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Central Coast Council Environmental Volunteer Program Strategy

Central
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Cover photo – *Shelly Beach Coastcare and visiting volunteers at work*

- **Contents**

1.   Executive Summary

This review and strategy provides an analysis and evaluation of Councils environmental volunteering program, the Central Coast Council Landcare Program (CCCLP).

The analysis included a review of Council documents, policies and procedures; a survey of volunteers within the program; a workshop where Councillors were invited to discuss their expectations for the program review and strategy development; benchmarking with other external environmental volunteering programs; and an analysis of the requirements in terms of Council resources to deliver the program under its current and expanded forms, including staff and financial resourcing.

The program, for the most part, is similar to other environmental volunteering programs on offer. The groups within the program carry out a range of activities that broadly fall within the areas of land conservation and park maintenance and are similar in nature to programs such as Bushcare, Landcare and Keep Australia Beautiful which are run by many other NSW Local Government Councils.

The current levels of support for the program have seen it capped at 80 volunteer groups. This has resulted in a program that is running at capacity, with a wait list of an additional 10 new groups. The report has found that the program is diverse in nature, supporting groups that can be defined in terms of 4 distinct sub-programs:

1. Conservation groups – volunteers carrying out bush regeneration activities
2. Amenity groups – volunteers carrying out maintenance, rubbish and graffiti removal, etc.
3. Technical groups – volunteers carrying out nursery volunteering, seed collection, citizen science.
4. Short-term groups – volunteers carrying out one off activities e.g. National Tree Day planting events, Floating Landcare, corporate events, etc.

A number of opportunities have been identified to expand the existing program. These include increasing the involvement of existing volunteers and groups in the program as well as introducing new volunteers and groups. With a program already at capacity, expanding the program could only realistically be achieved by increasing the resources allocated to the program from Council.

The report identifies strategic principles to guide management of the program and actions for the future including the following recommendations:
*   To rename the program to Central Coast Council Environmental Volunteer Program.
*   To distinguish the 4 distinct sub-programs, developing and delivering more specialised support to the groups working within each, through specific procedures, objectives and work techniques.
*   To prioritise the expansion of the program through developing additional conservation, technical and short-term groups in preference to additional amenity groups.

2.   Introduction

Council-supported environmental volunteering has a long history on the Central Coast. Since the late 1990's local residents have been helping to care for the environment through the former Wyong Shire Council Landcare and Gosford City Council Bushcare programs.

Since amalgamation of the two former Councils in 2016, the two programs have continued to run together under the title of the Central Coast Council Landcare Program (CCCLP). This has brought together approximately 600 volunteers working with a total of 83 Bushcare, Dunecare, Friends Of, Landcare and Tidy Towns groups throughout the local government area. Volunteers are almost entirely residents of the Central Coast, most often volunteering at sites within the suburbs where they live.

On most days of the month there is at least one CCCLP volunteer session taking place, with as many as 10 sessions taking place simultaneously across the LGA on busy days. Within each month, weather permitting, there are over 140 scheduled volunteer sessions, each running for at least 2 hours.

The CCCLP supports volunteers carrying out activities including ecological restoration and land conservation in bushland and coastal natural reserves, recreation area maintenance in open space parks, garden and road verge maintenance, and rubbish and graffiti removal. Volunteers are also involved with native plant seed collection and plant propagation through Council's nursery, take part in citizen science activities such as flora and fauna monitoring, and participate in one off events such as annual National Tree Day plantings and floating Landcare.

Since amalgamation there has been a continuation of administrative and management approaches for the groups working within their respective former Council areas. There is an opportunity to now better align these programs, taking into consideration the conservation, social, amenity, community and citizen science aspects that are already in place and bringing these together through an overarching program to support the community, Council and environmental needs of the Central Coast into the future.

3.   Vision and Purpose

Vision: The community partnering with Council to care for our environment.

Purpose: For Council to support these partnerships with the community in caring for our environment.

Figure 1: Kevin Shipman, partnering with Council through Wamberal Dunecare

3.   Vision and Purpose

4.   Program background and origins

Origins of environmental volunteering in Australia

To understand how and why the CCCLP exists today it is necessary to have an understanding of the history of community based natural resource management, and environmental volunteering, in Australia, and from the former WSC and GCC.

Landcare began in 1986 as a Victorian initiative to encourage a sustainable, integrated approach to agriculture and environmental management. The national Landcare movement commenced in 1989 and has grown and evolved to be a community owned and driven initiative with the vision of 'all Australians actively caring for the land and water that sustains us'. The keystones of the Landcare model are that it encourages integrated management of environmental assets including productive farmland and a sustainable approach to private land management. Landcare has expanded into many sub-programs including Coastcare, Dunecare, Swampcare, etc.

Bushcare, sometimes called Urban Landcare, formed in 1989 in the suburbs of Sydney as a program to support environmental volunteer work on public land managed by local councils or NSW government agencies. Activities include bush regeneration, weed removal, habitat restoration, tree planting, monitoring and surveying of native wildlife, water quality monitoring, community education and growing native plants at community nurseries.

Keep Australia Beautiful (KAB) is a national program which was established in 1971 with a vision for a litter free and sustainable Australia, following the 1968 commencement of Tidy Towns in Western Australia. The objectives of KAB were to lead, influence and advocate for environmental sustainability, deliver partnerships and programs ensuring mutually beneficial environmental outcomes. Programs developed and supported through KAB include Tidy Towns, Clean Beaches, Sustainable Cities and Adopt a Patch.

Origins of environmental volunteering on the Central Coast

WSC established the Wyong Shire Landcare Program in the late 1990's with an aim to encourage volunteer participation in the care of lands under the management and control of Council and other approved lands. The WSC program included volunteer groups carrying out bush regeneration works through Landcare (and other care) groups and later expanded to include Tidy Towns and Friends Of groups carrying out work to improve the amenity of the area. The program also supported one off events such as National Tree Day planting activities within the Wyong Shire LGA, an education and training program for volunteers, and floating Landcare.

GCC established the Gosford City Council Bushcare Program in the late 1990's to support volunteers carrying out conservation work (bush regeneration) on Council owned and/or managed bushland reserves. The program later expanded to include volunteers working in Council's nursery to assist with native plant propagation and a seed collecting group to collect native plant seed from Council's bushland reserves for supply to the nursery. Citizen science based activities associated with fauna and flora monitoring were supported through the program, as were one off events such as National Tree Day planting activities. There was also an education and training program for volunteers.

Following amalgamation in 2016 the Central Coast Council Landcare Program was adopted as the program name following staff consultation, as this was considered to encompass the various landscapes, land tenures and activities covered by the program. Existing groups retained their individual names, such as Budgewoi Beach Dunecare, Green Point Bushcare, Mount Alison Landcare, Mannering Park Tidy Towns.

Figure 2: Flowchart showing the evolution of the current Landcare Program on the Central Coast

Differences between the former Council programs

The former Wyong Shire Council Landcare and Gosford City Council Bushcare programs had a number of notable differences.

Table 1: Differences between former WSC Landcare and GCC Bushcare programs

Program attribute	Former WSC	Former GCC
Types of volunteer groups	Conservation groups (Landcare, Coastcare, Dunecare, etc.). Amenity Groups (Friends Of, Tidy Towns). Short-term groups (National Tree Day, corporate volunteering, etc.).	Conservation groups (Bushcare, Dunecare, etc.). Technical groups (nursery volunteers, seed collectors). Short-term groups (National Tree Day, corporate volunteering, etc.).
Where the volunteers work	Council owned and/or managed land as well as other government land (e.g. RMS land, education land).	Council owned and/or managed land.
Volunteer records and reporting requirements	Volunteers record sessions and submit records to Council every 6 months.	Volunteers record sessions and submit records to Council monthly.
Site management	Restoration action plan for each volunteer group, 3 to 5 year review period.	Site strategy for each volunteer group, annual review and update.
Insurance coverage for volunteers	Council funded an umbrella policy through Wycare Incorporated to cover all unincorporated volunteer groups working through the Landcare program. Council funded individual insurance policies for each	Volunteer work on Council managed land covered through Council's insurance.

Program attribute	Former WSC	Former GCC
	incorporated group, this enabled them to carry out work within the Landcare Program and also covered them for work that they did in addition to the Landcare program.	
Herbicide use by volunteers	Volunteers permitted to spray in accordance with restoration action plans, glyphosate and other herbicides used.	Direct application methods with glyphosate only (no spraying by volunteers).
Power tool use by volunteers	Power tools including brush-cutters, ride-on mowers and powered spray equipment permitted in accordance with restoration action plans.	Power tools not permitted for use by volunteers.

5.   The Central Coast Council Landcare Program

5.1 Overview of current Program

The CCCLP is managed by a Council team consisting of a Team Leader, four Bushcare/Landcare Officers to support volunteers, and a part time administration assistant to help manage the large quantity of information and volunteer records.

Each officer within the Landcare team currently has responsibility for a maximum of 20 groups and the volunteers associated with them. Requests from groups for assistance, tools and materials, training, etc. are managed by each officer for their respective groups.

The current CCCLP can be divided into four sub-programs:

- Conservation groups include those whose primary objective is to conserve and regenerate natural reserves. The reserves include bushland areas and coastal dune areas. Volunteers achieve these objectives through controlling exotic weed species and native planting activities where required.
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- Amenity groups are those whose primary objective is to help improve the amenity of public spaces. Volunteers achieve these objectives through carrying out ongoing maintenance such as litter and graffiti removal, lawn mowing and garden maintenance.

Figure 3: Friends of Noraville Cemetery carrying out maintenance work at their site.

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- Technical groups are those whose primary objective is to carry out specialist tasks or activities that support other CCCLP or Council functions. Examples of these are the seed collectors and plant propagators. Citizen science groups collecting fauna and flora information would also fit within this sub program.

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Figure 4: Seed collection, for supply to Council's nursery, is one of the activities carried out within the Technical sub-program.

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- Short-term groups are formed to undertake a specific activity or event e.g. a planting activity organised as a National Tree Day event. These groups are often open to residents who are otherwise not registered and active within the Landcare Program. Sessions are managed to record attendance and to provide appropriate training and risk assessment for the activity. Other examples of short-term groups include corporate volunteering, Floating Landcare sessions, and community education events that the Landcare Team deliver, such as the Pioneer Dairy Day for school students, Bioblitz events and Youth Week events.

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Figure 5: Volunteers and staff participating in a Helping Hands planting event at Shelly Beach.

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There are also groups within the program whose current objectives and activities don't strictly fall within a single sub-program. They often carry out a combination of conservation and amenity type works, for example there are Landcare groups that manage part of their conservation site through bush regeneration techniques but also carry out lawn mowing, tree pruning and garden maintenance. These groups have been given a name that suggests that they fall within one of the sub-programs however they are really a hybrid group. The number of these won't be clear until all

group Site Strategies have been reviewed, but is likely to be less than 10, comprising some Landcare groups that also undertake mowing and some Amenity groups that also undertake bush regeneration.

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Table 2: Central Coast Council Landcare Program group and volunteer information

Sub program	Group type	Group number	Volunteer number	Volunteer hours July 2018 to March 2019	Objectives
Conservation	Bushcare	36	508	7,119	Help conserve and regenerate natural areas, including bushland and coastal dune reserves.
	Coastcare	5			
	Dunecare	6			
	Landcare	24			
Amenity groups	Friends Of	3	21	219	Improve the amenity of public spaces, mainly parks
	Tidy Towns	7	59	3,005	
Technical	Nursery volunteers	1	9	268	To provide specialist assistance and support for conservation activities
	Seed collectors	1	8	161	
Short-term groups *	e.g. National Tree Day	1	300*	600*	To provide opportunities for residents to participate in one off events.

*Estimates based on available event documentation and staff observations

Note: The volunteer report form and definition of active volunteers changed early in 2018, preventing easy comparison with previous years.

5.2 Volunteer Profile

Members of the program were surveyed in April 2019 to better understand who they are, aspects of the program they consider important, and how the program could be improved. There were 233 respondents to the survey, representing approximately 38% of the volunteers within the program. A summary of the survey results is included in the Appendix.

The vast majority of current volunteers were volunteering with one of the former Wyong or Gosford programs, bringing with them an expectation that Central Coast Council will continue to support them in a similar fashion. Changes in legislation (including Biodiversity Conservation and listing of endangered ecological communities) and internal procedures (e.g. personal protective equipment, risk assessment) mean that there is a need to change at least some aspects of each of the former programs as the Central Coast Council program further develops.

Introducing a unified program for the Central Coast Council will affect existing volunteers to some degree. Carrying out a review of the current situation in developing this strategy, and understanding the expectations of the volunteers for the future, will help Council develop a program to meet the future needs of the region.

Figure 6: Chris Anderson and Sue Bradfield are volunteers with Peninsula Dunecare at Ettalong

The results of the survey, which was designed to capture information about who the volunteers were, and how they volunteer, are summarised in Table 3 below. The responses showed the majority of the programs members were older in age and are retirees. This is consistent with research and demonstrates that people become more active in volunteering as they age, attributed mainly to lifestyle factors such as employment, career status and family life.

Table 3: Summary of survey results - volunteer profile information

	Results summary
Volunteer age	The program in its current form appeals to older members of the community, with almost half (47%) of the volunteers in the program aged between 60-69, and another 33% being over 70. Volunteers under the age of 35 only represent 3% of the program.
Volunteer employment status	The majority of volunteers within the program are retirees (66%), with the remainder in full time (9%), part time (9%) or other forms of employment.
Period volunteering with Council?	Approximately 30% of the volunteers have been volunteering for less than 3 years, representing those who have joined since Council's amalgamation. Just over 45% of the volunteers have been volunteering for 3 to 9 years, and over 20% of the volunteers in the program have been volunteering for more than 10 years.
Frequency of activity?	Most of the groups within the program have one regular session per month, reflected by the number of members who volunteer monthly (37%). A small number of volunteers are active less often (6%). Many of the programs members are more active, volunteering at least weekly (29%) or fortnightly (15%).
Number of groups for each volunteer	The majority of the volunteers in the program volunteer with one group (68%). However there are many volunteers who volunteer with 2 groups (15%) and some volunteers who are very active in volunteering with 3 or more groups (5%).

The survey questions presented 12 aspects of the program, asking volunteers to rate these from Not At All Important to Very Important. Table 4 lists these aspects from highest to lowest in overall importance to the volunteer respondents. These results are also presented in graphical form in the appendix.

Table 4: Program aspects in order of importance to volunteers

Program aspect	Ranking of importance from volunteer responses
Helping look after bushland areas and the environment	The highest scoring aspect of the program. 66% of respondents scored this as Very Important with another 31% scoring this as Important. For this aspect of the program only 2% of responses were Neutral and there were no responses as either Not Important or Not At All Important.
Community satisfaction and belonging, feeling like I am working with my neighbours and contributing to the local community	48% of respondents scored this aspect as Very Important and 44% as Important, making this the second highest scoring aspect overall. 8% of responses were either Neutral or Not Important.
Personal satisfaction, I feel good when I volunteer	The third highest scoring aspect of the program, 46% of respondents scored this as Important and 41% as Very Important. Only 1% of the responses were rated as Not Important.
Spending time outdoors	This aspect was the fourth highest scoring for the volunteers with the majority of responses rating this as Important (41%) or Very Important (40%). 17% or responses were Neutral and 1% of the ratings were as either Not Important or Not At All Important.
Helping to keep the community clean and tidy, through rubbish and graffiti removal, garden maintenance, mowing, etc.	Another important aspect for many volunteers, with 44% rating this as Very Important and 31% as Important. 22% of respondents were Neutral on this aspect and 3% were either Not Important or Not At All Important.
Education, learning about plants and animals, Aboriginal and European culture/history	Important to 47% of respondents, with 35% rating this as Very Important. Almost 4% of respondents rated this aspect as either Not Important or Not At All Important while 14% of the responses were Neutral.

Program aspect	Ranking of importance from volunteer responses
Helping look after public parks and recreation areas	Compared to the similar aspect of helping to look after bushland areas and the environment (the highest scoring aspect), helping to look after public parks and recreation areas was seen as being much less important to the respondents (7th place overall). Rated as Important (36%) or Very Important (39%) by the majority of respondents, with the remaining responses being Neutral (22%) or Not Important and Not At All Important (3%).
Socialising, meeting other people and making friendships	59% of respondents listed this as an Important aspect of the program. Others rated this as Very Important (23%) or Neutral (17%). A small number of respondents rated this as Not Important (1%).
Physical health and exercise benefits, the way I feel from the physical activities I do as a volunteer	Seen as Important to 48% of respondents. Of the other volunteers there was an almost equal split between those who found this aspect Very Important (25%) with those who were Neutral (22%). It was rated as Not Important by 4% of respondents.
Mental health benefits, wellbeing, stress/anxiety relief that I feel from my volunteering	Similar to the physical health benefits aspect, this was seen as Important to 45% of respondents. Seen as Very Important to 26% and Neutral to 25%. Not Important or Not At All Important to 4% of respondents.
Teaching other people, through sharing my skills and expertise with them	Seen as Important to 39% and Very Important to 25% of respondents. 32% of respondents were Neutral. 4% of respondents rated this aspect as Not Important or Not At All Important.
Citizen science projects, helping with research and monitoring activities, plants and animals, waterways	This was the lowest scoring aspect of the program with 23% of responses as Very Important, 35% as Important and 33% as Neutral. 9% of respondents rated this aspect as Not Important or Not At All Important.

The volunteers were asked to rate a number of areas where the program might be improved, including a free text section. The results are summarised in Table 5.

Table 5: Volunteer responses to areas for improvement within the program

Area for improvement	Volunteer response
Promotion for groups and the program	82% of respondents said that they would like more promotion for the program and for the groups within the program
Workshops and learning opportunities	63% of respondents said that they would like more workshops and learning opportunities
Visits from Landcare staff to groups and sites	62% of respondents said that they would like more visits from Landcare staff
Communication to volunteers	54% of respondents said that they would like more communication to volunteers
Tools and equipment	54% of respondents saying that they did not need more tools and equipment than was already being supplied through the program
No changes required	46% of respondents indicated that no changes were required, that the program already addressed their needs and expectations
Volunteer surveys	72% of respondents said No to more volunteer surveys*

* Note: This was the third survey to be sent to volunteers within the Central Coast Council and former Councils within the last 10 years.

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The final question of the survey asked the volunteers to indicate their preference for the name of Council's program:

- 35% of the volunteers did not have any preference for the overall program name.
- 31% of the volunteers chose one of the new program names that were suggested, either CCC Envirocare or CCC Environmental Volunteer Program.
- 30% of the volunteers chose a name consistent with the former Council program names, either CCC Bushcare Program or CCC Landcare Program.
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Figure 7: Alternative names for Council's environmental volunteering program

5.3 Landcare Program management and procedures

Volunteer group formation

New volunteer groups have historically formed when members of the community contact Council to request the establishment of a new group in a particular area. An Expression Of Interest (EOI) form captures information including how many people want to establish the group, the type of group that the community want to establish, the land ownership and management including future plans for the site, constraints and risks associated with the site.

In some instances Council has facilitated interest from the community and developed a new group in an area, for example Doyle Street Bushcare was formed after Council promoted and ran National Tree Day planting events at the site over a number of years. Other past attempts by Council to establish groups in priority conservation areas without an initial interest from the community have been less successful.

Council currently prioritises the EOI's received on the basis of:

- Number of initial volunteers
- Land tenure
- Type of group (eg conservation, amenity)
- Council plans for and use of the site

Commencement of a new group is dependent on the capacity of the Landcare team to manage and supervise it. As at May 2019 there was a waiting list to form 10 new groups of which five are conservation groups.

Group work sessions

Each group within the program is dedicated to working on a particular site or sites e.g. Pearl Beach Bushcare has three sites within the suburb of Pearl Beach. Groups take on a name that has significance or meaning to them e.g. Allagai Dunecare (working at MacMasters Beach).

Groups have regular work session times e.g. the first Saturday morning of the month, with some groups meeting at least once a month and many much more frequently. Groups are open to membership from the public and are promoted through Council's webpage and other CCCLP promotional activities. A Landcare program officer is appointed to each group as their primary point of contact with Council.

Figure 8: Members of the Vietnam Veterans Tidy Towns group carrying out a planting activity at their site.

Volunteer management

An active volunteer is defined as someone who is registered in the program and who has volunteered within the last 12 months.

Volunteers are considered to be inactive if they have not volunteered within the last 12 months. At this time staff contact them to find out why they are no longer active and they are encouraged, where possible, to become active again in the program.

New volunteers are required to complete a site induction and fill out a registration form when first attending a work session. Within 6 months of joining the program new volunteers are required to complete an introductory training session. New volunteers are provided with education and training about the CCCLP through the introductory training session and also through site based work session training. This includes record keeping requirements, Council's Code of Conduct, site training, risk assessment, personal safety and protective equipment requirements, native and weed plant identification and weed control techniques.

Figure 9: Terry Dicks of the Summerland Point/Gwandalan Tidy Towns group carrying out maintenance work within the Summerland Point Community Centre.

Group supervision

Most groups have a qualified supervisor working with them during at least one session each month. However, there are too many groups and sessions to allow program Officers to supervise every group.

Supervisors are either a staff member from Council's Landcare Team, a staff member from another section of Council, or someone who is engaged externally through a bush regeneration or labour hire company.

All supervisors are suitably qualified and experienced in land conservation and management. They have first aid and chemical use qualifications, as well as skills and experience in plant identification appropriate to guide the volunteers and their activities at the sites where they are appointed.

Table 6: Central Coast Council Landcare Program group supervision.

Group Supervision	Number of groups
Directly supervised by Landcare team staff	**11**
Supervised by other Council staff	**1**
Supervised by contractor staff	**3**
Supervised by Labour Hire staff	**33**
Groups approved to work without direct supervision	**35**

Insurance

Volunteers working on Council owned or managed land are covered for their program-related works through Council's personal accident and public liability insurance.

A small number of groups from the former WSC Landcare Program are incorporated and undertake additional activities that are not included in the CCCLP on land that is not under the ownership and/or management of Council or is not within the approved site. In these cases, following a resolution of WSC on 12 March 2003, Council provides funds to identified groups so that they can arrange their own insurance cover. Insurance support is currently provided to such incorporated conservation and amenity groups in the former WSC area.

Site Risk Assessment

An annual risk assessment is completed by each group within the program, guided by the group Supervisor or Landcare program officer. Tool box talks are carried out at the beginning of each work session to consider the works that will be performed on the day and plan safe work practices to eliminate or reduce any associated risks.

Site strategy development and review

Each site is unique and a detailed site assessment is completed for the conservation sites as a reference document. In addition, a Site Strategy template has been developed to identify the site-related objectives and authorised volunteer activities for the coming year. Site Strategies are reviewed and updated regularly, with volunteers and supervisors consulted by the program officer throughout.

A number of sites still have detailed Action Plans which in large part combine both the assessment report and the site strategy and these are continuing to be reviewed to fit the new format.

Some Site Strategies and Action Plans have previously included activities that volunteers completed outside the CCCLP or on non-Council land, however after the next review these will either not be included or will be clearly identified as additional to Council's program and approved activities to clarify legal responsibility.

Minimum criteria to remain in program

A set of minimum criteria has been developed for the conservation and amenity groups within the program:

- Groups are to complete a report sheet for each volunteer session and submit this to Council within one month of the session
- Groups are to meet on a regular basis throughout the year, with a minimum of 6 sessions per year
- Groups are to achieve a minimum of 50 volunteer hours at their site each year
- Groups are to operate on Council owned and/or managed land (existing groups that currently work on other public land will continue to be supported as at present, however new groups will need to comply with this requirement)

The Landcare Team works closely with groups that do not meet these criteria, offering additional training, support and promotion to help them remain in the program.

Communication with groups/volunteers

Communications occur between group members directly, and between the group and members of Council's Landcare team.

Each group nominates a convenor, a volunteer who is the primary point of contact for the group. Most of the communications between Council and the groups are through the group convenor however individual volunteers are also able to contact Landcare team staff directly if they wish to.

Communications from the Landcare team are sent out to individual volunteers, to specific groups, or to the whole program depending on the nature of the communication. This includes periodic information about education and training events and newsletters with useful or interesting information.

Promotion

Individual groups within the program are encouraged to develop promotional activities with the assistance and support of their dedicated officer. A template is being developed for use by all groups to streamline this process. Program wide promotions are also developed by the Landcare Team with the assistance of Council's communications section. Some incorporated groups also maintain their own websites and social media pages.

Figure 10: Display banners are one way that groups are promoted within their local area, displaying these in prominent locations while the volunteers are working at their site.

Education, training, knowledge and skills development

Education and training within the CCCLP gives volunteers opportunities to increase their skills and knowledge in areas related to environmental management. An ongoing education and training program is offered to active members of the program which is delivered through several frameworks:

- Compulsory training (Introduction to Bushcare/Landcare)

- Optional training (Chemical certification, first aid certification)

- Educational Workshops (snake safety awareness, Aboriginal culture and heritage, importance of bees, plant propagation, fungi)

Volunteers also learn and develop practical skills through the program, for example which techniques to use to most effectively and efficiently control the weed species on their sites and how to safely use the variety of tools that they have available to carry out their work. Work practices and methods are demonstrated by staff and supervisors during volunteer sessions and through workshop and training events.

As volunteers increase their skills and knowledge they are encouraged to contribute to the development of site strategies and take more responsibility for the work at their sites. In time, as the level of competence and confidence grows through education, training, knowledge and skills development groups may be encouraged and approved to work without supervision at their sites.

Workshops and training events provide the added opportunity of bringing together members from different groups within the program, offering opportunities for them to network and share their ideas and experiences.

Figure 11: Aboriginal cultural heritage workshop for program volunteers.

Figure 12: Weed identification workshop for program volunteers.

Resourcing

All tools and materials to support the work of volunteers and groups within the program are supplied by Council. Groups are able to request additional tools and materials, or replacements for consumable and/or broken items, through the report sheets that are submitted for their volunteer sessions.

Plants are provided to groups where revegetation is needed to help restore their sites. All plants supplied to groups within the program are sourced from Council's nursery at Erina, with a preference for stock that is of local provenance, having been collected by the seed collection volunteers and grown at Council's nursery by staff and nursery volunteers.

Achievements

Some of the achievements of the CCCLP over recent years include:

- Blue Star Sustainability Awards for environmental achievement and individual volunteer recognition through The Centre for Volunteering, NSW

- In excess of $500,000 in external funding to support the works of volunteers groups within the program

- The support of and partnership in Green Army projects at multiple sites across the Central Coast to provide training and skills development to under-employed youth

- Floating Landcare events throughout the Central Coast to provide conservation actions at difficult-to-access sites

- National Tree Day events with annual attendances in excess of 300 residents

- Improving Your Local Park and Environment funding of $30,000 annually to Landcare works that contribute to the improvement of Tuggerah Lakes

- Financial support from private sector organisations e.g. Delta Electricity provides $10,000 annually to support volunteer groups working near Munmorah Power Station

Celebration

The Landcare Program holds an annual event to celebrate the achievements of the volunteers over the previous year and to thank them for their efforts within the program.

Figure 13: Landcare officer promoting Council's program at a Youth Week event

5.4 Benefits of the program

Environmental Benefits

Conservation initiatives such as the Central Coast Council Landcare Program provide a significant role in the management, conservation and rehabilitation of natural habitats in an ever increasingly urban-centric world. Conservation volunteers offer services that would otherwise not be provided by Council, but which add value to the environment for all Central Coast residents.

Primarily, the CCCLP addresses environmental degradation, habitat loss and decreased biodiversity at a local scale. The Central Coast environment directly benefits from the Program's 83 groups through the reduction of weed species within local ecosystems and the increase of quality habitat for local native fauna. The program also aligns with the Central Coast Community Strategic Plan (CSP) which highlights the community's value of the natural environment and sustainability statement of *'leaving a positive legacy for future generations through responsible stewardship of our natural areas'*. CCCLP does this by encouraging groups to work within areas of key ecological importance such as Endangered Ecological Communities (EECs) and connecting corridors of remnant bushland.

Environmental benefit is also reflected in volunteer motivations. Studies show that one of the key motivators for volunteer activities are ecosystem conservation. At a local scale the 2010

GCC Bushcare volunteer survey found that 85.6% of respondents indicated that they had a *'personal satisfaction in helping the environment'*.

Figure 14: Corporate volunteers enjoy a day out of the office contributing through Council's environmental volunteer program.

The CCCLP also plays a crucial role as an enabler of citizen science which leads to beneficial environmental outcomes. Fauna surveys on the Central Coast by Landcare groups are a key component of the program and have been critical in the collection of data for several state, national and internationally listed species. The data collected also assists in the rehabilitation and management of sites, an example being community data (not Landcare) which informs the maintenance of Little Tern breeding sites at North Entrance.

Physical, mental and social health

The health benefits for volunteers undertaking conservation activities outdoors have been well documented. Significant research has shown that those participating in volunteering have better health outcomes in relation to physical and mental health, self-esteem, happiness and lower psychological stress. In broad terms it has been suggested that humans have a tendency to seek connection to nature (Wilson, E. O., 1984). This would suggest that environmental volunteering fulfils basic human requirements deeply entrenched in our biology.

The physical health benefits associated with environmental volunteering are intuitive but supported by scientific rhetoric. A 2004 study by Deakin University reported that participants benefited from physical exercise and activity. Physical activity contributed to increased cardio-vascular benefits and the management of weight. The opportunity to breathe 'fresh air' and associated respiratory health improvement are also recognised. The study also supports early research undertaken in 1997 by Deakin University showing that contact with nature had positive influence on immunity and cardiovascular function, a reduction of heart rate, muscle tension, blood pressure and skin conductance.

A previous GCC Bushcare Program survey (2010) found that 65% of its volunteers were over the age of 61. Current CCCLP registrations show this number is still typical for the program in 2019. Research demonstrates that an average of 3 hours volunteering per month leads to a significant improvement in life expectancy for older volunteers.

The United Nations World Urbanization Prospects (2015) predicts that loss of biodiversity will increasingly lead to the loss of wellbeing in urban centres. Wellbeing is not only defined as a lack of illness but also includes mental health and social wellbeing.

Studies conducted by Pryor et al. (2006) show that *'individuals experiencing chronic physical, mental and social ill health'* respond positively to *'active and social nature-based intervention'*. The study Feel Blue Touch Green (Deakin University, 2006) also highlights the benefits of volunteering in environmental conservation with respondents suffering from chronic depression reporting their involvement was *'uplifting'* and resulted in them *'feeling more positive'*.

Volunteering in conservation activities has also been shown to improve skills and employability of many of the participants. Contributing to communities and environment practical volunteer hours has been investigated and implemented by some universities as Workplace Integrated Learning for Natural Science students. Currently a very small number of volunteers in Central Coast Landcare commence programs for this reason. Moving forward this may prove to be a reliable source of participation for future groups.

Figure 15: Budgewoi Beach Dunecare winning a clean beach challenge.

6.   Links to other Council strategies

The Central Coast Community Strategic Plan 2018-2028, *One Central Coast*, identifies community priorities and provides a roadmap for the future. Based on extensive community consultation, several themes and related focus areas are relevant to Council's Landcare Program:

Belonging - Our community spirit is our strength; Creativity, connection and local identity

Green - Environmental resources for the future; Cherished and protected natural beauty

Liveable - Out and about in the fresh air; Healthy lifestyles for a growing community

In order to determine the success of *One Central Coast*, a range of indicators were identified to be reported annually. Council's Landcare Program could potentially contribute measurement to a number of these, such as:

- Sense of Community on the Central Coast

- Opportunities to be part of community life

- Community events that bring people together

- Volunteering Activities

- Healthy Lifestyle choices

- Access and enjoyment of local environment

- Community organisations, boards, and committees

- Participation in community engagement

Council's Landcare Program directly or indirectly relates to themes and actions identified in other Council strategies and plans (either completed or in preparation), including:

- Biodiversity Strategy

- Greener Places Strategy

- Climate Change Strategy

- Sustainability Strategy

- Plans of Management for Council Reserves

As a result, Council's Landcare Program regularly liaises with other areas within Council to discuss ideas and actions, and to share information and de-personalised data of relevance.

7.   Comparison with other Councils and Programs

Information was recently obtained about the environmental volunteering programs at eight other Councils and the Central Coast branch of the National Parks and Wildlife Service. Blue Mountains City Council was unable to be contacted during the comparison project but online information was available for their program.

Table 7 below summarises the information relating to each of these programs.

Figure 16: Partnership - Green Corp youth training group assisting to restore dunes at North Shelly Beach.

3.1 Landcare Program Strategy

Table 7: Environmental volunteering program information for other NSW Council's and NPWS

Attribute		Blacktown City Council	Cessnock City Council	Hornsby Shire Council	Ku-ring-gai Council	Lane Cove Council	Lake Macquarie City Council	Newcastle City Council	Port Macquarie-Hastings Council	Blue Mountains City Council	CC National Parks and Wildlife Service	Central Coast Council
Program name	Bushcare Program	X		X		X						
	Landcare Program						X	X				X
	Environmental Volunteer Program				X							
	Community Conservation Program									X		
	No formal program name		X						X		X	
Program objectives	Environmental conservation and habitat restoration.	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
	Community engagement/education.	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
	Litter collection and gardening.	X										X

Attribute		Blacktown City Council	Cessnock City Council	Hornsby Shire Council	Ku-ring-gai Council	Lane Cove Council	Lake Macquarie City Council	Newcastle City Council	Port Macquarie-Hastings Council	Blue Mountains City Council	CC National Parks and Wildlife Service	Central Coast Council
Types of groups within program	Conservation Groups:											
	• Bushcare	X	X	X	X	X	X					X
	• Creekcare						X					
	• Dunecare						X					X
	• Harbourcare					X						
	• Landcare		X				X	X	X			X
	• Treecare			X								
	Technical Groups:											
	• Backyard Habitat					X						
	• Bush Friends					X						
	• Bush Kids					X						
	• Native Bees				X							
	• Nursery volunteers	X		X								X
	• Pool To Pond				X							
	• Seed Collectors											X
	• Stream Watch					X						
	Amenity Groups:											
	• Adopt A Park	X										
	• Community Gardens				X							
	• Friends Of									X		X
	• Parkcare				X							
	• Streetcare				X							

Attribute	•	Blacktown City Council	Cessnock City Council	Hornsby Shire Council	Ku-ring-gai Council	Lane Cove Council	Lake Macquarie City Council	Newcastle City Council	Port Macquarie-Hastings Council	Blue Mountains City Council	CC National Parks and Wildlife Service	Central Coast Council
Number of groups	Conservation:	12	9	65	65	100	230	21	6	NA	20	71
	Technical:	1									22	2
	Amenity:	10	15		33							10
Group structure	Each group has a representative, one of the volunteers who acts as the leader or convenor and is the primary point of contact with Council.	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
	Volunteers are allowed to work alone.						X					
	There must be at least 2 volunteers for a session to run.	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X		X

Attribute		Blacktown City Council	Cessnock City Council	Hornsby Shire Council	Ku-ring-gai Council	Lane Cove Council	Lake Macquarie City Council	Newcastle City Council	Port Macquarie-Hastings Council	Blue Mountains City Council	CC National Parks and Wildlife Service	Central Coast Council
Land tenure	Volunteers only work on Council owned and/or managed land	X	X					X	X			
	Volunteers also work on other state government land			X	X							X	X
	Volunteers also work on private land					X	X			X		X
Group selection/ approval process	Community driven	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X
	Council initiates groups at priority sites						X					X
Group supervision	Sessions supervised by Council staff	X		X		X				X	X	X
	Sessions supervised by non-Council staff, contractors	X		X	X	X				X		X
	Supervision is not provided for groups		X				X	X	X			

Attribute		Blacktown City Council	Cessnock City Council	Hornsby Shire Council	Ku-ring-gai Council	Lane Cove Council	Lake Macquarie City Council	Newcastle City Council	Port Macquarie-Hastings Council	Blue Mountains City Council	CC National Parks and Wildlife Service	Central Coast Council
Volunteer education and training	Compulsory introduction/induction training for new volunteers	X		X	X	X	X	X				X
	Optional introduction/induction training						X				X	
	Work site induction	X		X		X					X	X
	Optional courses: • Plant identification, fauna, bush regeneration related • First aid – optional • Chemical use – optional • Snake Safety • Aboriginal Cultural Awareness	X	X	X		X	X X X	X	X		X X X	X X X X X
Program resources	Bush regeneration works at sites to support volunteers	X		X	X		X					X
	Tools and materials supplied to groups	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	X

3.1 Landcare Program Strategy

Attribute		Blacktown City Council	Cessnock City Council	Hornsby Shire Council	Ku-ring-gai Council	Lane Cove Council	Lake Macquarie City Council	Newcastle City Council	Port Macquarie-Hastings Council	Blue Mountains City Council	Wildlife Service	CC National Parks and Wildlife Service	Central Coast Council
Herbicide application	Volunteers not permitted to use herbicides	X											
	Volunteers have restricted herbicide use, direct application methods only, limited range of herbicides			X	X	X	X	X	X			X	X
	Volunteers have broad use of herbicides, including ability to spray/splatter gun/cordless drill and use wide range of herbicide products							X	X			X	X
Power Tool Usage	Not permitted	X	X	X	X	X	X	X					
	Permitted by Conservation groups												
	• Chain saws								X				
	• Ride on mowers								X				X
	• Brushcutters								X				X
	• Splatter guns												X
	• Other unspecified small plant items								X			X	X

Attribute	•	Blacktown City Council	Cessnock City Council	Hornsby Shire Council	Ku-ring-gai Council	Lane Cove Council	Lake Macquarie City Council	Newcastle City Council	Port Macquarie-Hastings Council	Blue Mountains City Council	CC National Parks and Wildlife Service	Central Coast Council
Power Tool Usage	Permitted by Amenity groups											
	• Chain saws											
	• Ride on mowers											X
	• Brushcutters											X
	• Other unspecified small plant items											X
Site plans - management	Plan developed at establishment of group	X			X	X	X	X	X		X	X
	Annual Review and update of site plans	X				X					X	X
	3 year review of site plans				X		X					
	Volunteer plans included within broader reserve management plans, reviewed every 7-10 years	X		X		X			X			

8.   Demand for, and constraints on, Council's Landcare Program

Community demand

Council's programs are well established with continued demand and interest. Applications have been received to establish an additional five Bushcare / Landcare and five Amenity groups. Consideration of these at the present time is not possible due to staff limitations in the program. Efforts have not been made to attract new groups into the program in recent years due to the inability to meet the current wait list.

Ongoing community interest in participating in technical areas is also evident, for example assisting with flora and fauna surveying and pre and post fire monitoring.

Figure 17: Volunteers are encouraged to learn about fauna monitoring through a bat workshop.

The current Central Coast population of 345,000 is forecast to grow to 415,000 by 2036, an expansion of approximately 20%. Most of the current volunteers within the CCCLP are retirees (66% from survey) and age demographics indicate a growing number of residents transitioning into retirement in the next decade, which is expected to translate into increased demand for Council's program.

One-off events, such as National Tree Day, have also increased in popularity in recent years, indicating that short-term volunteering opportunities may attract residents who may not be able to commit to ongoing attendance. Managing a single event can require the same staff time as

managing an ongoing group for a year (say 70 hours), and can produce up to 600 volunteer hours which is equivalent to the annual volunteer hours for one of the top 10 groups in the program.

Increased program promotion is likely to increase demand and attract new interest from the community.

Conservation and Amenity sub-programs

The Conservation sub-program fits best with the purpose of Council's Natural and Environmental Assets Unit which is responsible for implementing the Landcare program, and this sub-program has been identified as a high priority when assessing new applications, given the limitation of staff and budget resources.

The Amenity sub-program also addresses needs and interests of some residents while providing the social and health benefits of volunteering in general. Additionally, Amenity groups enable Council's Open Space and Recreation Unit to provide a higher level of service in relation to park maintenance. At present there is no intention to accept applications from groups wishing to establish new park areas. Amenity groups generally require a higher level of establishment and ongoing resourcing for small plant purchases and maintenance (ride-on mowers, brushcutters), risk management, and at some locations, also the need for additional training and traffic control plans. As a result, Amenity groups are not as high a priority and this is considered when prioritising requests to form new groups as detailed in the program procedure.

Technical sub-program

The Technical sub-program is also a high priority due to its support relationship to the Conservation sub-program, however this is currently only a small part of the overall program. There is great potential for this area to expand, with volunteers assisting to collect information or provide specialist services e.g. frog monitoring groups for Green and Golden Bell Frog populations at North Avoca and Davistown. Other potential volunteer opportunities include fauna and flora monitoring and survey work, and monitoring sites pre and post fire which will also help to identify emerging issues such as weeds.

Short-term sub-program

Short-term groups give members of the community the ability to participate in environmental volunteering activities without needing to commit to ongoing involvement in the program. Observations from staff suggest that these types of events, such as National Tree Day, attract younger members of the community, such as parents with children. These events give Council the ability to engage these community members in environmental volunteering where the other types of groups do not appeal to them for reasons of work/family life commitments.

Land tenure

In general terms the priority is to undertake activities on Council-managed land while acknowledging that flora and fauna do not recognise property boundaries. There can be landscape and community benefit in also providing support for activities on other public land, including

schools, crown land, and land owned by Roads and Maritime Services. Where existing groups have historically carried out work across different land tenures with support from Council this support will continue.

Opportunities may also exist to partner with other land owners and managers in carrying out conservation work which collectively benefits Council and the other land owners, for example there may be opportunities to develop volunteer groups that work across Council and National Parks land tenures.

WSC previously had a schools Landcare sub-program which has since lapsed in part due to changes in school and Council staff over time. The program will explore opportunities to develop environmental volunteering opportunities with primary and high schools.

Site Access

Actual and potential program sites are nominally the responsibility of a specific unit within Council, most frequently the sections responsible for bushland reserves, natural open spaces, recreation spaces, beaches and waterways. Some sites may include operational land, Council-owned residential land, road reserves, and drainage reserves. The establishment of new sites involves securing the approval of the internal property manager.

New groups are now advised that Council cannot guarantee access to the program site in perpetuity. Issues that may influence this includes availability of resources, Council policy, current legislation, new information about the site, and Council plans for the property.

Council need

Maintenance of Council's many Reserves by volunteers is of benefit where volunteer groups assist to improve prioritised site outcomes. However the key drivers in group establishment are the level of community interest on a site by site basis, and the Council resources available to initiate, manage, supervise, and resource new groups.

The most effective and cost-efficient method to identify new sites considers a range of factors and these are assessed from individual applications from the community to form new groups. Although site prioritisation is based on these factors when establishing new groups at new sites, it is important to note that Council and staff do not view eager new volunteers as an opportunity for cheap resources and labour to be directed to areas of greatest perceived need. The needs of the site are balanced with the needs and passions of the volunteers and the groups that are committed to helping manage them.

Resourcing limitations

Staff

Council's existing program provides for a Team leader and 4 full time officers, with a part time administration assistant (0.6 of a full time position).

Each individual Officer can manage a limited number of groups which is currently capped at 20, as this enables officers to offer the level of support to groups to meet administrative and management requirements. This provides an average of around 1.5 hours per week allocation to support each group, including travel time for site visits. Reducing the cap to 18 groups per officer would allow an additional 10 minutes allocated per group per week (a 10% increase).

Citizen science technical groups and one-off events both require a similar level of staff and resource support as ongoing program groups, but these are not counted within the cap at the present time.

Providing direct supervision of group activities is one challenge in establishing new groups. Many groups meet at the same time including on weekends and it is not possible for all of the required supervision to be provided directly by Landcare officers. For example, 10 groups meet simultaneously on the first Saturday of each month.

At present Council relies on external staff though contractors and labour hire to provide supervision for 36 of the 83 groups in the program. Some groups are authorised to work without supervision due to the specific sites and skills and experience of the volunteers, however many groups require a qualified bush regenerator to guide their activities.

Due to supervision requirements an identified limitation to expanding the program is the availability of suitably qualified personnel.

Budget

Council's existing program requires an allocation of approximately $1,253,000 per year to fund 5.6 staff with vehicles and support equipment, external group supervisors and bush regeneration contractors, and materials such as plants, replacement tools, herbicide, mulch and signs.

Overall, the average cost of managing each group in the program is $15,100 per year. Of this approximately 67% is allocated to internal staff (but not external supervisors), vehicles and corporate overheads. Most groups require little in the way of materials, around $1,200 per group. An exception is that the establishment of any new Amenity groups would require the purchase of items of small plant such as ride-on mowers and brushcutters, ongoing lease fees to cover equipment maintenance and replacement costs and (for a few groups) licence arrangements over Council storage areas.

An expansion of the program to meet existing and expected demand, while maintaining the current service levels, would require an increase in the associated budget. In simple terms, each increase in the number of volunteer groups by 18-20 groups, or 22-25% on current group numbers, would require approximately $212,500 in additional annual funding as well as approval to recruit an additional officer.

Figure 18: Saltmarsh regeneration achieved by volunteers at Killarney Vale over three years

9.   Realistic options for expansion

Specific interest has been expressed to identify the best opportunities to expand the current program are these are described in the Table 8 below.

Table 8 – Expansion opportunities and constraints

Opportunity	Constraint	Approvals and requirements
Increase the number of groups by up to 20 to cater for current and expected demand. The 5 Conservation group applications currently on the waitlist can be progressed in the short term, while additional short-term volunteering opportunities are investigated and developed as relevant.	Insufficient staff to manage new groups including developing specific procedures for any 'Technical' groups. May require a promotional campaign to attract new applications; due to unfulfilled waitlist no promotion to attract new group applications has occurred in recent years. Starting a new group is significantly more labour-intensive than managing an existing group. Note that the 5 Amenity groups on the wait list are a lower priority for commencement and require more resources.	Requires: • additional Landcare Officer including office provision • budget increase of $212,500 per year • one-off Capital vehicle purchase of about $40,000 • Including technical and short-term groups within the cap of 20 groups per officer
Increase short-term volunteer opportunities including planting events, citizen science and flora/fauna surveys to cater for a broader audience.	Staff capacity is an issue as each event requires considerable effort to organise and this increases when developing new events. Extra resources are also required (eg plants, tools, portable toilets, etc).	Additional staff and budget included in the above Review effectiveness regularly.

Facilitate participation of relevant public and private schools and TAFE (including Indigenous and youth conservation courses) in Landcare-related activities which could include specific Landcare groups or work experience type programs; youth are currently under-represented.	Likely to require additional Landcare Officer to liaise with stakeholders and identify sites and procedures (eg work experience, short term arrangements, specific supervision, etc)	Develop new procedures Additional staff and budget included in the above Review demand and procedures regularly.

In addition to the above, other opportunities were identified but found not to be practical or effective; these are listed in Table 9 below.

Table 9 – Ineffective or non-practical opportunities

Opportunity	Constraint	Approvals and requirements
Increase the number of volunteers per group. Could include encouraging volunteers to participate in more than one group.	Requires ongoing promotion including site events; experience shows that this is rarely successful. Dependent on willingness of local volunteers.	Dependent on capacity of Landcare officers; reducing cap to 18 groups per officer may be required as larger groups usually require additional support.
Increase the number of years volunteers remain in the program.	Dependent on willingness of volunteers. May require incentives such as additional workshops and other events.	Nil. Initiating an exit survey will help understand the reasons volunteers leave the program.
Increase the number of hours per volunteer.	Dependent on willingness of volunteers, some may be interested. Likely to require additional group meeting times and supervision.	Will require additional resources for those groups that require site supervision .

10.   Strategic principles and Action Plan

Strategic management of the program into the future is best supported by a decision framework to inform flexible and responsive management choices that are aligned to Council and community needs.

The following principles guide management of the program at the present time:

1. The number of groups managed by each Officer will not exceed 20 (this does not include the program Team Leader who may manage a small number of additional groups)

2. Groups may be one of four sub-programs:

   a. Conservation – to undertake bush regeneration

   b. Technical – to undertake specialist technical activities which may include seed collection, plant propagation, scientific surveys and data collection, and advanced bush regeneration

   c. Short-term groups - for specific activities and events

   d. Amenity – to maintain public parks

3. The current priority is to support the Conservation sub-program on Council-managed land and also Technical and Short term groups that support the Conservation sub-program or conservation activities on Council's priority natural reserves.

4. The Amenity sub-program :

   a. Only applies to designated parks as approved by Council's Open Space and Recreation unit

   b. Will not increase significantly as a proportion of all groups (currently 8.3%)

5. Procedures or guidelines will be developed and reviewed regularly for:

   a. Each sub-program

   b. Assessing an expression of interest to form a new group

   c. Potential high risk activities which may include - herbicide use; activities related to protected species and vegetation communities; use of small plant and specialised equipment; working near roadsides, waterways, steep slopes; and use of power tools. In general terms use of small plant is not usually consistent with conservation activities and use of power tools is not encouraged, however variations may be considered.

   d. Minimum reporting and other requirements for groups to remain in the program

   e. Managing Incorporated groups that undertake activities additional to, and/or on sites not included in, Council's program

6. Regular liaison with groups and communication with volunteers and groups is considered a priority

7. Group supervisors will have suitable qualifications and experience and may be either Council program Officers, other suitable Council staff, bush regeneration contractors or labour hire staff

8. Consult with 'hybrid' groups that do not easily fit into one of the identified sub-programs and provide options to each to assist their transition into the program structure

Table 10 - Action Plan

Action	Description	Budget changes
1.	Change Council's environmental volunteering program title to the Central Coast Council Environmental Volunteer Program.	Nil

2.	Provide 4 sub-programs, in order of priority being:
	   1. Conservation program
	   2. Technical program
	   3. Short-term volunteer program
	   4. Amenity program
		Nil

3.	Continue to develop, and periodically review, procedures to support the program.	Nil
4.	Ensure the Site Strategy or Plan for each group is compliant with current policy and legislation, and is reviewed at least every 2 years.	Nil
5.	Continue to engage external contractors and labour hire staff to provide suitable supervision for approved group activities, where suitable internal staff are not available.	Nil
6.	Develop exit questionnaire for volunteers/groups leaving the program to better understand turnover dynamics.	Nil
7.	Pursue opportunities to recruit additional Officers and provide sufficient budget allocation to allow expansion of the program.	$212,500 per year (plus one-off Capex vehicle purchase of approximately $40,000) per additional Officer
8.	Continue to review and identify groups that may justify consolidation or retirement from the program in order to allow new groups to establish that may yield greater environmental and social outcomes with existing resources.	Nil
9.	Establish branding and marketing of new program to attract new volunteers and to acknowledge existing volunteers within the program.	Nil

Action	Description	Budget changes
10.	Determine and establish threshold levels where the cost of supporting a group and the outcomes being realised remain sustainable.	Nil
11.	Develop a set of indicators to track growth and success of the program in order to guide future approaches for continuous improvement.	Nil
12.	Review criteria for prioritisation of new group requests when program expansion is constrained by resources.	Nil
13.	Investigate opportunities for finding additional support for the program, including external grant funding and third party sponsorship.	Nil
14.	Consider new technologies for managing the program e.g. phone apps to manage group activities.	Nil

Figure 19: Results of mound planting by Friends of Noraville Cemetery.

11.   References

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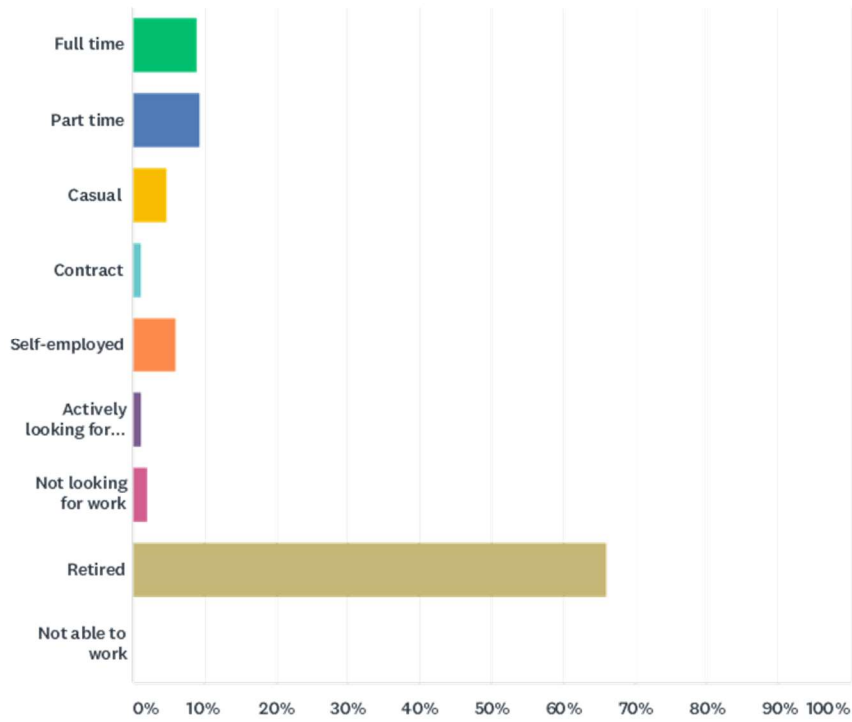Wilson, Edward O. (1984). Biophilia. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

12.   Appendices

1.   Summary of Landcare Program Volunteer Survey 2019

Landcare Program Volunteer Survey 2019

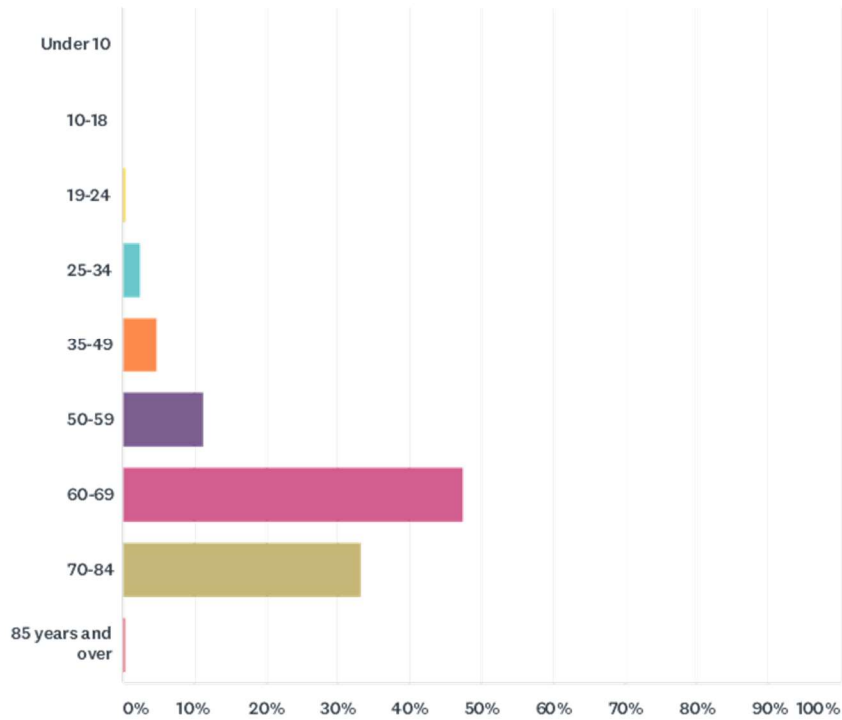# Q1 What is your employment type?

Answered: 233   Skipped: 0

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Full time	9.01%	21
Part time	9.44%	22
Casual	4.72%	11
Contract	1.29%	3
Self-employed	6.01%	14
Actively looking for work	1.29%	3
Not looking for work	2.15%	5
Retired	66.09%	154
Not able to work	0.00%	0
TOTAL		233

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Landcare Program Volunteer Survey 2019

Q2 What is your age?

Answered: 232   Skipped: 1

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Under 10	0.00%	0
10-18	0.00%	0
19-24	0.43%	1
25-34	2.59%	6
35-49	4.74%	11
50-59	11.21%	26
60-69	47.41%	110
70-84	33.19%	77
85 years and over	0.43%	1
TOTAL		232

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Landcare Program Volunteer Survey 2019

Q3 Do you volunteer with Council?

Answered: 231   Skipped: 2
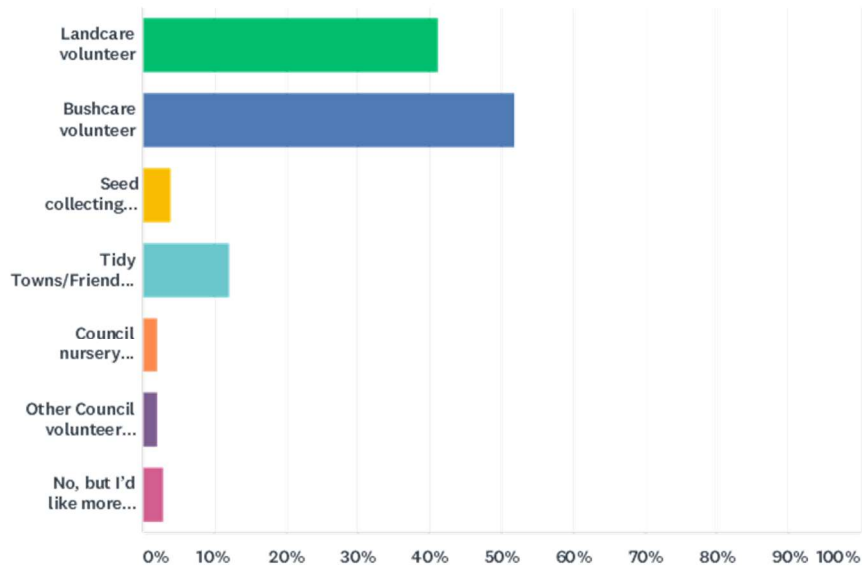
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Landcare volunteer	41.13%	95
Bushcare volunteer	51.95%	120
Seed collecting volunteer	3.90%	9
Tidy Towns/Friends Of volunteer	12.12%	28
Council nursery volunteer	2.16%	5
Other Council volunteer programs, e.g. library, art gallery, etc.	2.16%	5
No, but I'd like more information about volunteering	3.03%	7
Total Respondents: 231		

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Landcare Program Volunteer Survey 2019

Q4 Please provide your email address below

Answered: 7   Skipped: 226

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Landcare Program Volunteer Survey 2019

Landcare Program Volunteer Survey 2019

Q5 How long have you been volunteering with Council's Landcare Program?

Answered: 233   Skipped: 0
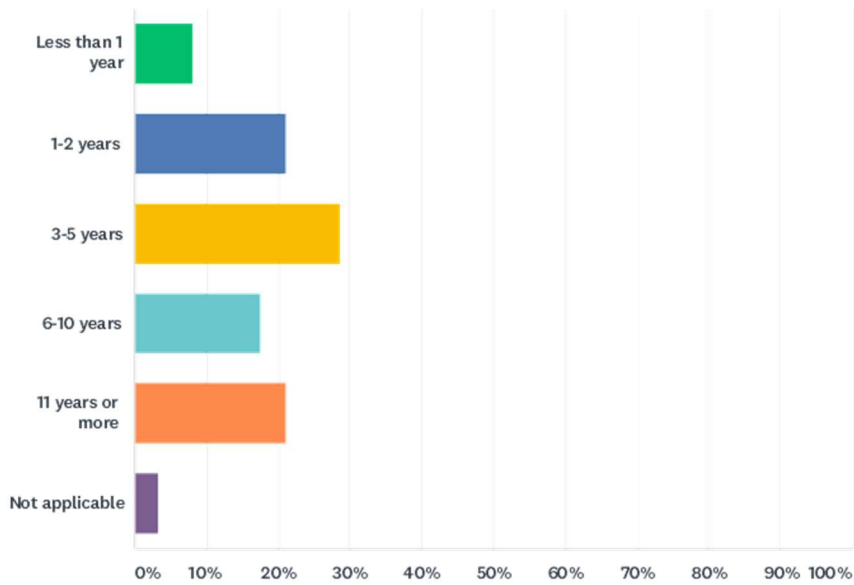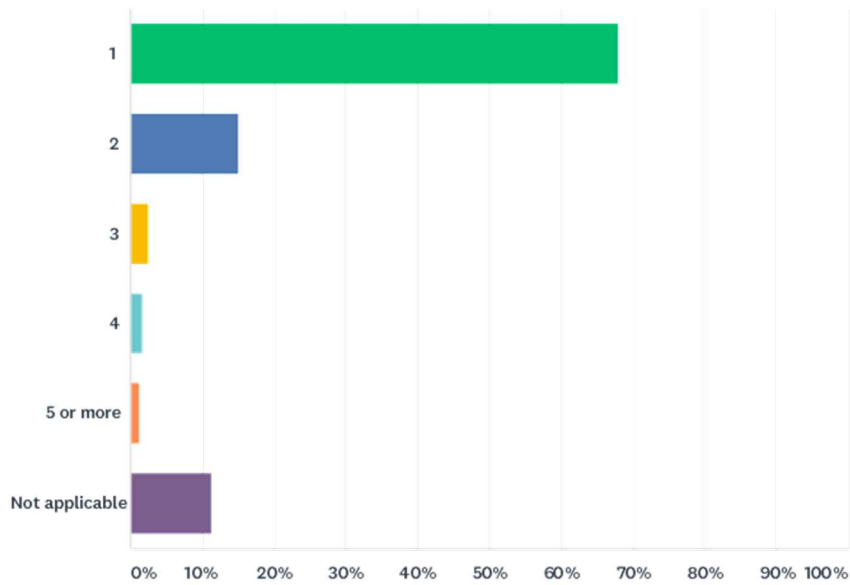

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Less than 1 year	8.15%	19
1-2 years	21.03%	49
3-5 years	28.76%	67
6-10 years	17.60%	41
11 years or more	21.03%	49
Not applicable	3.43%	8
TOTAL		233

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Landcare Program Volunteer Survey 2019

Q6 If you are a Landcare Program volunteer, how many groups do you volunteer with?
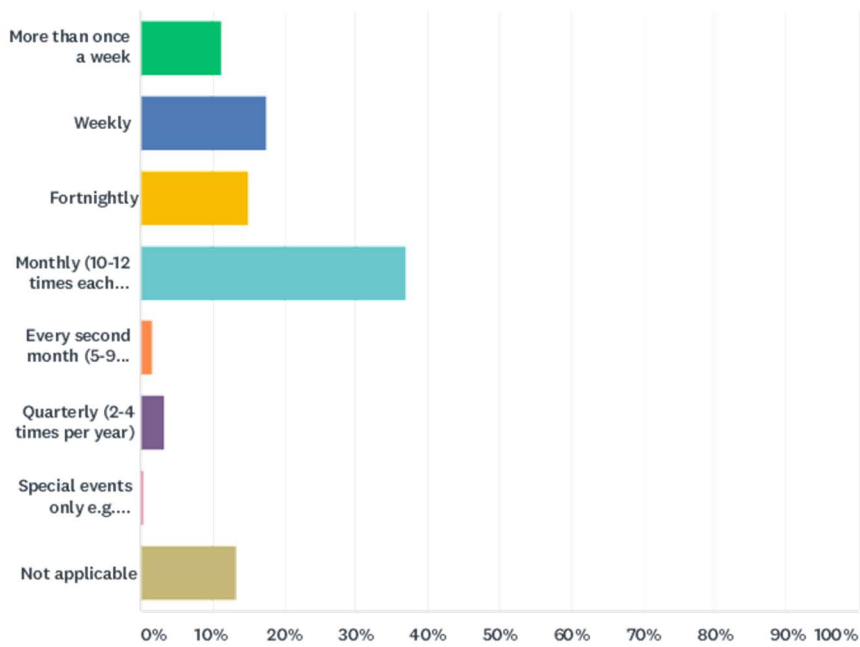
Answered: 231   Skipped: 2

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
1	67.97%	157
2	15.15%	35
3	2.60%	6
4	1.73%	4
5 or more	1.30%	3
Not applicable	11.26%	26
TOTAL		231

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Landcare Program Volunteer Survey 2019

Q7 If you are a Landcare Program volunteer, how often do you volunteer?

Answered: 232   Skipped: 1


| ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
More than once a week	11.21%	26
Weekly	17.67%	41
Fortnightly	15.09%	35
Monthly (10-12 times each year)	37.07%	86
Every second month (5-9 times each year)	1.72%	4
Quarterly (2-4 times per year)	3.45%	8
Special events only e.g. National Tree Day planting or other one off events	0.43%	1
Not applicable	13.36%	31
TOTAL		232

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Landcare Program Volunteer Survey 2019

Q8 Please rate the importance of the following aspects of Council's Landcare Program to you.

Answered: 228   Skipped: 5
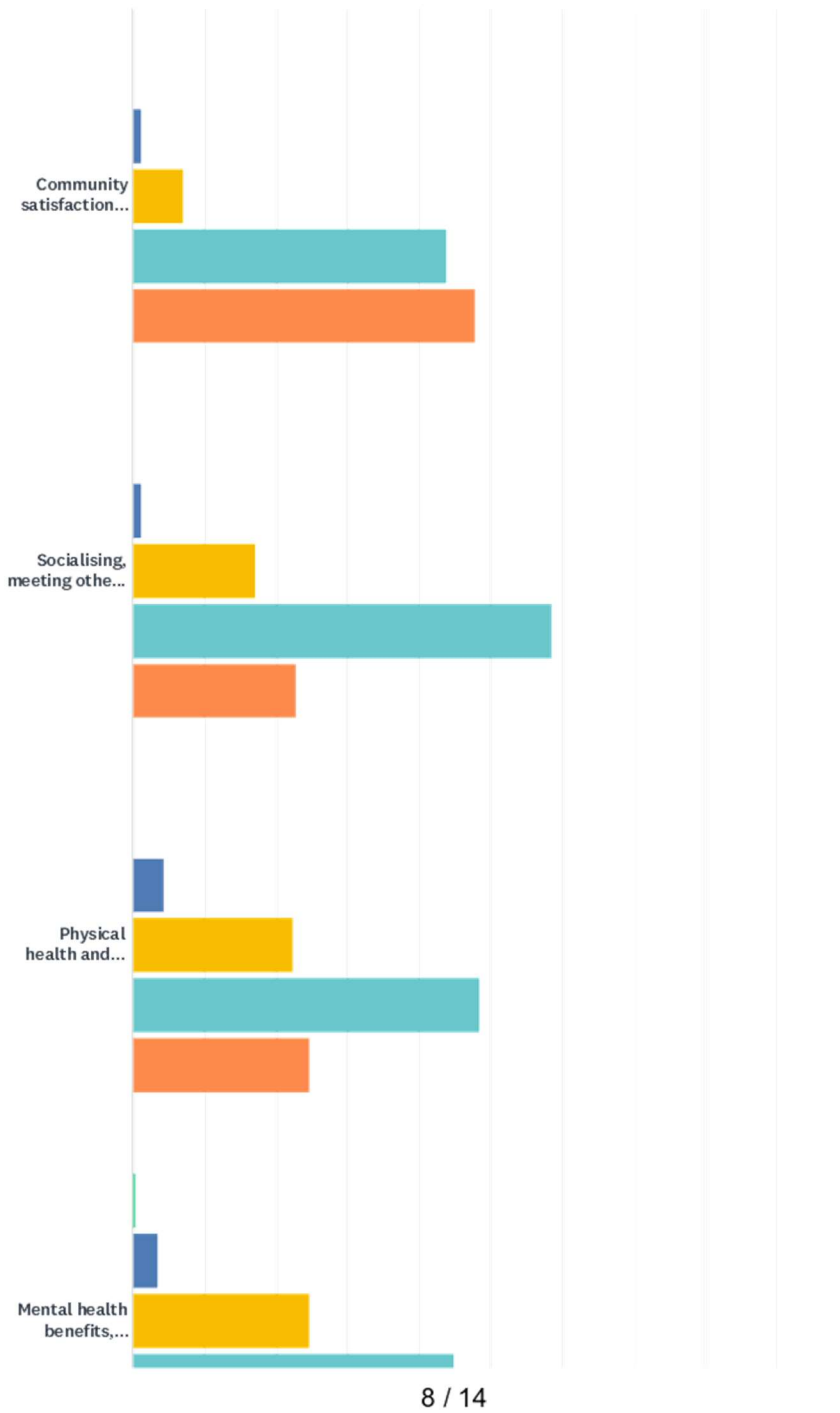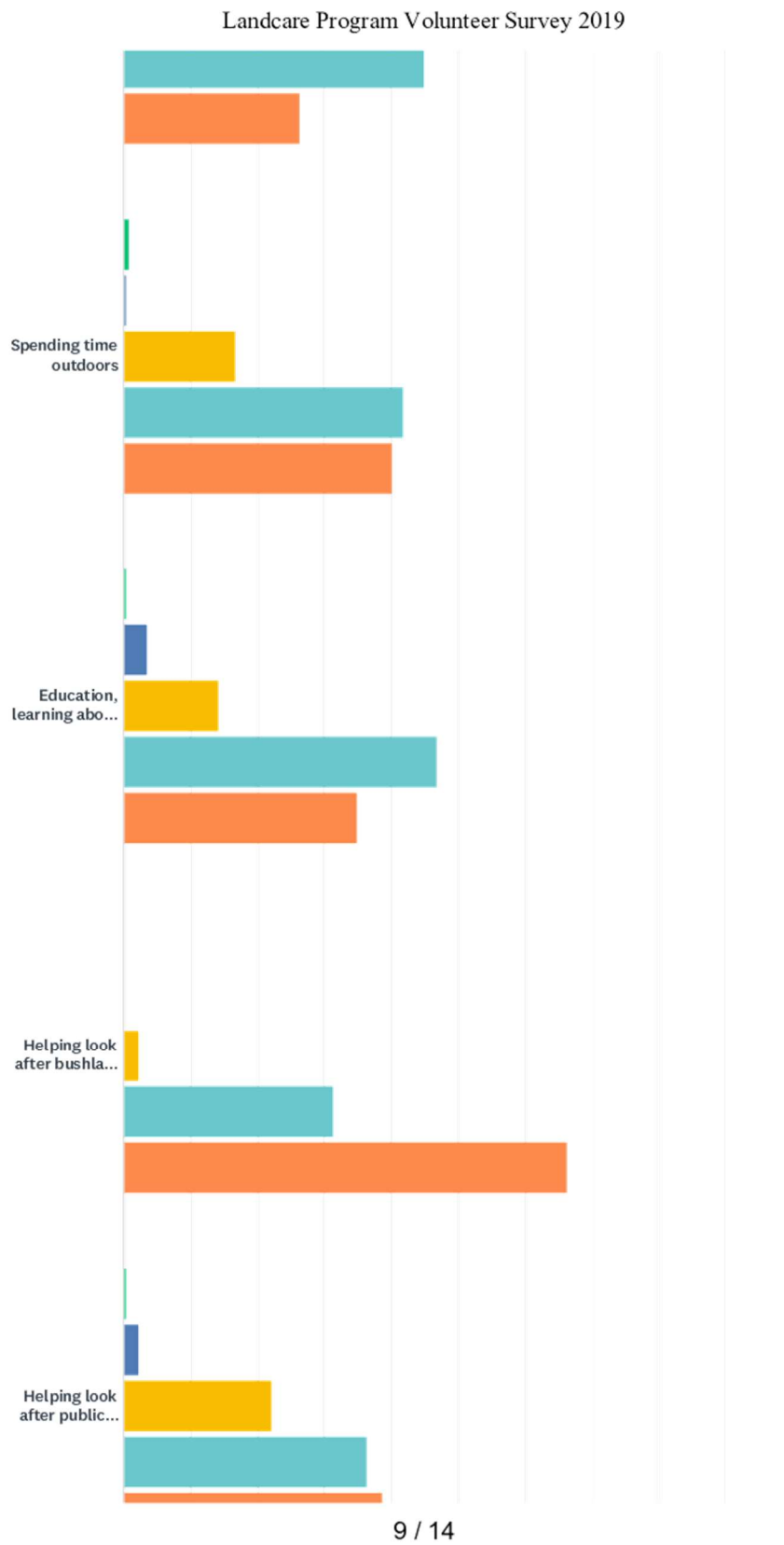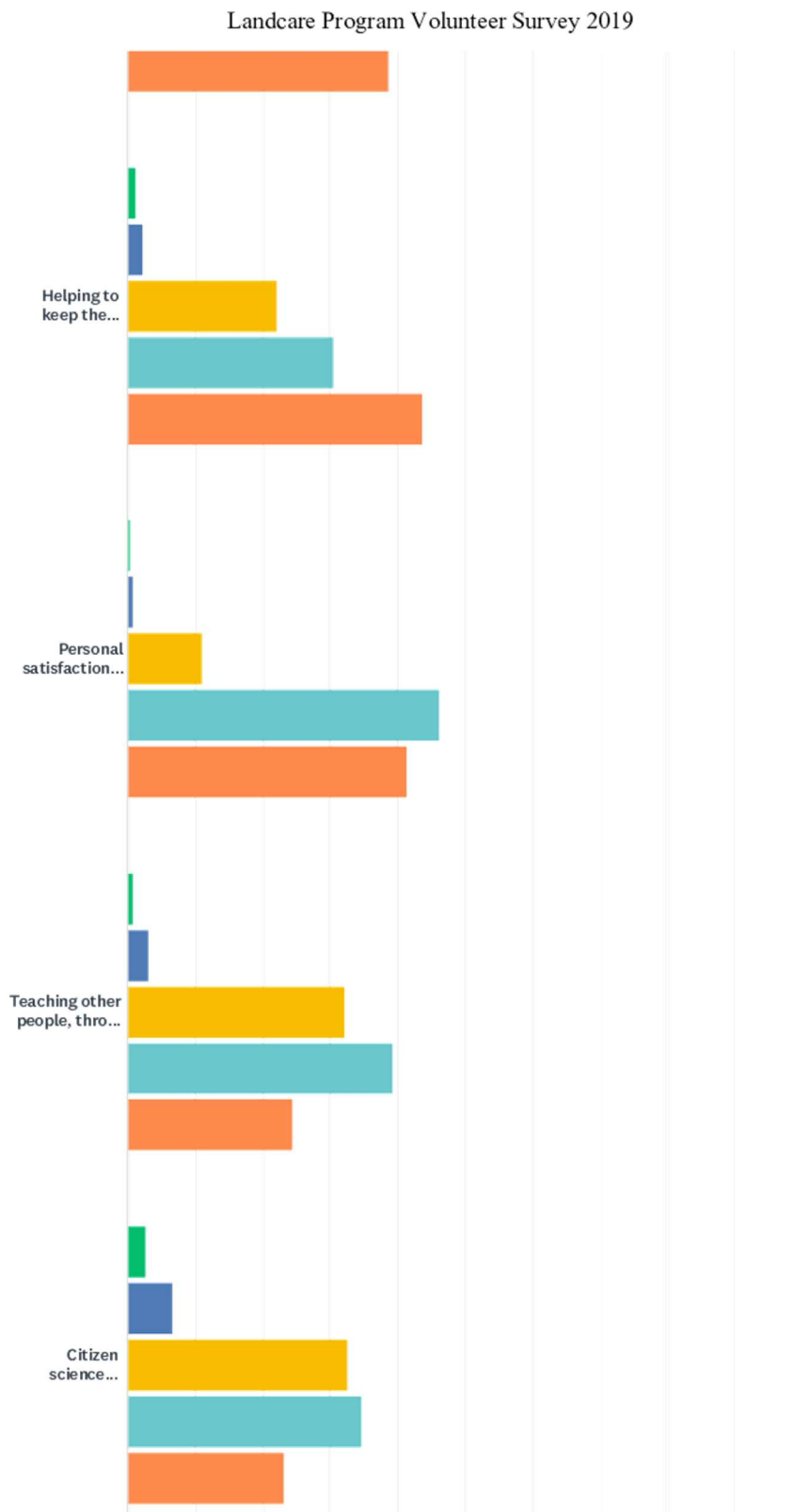
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Landcare Program Volunteer Survey 2019

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Landcare Program Volunteer Survey 2019

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Landcare Program Volunteer Survey 2019

	NOT AT ALL IMPORTANT	NOT IMPORTANT	NEUTRAL	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
Community satisfaction and belonging, feeling like I am working with my neighbours and contributing to the local community	0.00% 0	1.32% 3	7.02% 16	43.86% 100	47.81% 109	228	4.38
Socialising, meeting other people and making friendships	0.00% 0	1.32% 3	17.18% 39	58.59% 133	22.91% 52	227	4.03
Physical health and exercise benefits, the way I feel from the physical activities I do as a volunteer	0.00% 0	4.41% 10	22.47% 51	48.46% 110	24.67% 56	227	3.93
Mental health benefits, wellbeing, stress/anxiety relief that I feel from my volunteering	0.44% 1	3.52% 8	24.67% 56	44.93% 102	26.43% 60	227	3.93
Spending time outdoors	0.88% 2	0.44% 1	16.74% 38	41.85% 95	40.09% 91	227	4.20
Education, learning about plants and animals, Aboriginal and European culture/history	0.44% 1	3.54% 8	14.16% 32	46.90% 106	34.96% 79	226	4.12
Helping look after bushland areas and the environment	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	2.21% 5	31.42% 71	66.37% 150	226	4.64
Helping look after public parks and recreation areas	0.44% 1	2.22% 5	22.22% 50	36.44% 82	38.67% 87	225	4.11
Helping to keep the community clean and tidy, through rubbish and graffiti removal, garden maintenance, mowing, etc.	1.35% 3	2.25% 5	22.07% 49	30.63% 68	43.69% 97	222	4.13
Personal satisfaction, I feel good when I volunteer	0.44% 1	0.89% 2	11.11% 25	46.22% 104	41.33% 93	225	4.27
Teaching other people, through sharing my skills and expertise with them	0.89% 2	3.13% 7	32.14% 72	39.29% 88	24.55% 55	224	3.83
Citizen science projects, helping with research and monitoring activities, plants and animals, waterways	2.68% 6	6.70% 15	32.59% 73	34.82% 78	23.21% 52	224	3.69

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Landcare Program Volunteer Survey 2019

Q9 Do you have any suggestions for changes that we could make to improve the program?

Answered: 221   Skipped: 12
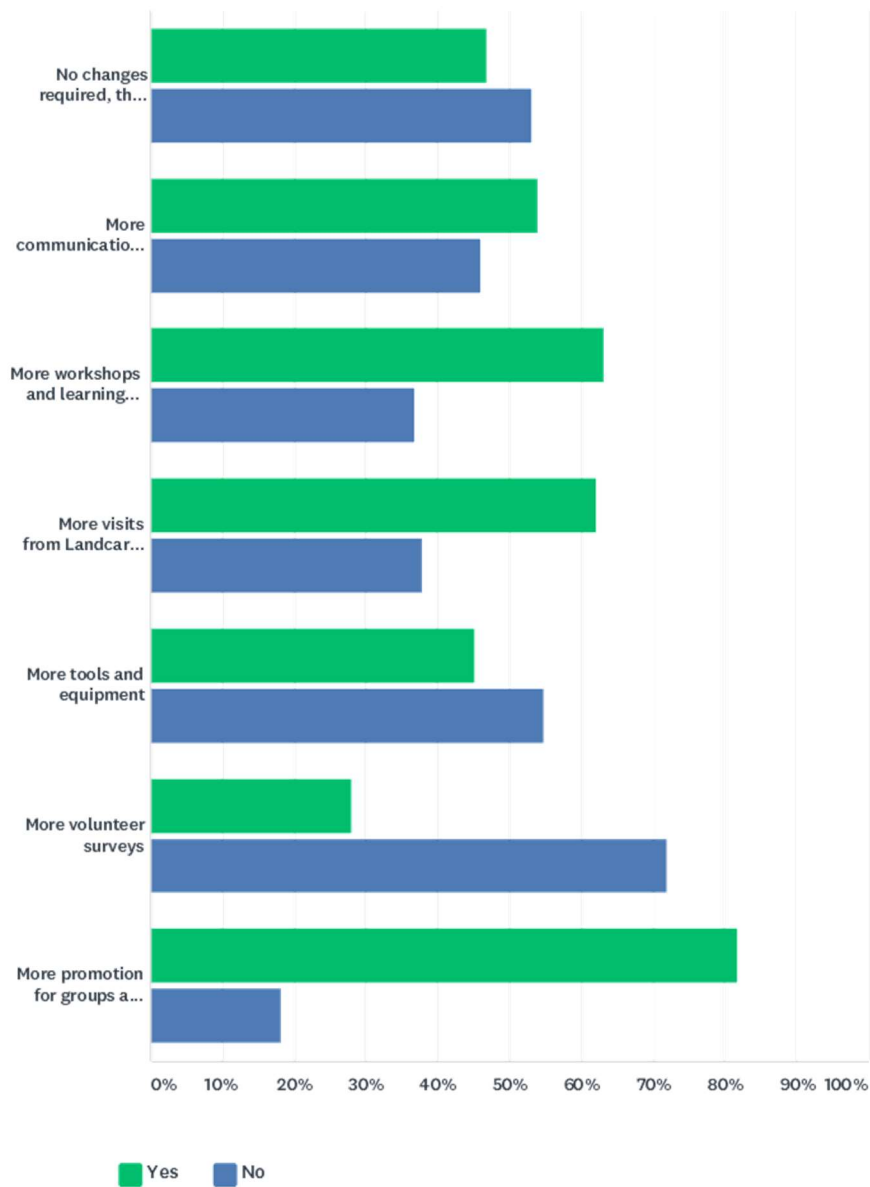
	YES	NO	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
No changes required, the program already addresses my needs and expectations	46.84% 89	53.16% 101	190	1.53

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Landcare Program Volunteer Survey 2019

More communication to volunteers	53.97% 102	46.03% 87	189	1.46
More workshops and learning opportunities	63.13% 125	36.87% 73	198	1.37
More visits from Landcare staff to groups and sites	62.11% 118	37.89% 72	190	1.38
More tools and equipment	45.26% 86	54.74% 104	190	1.55
More volunteer surveys	27.98% 54	72.02% 139	193	1.72
More promotion for groups and the program	81.86% 167	18.14% 37	204	1.18

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Landcare Program Volunteer Survey 2019

Q10 Since amalgamation 'Central Coast Council Landcare Program' has been used as the overall program name covering all of the Landcare, Bushcare, Tidy Towns and Friends Of groups from the former Wyong Shire Council and Gosford City Council. Do you have a preference, or a suggestion, for the overall program name in the future?

Answered: 229   Skipped: 4
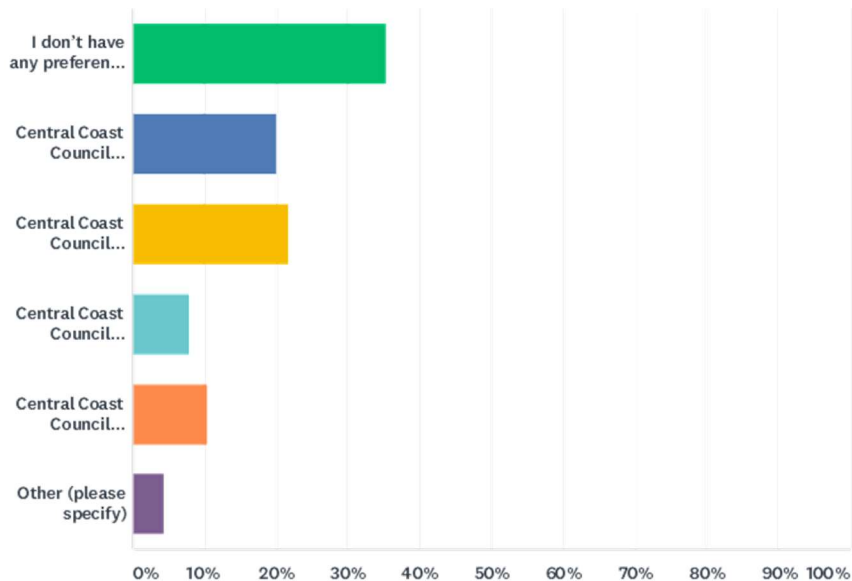
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
I don't have any preference for the overall program name	35.37%	81
Central Coast Council Environmental Volunteer Program	20.09%	46
Central Coast Council Landcare Program	21.83%	50
Central Coast Council Bushcare Program	7.86%	18
Central Coast Council Envirocare Program	10.48%	24
Other (please specify)	4.37%	10
TOTAL		229

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Central Coast Local Planning Panel

Recommended Appointments

May 2020

On 12 February 2020, Council received notification from the NSW Department of Planning Industry & Environment (the Department) that the NSW Minister for Planning & Public Spaces, The Hon. Rob Stokes MP, has made a regulatory amendment requiring Central Coast Council to establish a Local Planning Panel in accordance with Section 2.17 of the *Environmental Planning & Assessment Act, 1979.*

The following sets out the recommended Central Coast Local Planning Panel appointments (Chair, alternate Chairs, expert/professional panel members and community panel members (and alternate delegates) for appointment to the Panel.

The appointments are for a period of 3 years in accordance with Schedule 2 Clause 11 (1) of the *Environmental Planning & Assessment Act 1979.*

Position/Appointment	Name
Chair*	Ms Donna Rygate
Alternate Chairs*	Mr Jason Perica Ms Kara Krason
Professional/Expert Panel Members	Mr Gregory Flynn Ms Sue Francis Mr Stephen Leathley Ms Linda McClure Mr Grant Christmas Mr Garry Fielding
Community Panel Members	Mr Andrew Chan (all 5 wards) Ms Lynne Hamilton (all 5 wards) Mr Daniel Corti (Gosford West, Gosford East & Wyong Wards) Mr Glenn Watts (all 5 wards) Ms Gabby Bowles (Gosford West Gosford East, Wyong Wards)

* As nominated by the the Hon Rob Stokes MP, Minister for Planning & Public Spaces in correspondence received 12 February 2020.

LOCAL PLANNING PANELS DIRECTION – DEVELOPMENT APPLICATIONS

I, the Minister for Planning, give the following direction under section 9.1 of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*.

Minister for Planning

Dated: 3rd November, 2019.

Objective

The objective of this direction is to amend the Ministerial direction dated 23 February 2018. This direction inserts the Central Coast Council as a council which must constitute a local planning panel, and will identify the development applications that are to be determined by the local planning panel on behalf of the Central Coast Council.
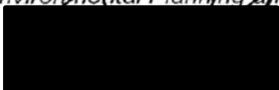
Application

This direction applies to the Central Coast Council.

Direction

Insert 'Central Coast' in the table in the direction dated 23 February 2018 so that the local planning panel of the council is to determine development applications of a kind specified in 'Schedule 2' to that direction.

1

LOCAL PLANNING PANELS DIRECTION – DEVELOPMENT APPLICATIONS

I, the Minister for Planning, give the following direction under section 9.1 of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*.

Minister for Planning

Dated: 23/2/xviii

Objective

The objective of this direction is to identify the development applications that are to be determined by local planning panels on behalf of councils in the Greater Sydney Region and Wollongong.

Application

This direction applies to councils in the Greater Sydney Region and Wollongong. It also applies to any other council that constitutes a local planning panel under the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*.

Interpretation

A word or expression used in this direction has the same meaning as it has in the standard local environmental planning instrument prescribed by the *Standard Instrument (Local Environmental Plans) Order 2006* made under the Act, unless it is otherwise defined in this direction.

Direction

Local planning panels of councils in the areas identified in the Table below are to determine development applications involving development of a kind specified in the Schedule to this direction that is identified in the Table below.

> Note: Councils can make arrangements for the determination of applications for the modification of development consents by either the local planning panel or council staff.

Table

Council	Development
Bayside, Blue Mountains, Burwood, Camden, Campbelltown, Canada Bay, Georges River, Hawkesbury, Hornsby, Hunters Hill, Ku-ring-gai, Lane Cove, Mosman, North Sydney, Randwick, Ryde, Strathfield, Waverley, Willoughby, Wollondilly, Woollahra, and any other council that constitutes a local planning panel constituted under the EP&A Act	Schedule 1
Blacktown, Canterbury-Bankstown, Cumberland, Fairfield, Inner West, Liverpool, Northern Beaches, Parramatta, Penrith, Sutherland, The Hills, Wollongong	Schedule 2
City of Sydney	Schedule 3

1

This direction takes effect on 1 March 2018 and applies to development applications made but not determined before 1 March 2018.

If a council to which this direction applies has not delegated the function of determining a development application to an officer or employee of the council, then the local planning panel is to determine the development application.

SCHEDULE 1

1. **Conflict of interest**

    Development for which the applicant or land owner is:

    (a)   the council,

    (b)   a councillor,

    (c)   a member of council staff who is principally involved in the exercise of council's functions under the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*,

    (d)   a member of Parliament (either the Parliament of New South Wales or Parliament of the Commonwealth), or

    (e)   a relative (within the meaning of the *Local Government Act 1993*) of a person referred to in (b) to (d).

    but not development for the following purposes:

    (a)   internal alterations and additions to any building that is not a heritage item,

    (b)   advertising signage,

    (c)   maintenance and restoration of a heritage item, or

    (d)   minor building structures projecting from the building facade over public land (such as awnings, verandas, bay windows, flagpoles, pipes and services, and sun shading devices).

2. **Contentious development**

    Development that:

    (a)   in the case of a council having an approved submissions policy – is the subject of the number of submissions set by that policy, or

    (b)   in any other case – is the subject of 10 or more unique submissions by way of objection.

    An *approved submissions policy* is a policy prepared by the council and approved by the Secretary of the Department of Planning and Environment which details the circumstances in which a local planning panel or council staff should exercise the consent authority functions of the council, based on the number and nature of submissions received about development.

2

3.   **Departure from development standards**

Development that contravenes a development standard imposed by an environmental planning instrument by more than 10% or non-numerical development standards.

Note: If the Secretary allows concurrence to be assumed by council staff for contravening development standards, the panel can delegate these applications to council staff to determine.

4.   **Sensitive development**

(a)   Designated development.

(b)   Development to which *State Environmental Planning Policy No 65 – Design Quality of Residential Apartment Development* applies.

(c)   Development involving the demolition of a heritage item.

(d)   Development for the purposes of new licenced premises, that will require one of the following liquor licences:

    (i)   a club licence under the *Registered Clubs Act 1976,*

    (ii)   a hotel (general bar) licence under the *Liquor Act 2007*, or

    (iii)   an on-premises licence for public entertainment venues under the *Liquor Act 2007.*

(e)   Development for the purpose of sex services premises and restricted premises.

(f)   Development applications for which the developer has offered to enter into a planning agreement.

3

SCHEDULE 2

1. **Conflict of interest**

    Development for which the applicant or land owner is:

    (a)   the council,

    (b)   a councillor,

    (c)   a member of council staff who is principally involved in the exercise of council's functions under the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*,

    (d)   a member of Parliament (either the Parliament of New South Wales or Parliament of the Commonwealth), or

    (e)   a relative (within the meaning of the *Local Government Act 1993*) of a person referred to in (b) to (d).

    but not development for the following purposes which requires:

    (a)   internal alterations and additions to any building that is not a heritage item,

    (b)   advertising signage,

    (c)   maintenance and restoration of a heritage item, or

    (d)   minor building structures projecting from the building facade over public land (such as awnings, verandas, bay windows, flagpoles, pipes and services, and sun shading devices).

2. **Contentious development**

    Development that:

    (a)   in the case of a council having an approved submissions policy – is the subject of the number of submissions set by that policy, or

    (b)   in any other case – is the subject of 10 or more unique submissions by way of objection.

    An *approved submissions policy* is a policy prepared by the council and approved by the Secretary of the Department of Planning and Environment which details the circumstances in which a local planning panel or council staff should exercise the consent authority functions of the council, based on the number or nature of submissions received about development.

3. **Departure from development standards**

    Development that contravenes a development standard imposed by an environmental planning instrument by more than 10% or non-numerical development standards.

    Note: If the Secretary allows concurrence to be assumed by council staff for contravening development standards, the panel can delegate these applications to council staff to determine.

4. **Sensitive development**

    (a)   Designated development.

    (b)   Development to which *State Environmental Planning Policy No 65 – Design Quality of Residential Apartment Development* applies and is 4 or more storeys in height.

4

(c)   Development involving the demolition of a heritage item.

(d)   Development for the purposes of new licenced premises, that will require one of the following liquor licences:

   (i)   a club licence under the *Registered Clubs Act 1976,*

   (ii)   a hotel (general bar) licence under the *Liquor Act 2007,* or

   (iii) an on-premises licence for public entertainment venues under the *Liquor Act 2007.*

(e)   Development for the purpose of sex services premises and restricted premises.

(f)   Development applications for which the developer has offered to enter into a planning agreement.

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SCHEDULE 3

1. **Conflict of interest**

   Development for which the applicant or land owner is:

   (a)   the council,

   (b)   a councillor,

   (c)   a member of council staff who is principally involved in the exercise of council's functions under the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*,

   (d)   a member of Parliament (either the Parliament of New South Wales or Parliament of the Commonwealth), or

   (e)   a relative (within the meaning of the *Local Government Act 1993*) of a person referred to in (b) to (d).

   but not development for the following purposes which requires:

   (a)   internal alterations and additions to any building that is not a heritage item,

   (b)   advertising signage,

   (c)   maintenance and restoration of a heritage item,

   (d)   development for the purpose of end of journey facilities, or

   (e)   minor building structures projecting from the building facade over public land (such as awnings, verandas, bay windows, flagpoles, pipes and services, and sun shading devices).

2. **Contentious development**

   Development that:

   (a)   in the case of a council having an approved submissions policy – is the subject of the number of submissions set by that policy, or

   (b)   in any other case – is the subject of 25 or more unique submissions by way of objection.

   An **approved submissions policy** is a policy prepared by the council and approved by the Secretary of the Department of Planning and Environment which details the circumstances in which a local planning panel or council staff should exercise the consent authority functions of the council, based on the number or nature of submissions received about development.

3. **Departure from development standards**

   For development for the purpose of dwelling houses, dual occupancies and attached dwellings, development that contravenes a development standard imposed by an environmental planning instrument by more than 25% or non-numerical development standard.

   For all other development, development that contravenes a development standard imposed by an environmental planning instrument by 10% or non-numerical development standards.

   Note: If the Secretary allows concurrence to be assumed by council staff for contravening development standards, the panel can delegate these applications to council staff to determine.

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4.   **Sensitive development**

   (a)   Designated development.

   (b)   Development to which *State Environmental Planning Policy No 65 – Design Quality of Residential Apartment Development* applies and is 4 or more storeys in height.

   (c)   Development involving the demolition of a heritage item.

   (d)   Development for the purposes of new licenced premises, that will require one of the following liquor licences:

      (i)   a club licence under the *Registered Clubs Act 1976,*

      (ii)   a hotel (general bar) licence under the *Liquor Act 2007*, or

      (iii)   an on-premises licence for public entertainment venues under the *Liquor Act 2007.*

   (e)   Development for the purpose of sex services premises and restricted premises.

   (f)   Development applications for which the developer has offered to enter into a planning agreement.

7

Local Planning Panels

Guidance for councils on appointing members

NSW GOVERNMENT

Overview

This document provides an overview of the process of appointing members to local planning panels and provides guidance to assist local councils in that process.

Mandatory requirements for the process of appointing members to local planning panels are set out in:

- sections 2.17-2.20 of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*, (EP&A Act);
- schedule 2 of the EP&A Act; and
- the Local Planning Panels Direction – Operational Procedures dated 23 February 2018.

This document provides best practice information and guidance to assist councils in addressing these requirements.

This guidance has sections on:

- panel membership;
- approval of chairs and independent experts;
- guidance on selecting an independent expert member;
- recruitment of community representatives; and
- terms of appointment.

Panel membership

A local planning panel consists of four members: a chair, two independent expert members and a community representative.

If a council is required to constitute a local planning panel, it must appoint chairs and independent expert members approved by the Minister for Planning.

Community representatives are recruited, selected and appointed by councils.

Mayors, councillors, property developers and real estate agents are not eligible for appointment to local planning panels.

Approval and appointment of chairs and independent experts

The Minister for Planning and Public Spaces approves experts and chairs and alternate chairs for appointment by councils.

If the chair of a local planning panel vacates their position, council should request that the Minister for Planning and Public Spaces approve a replacement chair for appointment by council.

Independent experts pool

A pool of over 200 independent experts has been approved.

Each expert has been approved on the basis of their professional standing, experience, technical ability and broad understanding of the development assessment process. Each expert has met one or more of the expertise requirements set out in the EP&A Act.

Local Planning Panels

Guidance for councils on appointing members

Each expert has completed probity checks and provided a statutory declaration that they have not been bankrupt, do not have a criminal record and are not developers or real estate agents. None of the experts is a Mayor, local councillor, or local council or State government employee.

The Planning Panels Secretariat at the Department of Planning and Environment maintains a list of approved independent experts and can make this list available to councils on request.

Council should select sufficient experts for appointment to ensure that panel meetings can proceed in the event that a member may be unavailable for any reason, and also to enable the chair to rotate panel members periodically (as required by clause 1.2.1.c of the Operational Procedures).

Guidance on the selection of independent expert members

Council may discuss potential expert members with its appointed chair.

Chairs should not make unsolicited representations on behalf of experts to councils.

Experts should not approach councils or chairs to solicit or canvass appointments.

Experts can be appointed to more than one local planning panel.

Councils are not able to prohibit experts from carrying out consultancy work within the LGA.

It is up to each panel member to ensure that they comply with the code of conduct. The panel chair also must "ensure the panel fully discharges its responsibilities under...the code of conduct...in a timely manner" (as required by clause 3.1.3 of the Operational Procedures).

Breaches of the code of conduct may constitute a reason for removal from the panel and/or from the pool of approved independent experts.

Recruitment of community representatives

Councils recruit, select and appoint community representatives. The following points are provided as guidance to assist councils in this process.

Community representatives are appointed to bring local knowledge and experience to the local planning panel. Community representatives should be selected from the local community. Community representatives are not expected to be experts in planning matters.

If the council area has wards, a community representative is needed to address matters for each ward. Community representatives can represent one or more wards.

The General Manager of the council should oversee the selection process for the community representatives of the local planning panel.

A sufficient number of community representatives should be appointed so that the panel can operate efficiently, even if a community representative is unable to attend for any reason, and so that community representatives can be periodically rotated (as required by clause 1.3.1.c of the Ministerial direction).

Advertising

The council should seek expressions of interest from the community for the role of community representative on the local planning panel by placing at least two advertisements in local media publications (i.e. newspapers) as well as advertising through one or more of the following:

- the council's website, newsletters and social media e.g. council's Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn pages;

Local Planning Panels

Guidance for councils on appointing members

- any relevant community forums, ward or precinct committees etc. convened by the council;
- local/community radio or magazines; or
- council offices, libraries, community or sports centres, schools, residents and community groups.

The advertising period should be no less than 28 days, in order to give community members enough time to apply.

Applications for the role of community representative at council may be sent to the General Manager at that council. Applications should not be sent to the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment.

Selection criteria

Local community representatives may be selected on the basis that they:

- are current residents within the LGA;
- have an understanding of the LGA and issues of concern to the local community;
- have the capacity to form independent views and to contribute constructively to the determination of applications;
- are able to demonstrate a basic level of understanding of the planning system, i.e. knowledge of the council's local environmental plan, development control plan, local strategic planning statement or community strategic plan; and
- are committed to:
  - o following the *Code of Conduct for Local Planning Panel Members* and the Local Planning Panels Operational Procedures; and
  - o attending local planning panel meetings.

Appointing community representatives

Following the end of the advertising period, the General Manager should arrange a selection panel to:

- review the applications against the relevant selection criteria; and
- shortlist suitable candidates;
- arrange for interviews (if required); and
- recommend candidates suitable for appointment as community representatives.

Probity checks

Probity checks are required for all panel members. The Department conducts a range of background checks prior to the approval of chairs and expert members, including criminal, financial and academic checks:

Council must arrange probity checks for community representatives. These checks should include at a minimum:

- public register of real estate agents check;
- bankruptcy record check; and
- National Police check (ACIC).

Local Planning Panels

Guidance for councils on appointing members

NSW GOVERNMENT

Remuneration

The Minister has made a remuneration determination setting minimum per meeting rates for panel members. The determination is available, along with the Minister's Local Planning Panels Directions, at:

www.planning.nsw.gov.au/Assess-and-Regulate/Development-Assessment/Local-Planning-Panels/Statutory-rules.

Terms of appointment

Appointed members should accept their terms of appointment in writing. The terms of appointment should identify:

- the sections of the EP&A Act under which appointments are made and terminated;
- period of appointments;
- duties and responsibilities;
- a commitment to comply with the *Code of Conduct for Local Planning Panel Members* and to complete the Disclosures Return at Schedule 2 of the Code of Conduct when appointed, and as required under clause 4.15 of the Code of Conduct;
- remuneration; and
- limits of liability.

The General Manager should notify all applicants of the outcome of their application. The General Manager should also notify the panel chair of all decisions on appointments to the local planning panel.

The Planning Panels Secretariat at the Department of Planning and Environment must be advised of all appointments to the local planning panel, including any appointments as alternates, or as ward representatives.

Where can I find out more?

Call the Planning Panels Secretariat on 8217 2060.

Email enquiry@planningpanels.nsw.gov.au.

3.2   Constitution of Central Coast Local Planning Panel

Attachment 4   ***Hon Rob Stokes MP - member - NSW Government Regulatory Amendment***
Requiring CCC Establish Planning Panel - Hon Rob Stokes MP

NSW GOVERNMENT

The Hon. Rob Stokes MP
Minister for Planning and Public Spaces

Ref: IRF19/7306

Mr Gary Murphy
Chief Executive Officer
Central Coast Council
PO Box 21
GOSFORD NSW 2250

Dear Mr Murphy *Gary,*

As you are aware, the NSW Government has made a regulatory amendment requiring Central Coast Council (Council) to establish a local planning panel. The Government has taken this step to improve the quality, transparency and credibility of planning decisions. Independent experts in areas such as architecture, the environment and heritage are well placed to make technical decisions about sensitive or contentious development applications. Council's professional planning staff will continue to determine most routine applications.

The ongoing role of Council in relation to land use planning is a critical one, focused on setting the strategic vision, policies and development controls that the panel must apply. The panel will be accountable to Council, which will choose experts members from an approved pool and will also choose community representatives to enhance the panel's knowledge and understanding of local issues.

I am pleased to advise Council that I have approved Ms Donna Rygate as Chair and Mr Jason Perica and Ms Kara Krason as alternate chairs for Council to appoint to its local planning panel. The curricula vitae of the chairs are enclosed for your information. Each has expertise in government and public administration.

The list of approved independent experts, from which Council is to select at least two members for appointment to its panel, and their curricula vitae are available electronically. Please advise Mr Stuart Withington, Manager, Planning Panels Secretariat at the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (the Department) of your nominated contact to receive instructions to access this list and arrange briefings for staff and councillors. You may contact Mr Withington at stuart.withington@planning.nsw.gov.au.

Each expert has expertise in at least one area of planning, architecture, heritage, the environment, urban design, economics, traffic and transport, law, engineering, tourism or government and public administration.

The approved chairs and independent experts have been subject to probity and political donations checks and are not councillors, developers or real estate agents, nor are they bankrupt.

In selecting and appointing a community representative for each of its five wards, Council is to ensure that similar probity and occupation checks are undertaken.

GPO Box 5341 Sydney NSW 2001 ▪ P: (02) 8574 6707 ▪ F: (02) 9339 5554 ▪ W: nsw.gov.au/ministerstokes

3.2   Constitution of Central Coast Local Planning Panel

Attachment 4   *Hon Rob Stokes MP - member - NSW Government Regulatory Amendment*
Requiring CCC Establish Planning Panel - Hon Rob Stokes MP

It is advisable that alternate members for each position are appointed to allow the chair to periodically rotate the members and ensure the panel can continue to operate if a member has a conflict of interest or is unable to attend a meeting.

Council will need to ensure it can appoint its members prior to 2 March 2020. Please advise the Department by 21 February of Council's chosen panel members, alternate members and community representatives.

Enclosed is a guide developed by the Department to assist with the selection and appointment process of panel members. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for Council's ongoing cooperation in implementing this important initiative.

Should you have any questions in relation to this matter, you are welcome to contact Mr Withington on 8217 2061.

Yours sincerely

The Hon. Rob Stokes MP
Minister for Planning and Public Spaces

Encl: CVs of approved chairs and panel member selection guide