

## AMENDED ITEM



**Item No:** 3.1  
**Title:** Landcare Program Strategy  
**Department:** Environment and Planning

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11 May 2020 Ordinary Council Meeting

Trim Reference: F2004/06937 - D13769892

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### Report Purpose

The purpose of this report is for Council to consider the outcome of the public exhibition of the Landcare Program Strategy. The report also addresses outstanding actions arising following Council's consideration of the draft Landcare Program Strategy at its Ordinary Meeting of 8 July 2019.

The draft Landcare Strategy was developed and placed on public exhibition prior to the realisation of COVID-19 (Coronavirus) restrictions on public gatherings. There is a community expectation that the strategy will be considered for final adoption given that it has already been on public consultation and that the strategy will be implemented in line with advice from government and health authorities.

### Recommendation

- 1 That Council formally adopt the draft Central Coast Council Environmental Volunteer Program Strategy, specifically amended as follows:**
  - ***The name of the Program has been changed from CCC Landcare Program to CCC Environmental Volunteer Program.***
  - ***Action Item 13 added to Strategy – investigate opportunities for funding additional support for the program, including external grant funding and third-party sponsorship.***
  - ***Action Item 14 added to Strategy – consider new technologies for managing the program e.g. phone apps to manage group activities.***
- 2 That Council endorse expanding the program through the recruitment of two additional full time equivalent (FTE) staff, at a projected cost of \$40,000 in capital and \$134,125 in operational expenditure per additional FTE, for the purpose of supporting additional volunteer groups as outlined within the strategy.**

#### **Background**

At Council's Ordinary Meeting of 8 July 2019, a draft Central Coast Council Landcare Program Strategy was presented for endorsement to place on public exhibition for the purpose of community consultation. This draft strategy was developed in accordance with action E1.03 in Council's 2018-19 Operational Plan. The action required the preparation of a strategy to identify expansion opportunities for Council's Landcare program in order to enable greater participation in the future.

Council, at its ordinary meeting on 8 July 2019 resolved the following:

- 623/19 *That Council endorse the draft Central Coast Council Landcare Program Strategy, for the purposes of community consultation.*
- 624/19 *That the draft Central Coast Council Landcare Program Strategy be placed on public exhibition for a period of 28 days.*
- 625/19 *That a further report come back to council reporting on the outcomes of the community consultation by the end of November 2019.*
- 626/19 *That the report to come back to Council also;*
  - a Provides a comparison of other Council's expenditure and resourcing on the volunteer programs on a per population basis*
  - b identifies additional funding to be allocated to support and increase the number of volunteer groups.*

This report addresses the above resolutions of Council.

#### **Consultation**

Prior to the development of the draft strategy, all members of Central Coast Council Landcare Program were invited, in April 2019, to participate in a survey to better understand the programs current volunteers, what the important aspects of the program were to them, and how they thought that the program could be improved. There were 233 respondents to the survey, representing approximately 38% of the volunteers. The survey results were considered in developing the draft strategy and were included as an appendix to the draft strategy.

A Councillor workshop session was held to provide an opportunity for Councillors to advise staff of specific needs or expectations to be included in the review of the program and development of the draft Landcare Strategy.

In accordance with resolution 624/19, the Central Coast Council Landcare Program Strategy was on public exhibition for a period of 28 days between 5 August 2019 to 12 September 2019.

### 3.1 Landcare Program Strategy (contd)

There were 25 submissions on the strategy and the themes from these responses can be summarised as noted below in Table 1:

**Table 1:** Summary of themes identified through engagement period and how they are addressed within the strategy.

<b>Themes identified</b>	<b>Relevant Action Identified in Action Plan (Page 46-47 of Attachment 1 – ‘Environmental Volunteer Program Strategy’</b>
Support for the program to continue and for it to expand	Addressed in multiple items in Action Plan of the amended Strategy, including additional resourcing as identified in Action 7.
Support for expansion of conservation and environment groups over amenity groups within the program. ‘Possible excision of amenity groups under a different area of community programs’	Addressed within section 8 of the amended Strategy, noting that Amenity groups are of lower priority than other groups in expanding the Program given that the focus of this program, and the expertise of the staff that support it, is largely in relation to the management of our natural environment. Also addressed within section 10 of the amended Strategy, noting priority to establish other groups over Amenity groups and not increasing the proportion of Amenity groups within Program. Action 2 identifies Amenity groups as lowest priority within Program.
Support for short-term groups noting time constraints for residents committing to longer term projects. Project based volunteering rather than group based.	Addressed within Section 8 of the amended Strategy, noting that Short-term groups give the community opportunities to participate without the need of an ongoing commitment e.g. participation in National Tree Day planting events. Short-term groups identified as an Opportunity for expanding the program in Section 9 of the amended Strategy. The Strategic Principles and Action Plan recognise the provision of Short-term groups within the Program. Action 2 prioritises the development of Short-term groups ahead of additional Amenity groups.
Interest in the technical groups within the program.	Section 8 of the amended Strategy identifies the Technical sub-program as a high priority and recognises this as an area for expansion within the Program. Section 9 of the amended Strategy identifies this as an area

**3.1 Landcare Program Strategy (contd)**

<b>Themes identified</b>	<b>Relevant Action Identified in Action Plan (Page 46-47 of Attachment 1 – ‘Environmental Volunteer Program Strategy’</b>
	of opportunity for expanding the Program. Action 2 identifies the priority of the Technical groups.
Name change – results of public exhibition were consistent with previous survey results. There was support for and against changing the name of the program. Of the new name options there was considered support for CCC Environmental Volunteer Program as a descriptive name, one that allowed people to ‘immediately understand the role of the program/organization and to buy into the concept without further investigation’	Addressed in Action 1 of the amended Strategy.
Flexibility for volunteers to work on their sites on any days.	Section 5.3 of the amended Strategy includes information relating to the development and review of site strategies. Site Strategies are group specific and include information on when volunteers can work on the sites associated with each group in the Program. They are developed by Council Officers in consultation with the volunteer groups. There is no limitation for volunteers to work on particular days, but controls associated with each site and skills and experience of group members are considered to determine whether volunteers require qualified supervision and support in order to appropriately manage WHS and Environmental Risk. Actions 3 & 4 of the amended Strategy relate to the development and review of procedures to support the program and that Site Strategies are reviewed periodically.
Site specific training for volunteers.	Induction and General training programs for volunteers will continue to be offered through the program. Actions 3, 4 & 5 within the amended Strategy all relate to volunteer training. The provision of supervisors to work with volunteers (Action 5) is especially important in being able to provide ongoing

### 3.1 Landcare Program Strategy (contd)

Themes identified	Relevant Action Identified in Action Plan (Page 46-47 of Attachment 1 – 'Environmental Volunteer Program Strategy'
	site specific training to volunteers during their regular work sessions. Expansion of the Program, especially in the Technical area, will provide opportunities to develop and deliver specific training for volunteers e.g. flora and fauna surveying techniques, citizen science related activities. Collaboration with Council's Environmental Education team will continue to provide opportunities for volunteers to attend workshops to increase their skills and knowledge more broadly in environmental areas.
Support for coordination of work across different land tenures, different public authorities, to maximise environmental outcomes.	Section 8 of the amended Strategy acknowledges that the program will continue to support existing/legacy groups working on land not under Council's care and control and also identifies that opportunities may exist to partner with other land owners to carry out works across tenures.
Promotion through other external organisations, e.g. Landcare website. Also at sites, e.g. interpretive signage.	Section 5.3 of the amended Strategy addresses promotion. Action 9 addresses the marketing of the Program. In consultation with Council's Communications Section, opportunities to promote the Program through other external organisations and with promotional materials will be developed and delivered.
Business sponsorship of the program, especially local businesses.	New Action Item 13 added to amended Strategy. This includes investigating third party sponsorship opportunities.
Ensuring that the volunteers and groups are appropriately resourced.	Provision of materials, PPE, and appropriate tools will continue as part of the program.
Consider new technologies for managing the program e.g. phone apps to manage groups activities.	New Action Item 14 has been added to the amended Strategy to investigate technologies to better support the program.

As a result of this consultation process and the feedback from Councillor's and the public the draft strategy has been amended.

### 3.1 Landcare Program Strategy (contd)

The draft strategy suggested changing the name of the program to Central Coast Council Envirocare. The consultation results have shown a preference for CCC Environmental Volunteer Program of the various new name options put forward, with particular resistance to CCC Envirocare as a program name through the Councillor and community consultation. The program name has been changed in the amended strategy to now be the "Central Coast Council Environmental Volunteer Program".

The results from the volunteer survey, councillor workshop and community consultation have all been taken into consideration in finalising the strategy. For the most part the points that were raised through the various consultations were consistent with the strategy, its management principles and actions.

In accordance with resolution 626/19, a benchmarking exercise was carried out to compare the expenditure and resourcing of the Central Coast Council Landcare Program with other Council environmental volunteer programs. Through this exercise a total of 50 Councils were contacted throughout NSW, Victoria and Queensland.

Twelve of the Council's contacted through the benchmarking exercise responded with information which was able to be used to draw comparisons with the Central Coast Council Landcare Program, the results of this survey are shown in Table 2.

On a per population basis, levels of support for volunteer programs ranged from \$0.52 (Ipswich City Council and City of Casey) to \$20.91 (Wingecarribee Shire Council). These compare to current Central Coast Council levels of support on a per population basis of \$3.75 [ranked 5 of 13].

**Table 2:** Comparison of different Local Government Area (LGA) Landcare programs with reference to total program budget per population basis.

Council	Environmental Volunteer Program Staff FTE	Environmental Volunteer Program Operating Budget 19/20 (not incl. staff costs)	Total Program Budget (19/20)* (Staff and Operating Budget Combined)	Population Basis	Total Program Budget per Population Basis (\$)	Total Program Budget per Population Basis (rank)
Wingecarribee Shire Council	5.5	\$180,000	\$1,000,193	47,822	\$20.91	1
Ku-ring-gai Council	3.8	\$450,000	\$1,016,679	123,000	\$8.27	2
Lake Macquarie City Council	7.69	\$440,000	\$1,586,779	204,914	\$7.74	3
Hornsby Shire Council	3.6	\$300,000	\$836,854	168,614	\$4.96	4
<b>Central Coast Council</b>	<b>5.6</b>	<b>\$418,205</b>	<b>\$1,253,314</b>	<b>333,627</b>	<b>\$3.76</b>	<b>5</b>
Mornington	1	\$263,000	\$412,126	154,999	\$2.66	6

### 3.1 Landcare Program Strategy (contd)

Council	Environmental Volunteer Program Staff FTE	Environmental Volunteer Program Operating Budget 19/20 (not incl. staff costs)	Total Program Budget (19/20)* (Staff and Operating Budget Combined)	Population Basis	Total Program Budget per Population Basis (\$)	Total Program Budget per Population Basis (rank)
Peninsula Shire						
City of Yarra (Vic)	1	\$80,000	\$229,126	86,657	\$2.64	7
Logan City (Qld)	3	\$300,000	\$747,378	319,652	\$2.34	8
Fairfield City Council	2	\$49,000	\$347,252	198,817	\$1.75	9
Wollongong City Council	2	\$53,287	\$351,539	203,630	\$1.73	10
City of Gold Coast (Qld)	1.3	\$530,000	\$723,864	540,559	\$1.34	11
City of Casey (Vic)	0.5	\$82,000	\$156,563	299,301	\$0.52	12
Ipswich City Council	0.6	\$15,000	\$104,476	200,000	\$0.52	13

On a per active volunteer basis, levels of support for volunteer programs ranged from \$723 (Wollongong City Council) to \$11,575 (Fairfield City Council). These compare to current Central Coast Council levels of support on a per volunteer basis of \$2088 [ranked 5 of 8].

**Table 3:** Comparison of different Local Government Area (LGA) Landcare programs with reference to total program budget per number of active volunteers within program.

Council	Environmental Volunteer Program Staff FTE	Environmental Volunteer Program Operating Budget 19/20 (not incl. staff costs)	Total Program Budget (19/20)* (Staff and Operating Budget Combined)	Number of Active Volunteers within Program	Total Program Budget per Active Volunteer (\$)	Total Program Budget per Active Volunteer (rank)
Fairfield City Council	2	\$49,000	\$347,252	30	\$11,575.07	1
Wingecarribee Shire Council	5.5	\$180,000	\$1,000,193	170	\$5,883.49	2
Logan City (Qld)	3	\$300,000	\$747,378	213	\$3,508.82	3
City of Gold Coast (Qld)	1.3	\$530,000	\$723,864	230	\$3,147.23	4
<b>Central Coast Council</b>	<b>5.6</b>	<b>\$418,205</b>	<b>\$1,253,314</b>	<b>600</b>	<b>\$2088.86</b>	<b>5</b>
City of Casey (Vic)	0.5	\$82,000	\$156,563	100	\$1565.63	6
Ipswich City Council	0.6	\$15,000	\$104,476	80	\$1,305.95	7
Wollongong City Council	2	\$53,287	\$351,539	486	\$723.33	8

\* Council's 'Natural Asset Volunteer Programs Team Management' budget for 5.6 FTE is \$835,109. For the purpose of making budget comparisons across different Council programs

### 3.1 Landcare Program Strategy (contd)

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*staff FTE's have been costed at an average of \$149,126 (based on the Central Coast Council average cost per FTE for staffing costs). Actual staff costings were not provided by any of the benchmarking Council's, only FTE equivalents.*

From nearby Council's with similar sized local government areas (i.e. Lake Macquarie, Hornsby and Ku-ring-gai) Central Coast Council ranked 4<sup>th</sup> out of the four Council's in regard to investment per capita in its Landcare Program.

The draft strategy recognised the preference for an additional staff member to allow the expansion of the program through supporting and increasing the number of volunteer groups. To address resolution 626/19, the funding required for each new FTE would be an additional \$212,500 of operating budget toward the annual program and an additional \$40,000 as a one-off capital purchase for each two required vehicles. The recommendation to increase the operational expenditure by \$134,125 is a first-year estimate allowing for recruitment and the establishment of a new FTE, anticipating that each new FTE would require time to establish themselves within the program and establish up to 5 new groups in their first year. In subsequent years, as they become fully established within the program and reach capacity, the ongoing increase in the operational budget would be up to \$212,500 per additional FTE.

Each additional FTE could support up to a maximum of an additional 20 volunteer groups within the program. It is noted however that the establishment of 20 additional groups may not happen immediately and simultaneously, they may become operational incrementally as new groups are identified and developed, new volunteers are inducted into the program, new sites are assessed and plans prepared for their management.

This additional staffing could also provide flexibility for the new and existing program staff to take on supporting roles to integrate their volunteer management with other natural reserve management directives. The Strategy prioritises the support of conservation, technical and short-term groups that support conservation activities on Council's priority natural reserves. Additional staff resourcing could also provide opportunities to integrate management of volunteer works on sites, for example supporting Technical aspects of volunteer management to increase the level of involvement of volunteers in seed collection and plant propagation, engagement of specialist contractors to support scientific surveys and data collection, advanced bush regeneration, and other aspects of natural reserve management in alignment with Council's natural reserve management objectives.

#### **Financial Impact**

If Council chooses to adopt the recommendation of expanding the program by recruiting additional staff, there will be a need to increase the Natural Asset Volunteer Programs Team Management budget by approximately \$108,000 for each additional FTE which in total for two additional FTE this would be \$216,000.

Within the current Landcare Program volunteer groups receive, on average, approximately \$5,225 per year in support. There are also additional program expenses dedicated to



### 3.1 Landcare Program Strategy (contd)

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supporting volunteers broadly within the program, for example through providing training and the annual volunteer Christmas party. Maintaining current levels of support for all volunteer groups within the program and extending this level of support to any new ones, would require an increase to the Environmental Programs budget of up to \$104,500 to support up to 20 new volunteer groups per new staff member.

In the first year of any new staff positions becoming active it is anticipated that each new position would establish 5 new groups (on average for whole 12-month period) whilst the new staff members and volunteer groups are becoming established within the program. The initial annual costs associated with the support of these groups would be \$26,125 per additional FTE.

This means, in year 1 of the program, the additional operating costs for Council are expected to be \$134,125 for each additional FTE.

An additional \$40,000 would be required as a one-off capital purchase for each new FTE to provide them with a vehicle in order to carry out their support to volunteer groups working in the field.

#### **Link to Community Strategic Plan**

Theme 3: Green

#### **Goal E: Environmental resources for the future**

G-E1: Educate the community on the value and importance of natural areas and biodiversity, and encourage community involvement in caring for our natural environment.

#### **Attachments**

<b>1</b>	CCC Environmental Volunteer Program Strategy	Provided Under Separate Cover	D13811599
<b>2</b>	Landcare Program Volunteer Survey Summary	Provided Under Separate Cover	D13944796