastal erosion
- an increase in the frequency of storm events and intense rain periods
- changes in annual rainfall, a decrease in winter rainfall, stream flow and water supply
- an increase in the number of hot days.

Health issues

Coronavirus 'Covid-19' was declared a disease of pandemic potential in Australia on 21 January 2020. Council is responsible for working closely with the NSW and Federal Government to support preparedness, implementation of response measures and recovery, as well as communication of messages to the local community. Council has also helped ensure that local businesses comply with Covid-19 Public Health Orders.



ACTIONS:	TIMEFRAME:
7.1 Work with the NSW Government to establish improved bushfire preparedness and flood planning practices	Short term
7.2 Complete the schedule of Flood Risk Management Studies and Plans for the Manning River, Gloucester River, Karuah River, Stroud, Bulahdelah, Port Stephens, Wallis Lake and Wallamba River to address flooding across the MidCoast	Short term
7.3 Develop and implement a Coastal Management Plan for Old Bar/Manning Point and the remainder of the MidCoast (referred to as the Open Coast) to ensure coastal hazards are considered in future planning	Short term
7.4 To provide water security for the MidCoast, investigate off stream storage for Gloucester, Bulahdelah and Stroud	Short term
7.5 To provide water security for the MidCoast, develop the concept design for Peg Leg Creek Dam near Tinonee, and increase the level of recycled water use for non-potable purposes	Medium term
7.6 Consider climate change in our future planning through the development and implementation of a Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation Plan	Short term
7.7 Work with the NSW Government to help build on the community's resilience and recovery capacity to natural disasters and climate change.	Ongoing
7.8 Work with the NSW Government and Federal Government to determine how future pandemics can be managed, and the role council plays.	Ongoing

Relationship to other plans:
Hunter Regional Plan 2036 – D11, D15, D16
MidCoast 2030 Shared Vision, Shared Responsibility – L1, L2, L3, C1, C2, E1, E2, E3

Planning priority 8 – Managing our land and water assets

The MidCoast Regional Economic Development Strategy (REDS) is a NSW Government initiative aimed at collaborating to build sustainable economic development for the MidCoast. Our land and water assets were identified in the REDS as one of three key regional strengths.

Agriculture, aquaculture, forestry (including associated product manufacturing) and mining are important industries in the MidCoast, accounting for approximately $478 million in exports, which is over 55% of the region's total exports. They make a Gross Value Added (GVA) contribution to the local economy of $388 million.

Much of the rural area is used for agriculture, primarily dairy and beef cattle grazing, with a growing poultry industry. Timber production has been historically significant, however this industry has declined in recent years. Oyster farming is an important aquaculture activity along our coast, while coal mining operates in the Gloucester coal basin. Along with fishing, the MidCoast Regional Economic Development Strategy identified the economic importance of these rural industries as the top specialised industries in the MidCoast when compared to NSW. While these industries do not generally employ a large number of people, they have a competitive advantage as specialised industries for our region. For example, the Wallis Lake is one of the largest producers of Sydney Rock Oysters in the state, accounting for 24.5% of production in NSW.

The recent drought, bushfires and COVID-19 resulted in significant impacts on these activities in the MidCoast through reduced productivity, loss of infrastructure and stock, and a downfall in some markets.

Moving forward, the MidCoast Regional Economic Strategy indicates that there are opportunities to strengthen and grow these key industry sectors. These include boosting productivity in agriculture through greater use of technology and innovation, growing the local aquaculture industry and leveraging advantages for freight and logistics.



Rural lands are affected by three sets of planning controls which when applied, lead to inconsistent rural outcomes. Some of the plans are over 10-years old and need to be renewed to reflect current farming practices and to address the rural challenges and opportunities for growth experienced across the MidCoast.

There are numerous development pressures on our rural lands, ranging from large scale housing developments to small subdivisions, or requests to place houses where currently none are permitted. We need to ensure that our good quality agricultural land is protected, while providing flexibility to support new farming practices, rural tourism, niche rural industries and opportunities to value add to rural produce.

We have important rural industries that supply markets across NSW, that are sometimes subject to land use conflicts. Conflict can be from expanding urban development, impacts on water quality or from people seeking a rural lifestyle. We need to ensure that these activities are protected, while encouraging sustainable practices.

Support industries are crucial, such as the beef abattoir in Wingham (export licensed), seafood processing, sale yards, saw milling facilities and mining infrastructure. We need to ensure that these industries can be developed in locations that support the rural sector. In addition, inter-regional transport connections are needed to deliver produce to markets outside of the MidCoast, like the Pacific Highway, The Bucketts Way and Thunderbolts Way. Given these are important economic factors they are considered in Planning Priority 9.

The Rural Strategy will examine these historic and emerging pressures on our rural lands, with the aim to maintain and where possible enhance the viability of rural activities and build upon opportunities.

The Rural Strategy's focus extends to all lands outside our towns and villages; it also considers environmental lands and waterways. Given the extent of these lands, their contribution to our scenic landscape will be explored, along with measures to build upon nature- and adventure-based tourism.





The four goals of the Rural Strategy are to:

- protect natural landscapes
- sustain primary production opportunities
- enhance rural lifestyles and livelihoods
- improve planning and plan-making in practice

The Rural Strategy will provide clear and consistent land use planning and management principles to inform the preparation of the MidCoast LEP and DCP (refer to Planning Priority 1).

ACTIONS:	TIMEFRAME:
8.1 Identify and protect the rural and environmental values of the MidCoast and explore opportunities to support and grow our rural sector through the Rural Strategy	Short term
8.2 Work with the NSW Government to develop and implement the Important Agricultural Land mapping	Short term

Relationship to other plans:
Hunter Regional Plan 2036 – D9, D10, D11, D13, D14, D17
MidCoast 2030 Shared Vision, Shared Responsibility – L1, L2, L3, C1, C2, E1, E2, E3, GE1, GE2, GE3

Planning priority 9 – Improving our infrastructure and becoming a location of choice

The proximity of Sydney and Newcastle and connection via the Pacific Highway, coupled with affordable land, makes the MidCoast region particularly attractive to light industrial, and freight and logistic industries. These opportunities will increase with the development of the Northern Gateway Transport project which will see Taree develop as a hub for freight and logistics, while reducing freight costs in and out of the MidCoast. Planning is underway to include the site in an industrial zone to support transport-related industries. Council will continue to work with the NSW Government to provide road infrastructure improvements to link this site to the Pacific Highway.

Additional industrial precincts are being planned in close proximity to the Pacific Highway, for example in Taree South. The precincts will enable easy access to the Pacific Highway and reduce the movement of freight through nearby towns.

Inter-regional connections are important to support economic growth and providing access to existing industrial areas such as the Gloucester industrial area. Council will continue to work with the NSW Government to recognise the importance of The Lakes Way, The Bucketts Way and Thunderbolts Way as significant freight and tourism routes, and the North Coast Rail Line, all of which connect the MidCoast with other regions.

The Manning Base Hospital provides medical services for the MidCoast, and is a significant employer that attracts service industries nearby. The Manning Health/Taree CBD Precinct Plan aims to increase the number of support businesses and services, particularly medical, around the Manning Base Hospital. The precinct expands over the adjoining Taree town centre to enhance the connectivity between these two areas. The plan will provide a new planning framework, along with improvements to our main streets and parks, which will add vibrancy to the Taree town centre.

Taree Regional Airport has flights direct to Sydney, and supports local aviation industries. The Taree Aviation Business Park provides serviced lots for aviation activities. Further opportunities exist for aviation-related industries along Lansdowne Road, airport living on surrounding rural lands and improved tourist facilities at the nearby Dawson River Caravan Park and Airport Tavern site. Developing these options around the airport will contribute to the viability of this important airport.

The Infrastructure Zones Review examines the planning controls that apply to infrastructure like water services, hospitals, cemeteries and TAFE; and recommends a consistent approach for the application of the controls.



ACTIONS:	TIMEFRAME:
9.1 Enable sustainable economic growth through the implementation of the MidCoast Regional Economic Development Strategy	Ongoing
9.2 Encourage transport related industries in Taree by progressing the development of the Northern Gateway Transport Hub	Short term
9.3 Utilise the connectivity of the Pacific Highway by investigating industrial precincts in proximity to the highway, for example Taree South	Short term
9.4 Pursue opportunities with the NSW Government for improved freight and tourism routes being The Lakes Way, The Bucketts Way and Thunderbolts Way	Ongoing
9.5 Increase medical opportunities and the vibrancy of the Taree CBD through implementation of the Manning Health/Taree CBD Precinct Plan	Short term
9.6 Build upon the Taree Regional Airport experiences by investigating industrial, housing and tourist opportunities in close proximity to the airport	Medium term
9.7 Develop a consistent approach to infrastructure planning controls through implementation of the Infrastructure Zones Review	Short term
9.8 Work with the NSW Government to undertake road safety improvements, and provide safe walking and cycling connections.	Ongoing
9.9 Work with the NSW Government to protect the freight network from encroachment by sensitive land uses.	Ongoing

Relationship to other plans:
Hunter Regional Plan 2036 – D4, D6, D8, D9, D10, D23, D24, D26
MidCoast 2030 Shared Vision, Shared Responsibility – L1, L2, L3, C2, CC2, GE2, GE3





Planning priority 10 – Leveraging our lifestyle and amenity

The MidCoast's lifestyle and amenity attracts visitors to our region. With 2.2 million visitors in 2018, tourism is an important industry for the MidCoast. Destination NSW estimated that visitors to the MidCoast spent $505 million in our region, which makes tourism our largest export industry. Of the visitors, around 60% were on a holiday, 33% visited friends and relatives, and 7% visited for other reasons. The MidCoast Destination Management Plan provides a framework to guide sustainable tourism development over the next 20 years.

Tourist accommodation has changed rapidly in recent years with the introduction of online booking platforms such as Airbnb and Stayz. More people are choosing to make their homes available to visitors, which on occasions can impact on nearby residents. Caravan parks are also being transformed into manufactured home estates. To provide a consistent and responsive approach to tourist accommodation, the Housing Strategy examined tourist accommodation in terms of short-term holiday letting (holiday homes), the application of the tourist zone and the changing nature of caravan parks (refer to Planning Priority 3).

The use of the Tourist zone across the MidCoast has in some cases restricted the development of tourist accommodation. It is important to maintain sufficient residential zoned land to enable a range of tourist accommodation opportunities. The Urban Land Monitor will assist in keeping track of land supply and demand (refer to Planning Priority 3).

Important factors for businesses investing in the MidCoast are certainty around the planning controls, flexibility to cater for innovation, and new business activities in our employment zones. The hierarchy of our centres and application of industrial zones differ across the three sets of planning controls. The planning controls have been reconsidered in the context of the MidCoast and renewed to reflect growing economic trends through the Employment Zones Review. The Review proposes a new planning framework – the aim being to ensure our employment zones are consistent, support a thriving and growing economy, have controls to encourage vibrant centres, and provide flexibility to meet our future needs.

The supply and demand of our employment-zoned land needs to be monitored to ensure there is sufficient land in the business or industrial zone to cater for future growth.

ACTIONS:	TIMEFRAME:
10.1 Encourage and grow tourism through the implementation of the Destination Management Plan	Ongoing
10.2 Work with landowners of Tourist zoned land, to examine zone options to improve tourist outcomes	Short term
10.3 Investigate opportunities to facilitate land uses that can support and enhance the tourist and visitor economy	Short term
10.4 Provide a MidCoast centre hierarchy, and consistent and renewed employment zones by implementing the Employment Zones Review	Short term
10.5 Ensure sufficient supply of employment lands by monitoring the supply and demand for land in business and industrial zones	Medium term

Relationship to other plans:
Hunter Regional Plan 2036 – D6, D9, D10, D13, D22, D24, D25
MidCoast 2030 Shared Vision, Shared Responsibility – L1, L2, L3, C1, C2, CC1, CC2, CC3, CC4, GE1, GE2, E2, E3





IMPLEMENTATION, MONITORING AND REPORTING

Implementation of the Statement

Monitoring and reporting on the Statement



IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STATEMENT

This Statement communicates the long-term land use strategy for the MidCoast, through the identification of planning priorities and actions for implementation.

The delivery of the MidCoast LEP and DCP will help realise the future land use vision for our region, alongside strategies and plans being developed that provide strategic direction for our region.

The Statement provides a framework for the coordinated action of partners to deliver and realise our vision. Council will continue to establish effective partnerships with our community, the NSW Government and other organisations to support the implementation.

It is important to note that the delivery of some actions outlined in this document will be subject to funding and incorporation in the Delivery Program and Operational Plan.



MONITORING AND REPORTING ON THE STATEMENT

The Integrated Planning and Reporting (IP&R) Framework under the *Local Government Act 1993* is the central planning framework for councils.

The framework assists Council in making decisions, allocating resources and achieving our community's priorities. The major policy document under the framework is our CSP which sets out the priorities and aspirations of the community, and the broader strategic direction of the Council.

The CSP has regard to economic, social, environmental and governance matters, and identifies the main priorities and aspirations of the community. These are then reflected in Council's strategic plans (including land use strategies, economic development strategies and cultural plans), and are delivered through actions in the Delivery Program and Operational Plan.

This highlights the importance of the Statement aligning with the CSP – it provides a mechanism for monitoring and reporting on the Statement. The actions provided under each Planning Priority will inform Council's Delivery Program and Operational Plan, in keeping with the Integrated Planning and Reporting (IP&R) framework.

In accordance with Section 3.9 of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*, the Statement must be reviewed at least every seven years pursuant to Section 3.9(1). A review of this Statement will be undertaken as soon as practical, and in conjunction with the CSP. This will enable more transparent alignment between these two plans, clearly indicating how the community's aspirations are being achieved. In addition, significant strategic plans will be completed providing an evidence-based approach to developing the vision for the MidCoast.

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MIDCOAST LOCAL STRATEGIC PLANNING STATEMENT

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