

Case Study: Sustainability - Serving the Community of Today Whilst Preparing for the Challenges of Tomorrow

COUNCIL NAME

Ballina Shire Council

WEB ADDRESS

[www.ballina.nsw.gov.
au](http://www.ballina.nsw.gov.au)

SIZE

484 square kilometres

POPULATION

41,828

Overview

Ballina Shire Council is a regional Council on the Far North Coast. As a coastal council in an area experiencing ongoing population growth, Council is continuously managing the balance between environmental, social and economic outcomes. Council's approach is to foster a culture of integrated environmental outcomes across Council.

Council's approach to environmental programs is directed by its Community Strategic Plan (CSP), Delivery Program and Operational Plan as well as an Environmental Action Plan (EAP). The EAP is a living umbrella document under which Council coordinates and records the environmental programs and outcomes being delivered.

Background

The Environmental Action Plan was developed to provide a central register that recognises the collective efforts of staff who work to ensure a better environmental outcomes every day at Ballina Shire Council. These outcomes are not always appreciated as an obvious environmental contribution and the EAP fosters a teamwork approach and mutual appreciation of the efforts made to improve our natural environment.

Overall, the rationale for the approach taken by Ballina Shire Council is to manage its responsibilities across the board as efficiently as possible, as well as fostering individual responsibility and sharing in the delivery of environmental outcomes across groups, staff and resources.

The programs detailed within the EAP are included at a strategic level within Council's CSP and in more detail in the Operational and Delivery Plans. Many of the programs also relate to regional partnerships such as those fostered by the Regional Organisation of Councils, Richmond River County Council, and those developed by councils on their own initiative. Work also occurs within the Shire through individual work programs which are contributing to a collective environmental outcome.

The relevant overarching objectives in our Community Strategic Plan are listed below. The overall objectives provide the framework for all of Council's activities.

- Healthy Environments 1 - We understand the environment.
- Healthy Environments 2 - We use our resources wisely.
- Healthy Environments 3 - Our built environment blends with the natural and cultural environment.
- A Connected Community 2 - We feel connected to the community.
- Engaged Leadership 1 - Our Council works with the community.

Implementation

Council has taken a conscious decision to work in a few focused areas which give environmental benefits. Projects are identified across a variety of work areas (e.g. water management, biodiversity, rural land management, estuary and water quality management) and implemented using integrated teams.

Council often partners with NGOs and in 2015/2016 ran a community partnership on the Koala Friendly and Farmer Friendly Windbreaks project, on riparian plantings for fish habitat, and on a stormwater improvement project in the Northlakes area, as well as the usual Lennox Headland community planting days and ongoing support for Landcare.

Council uses its quarterly magazine (Community Connect) to raise and maintain environmental awareness in the Shire, including explanation of specific environmental projects. This is really important in a regional area where roads and rubbish are traditionally core concerns for the community. Recent community surveys have provided extremely positive feedback about the range of activities covered by Council whilst maintaining its more traditional responsibilities. The success of this approach can be partly illustrated by the landholder (including farmer) support received for its Koala Management Strategy.

Quarterly reporting against work programs focuses targets in relation to Council's Operational Plan. The Operational Plan process provides successive targets for reporting to councillors, senior managers and the community.

The team approach provides benefits in connected communication. For example, the Chickiba Creek project worked with the neighbours to inform them of the upcoming works, included local fisherman in the audience for information, as well as the NGO WetlandCare. This provides a window into a number of different communities and how they work together.

Budget wise, Council undertakes its environmental programs through a mixture of seed funding, grant funds and project specific funds, with an overarching objective of using existing program resources wisely and constructively to add or integrate positive environmental outcomes.

Outcomes

Some achievements from 2015/16 include:-

- Adoption of the Ballina Shire Koala Management Strategy by Council.
- Gazettal of the Coastal Zone Management Plan
- Planting of 3700 trees for koala habitat, and 750 trees for a Koala and Farmer Friendly Windbreak Trial
- Supporting over 3000 hours of Landcare work in coastal habitat, and 1200 hours for inland riparian habitat
- Community partnerships to improve stormwater outcomes in two locations
- Delivery of recycled water to 160 homes in Lennox Head. We are now achieving re-use of 35% of dry weather flows (175% of our target)
- Ballina Major Regional Centre Strategy adopted - environmental themes include river health, climate change and alternative transport
- Over 74% of waste was diverted from landfill
- Asbestos Management Strategy adopted by Council

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- Every vehicle is reviewed for environmental performance before purchase, which has so far resulted in an average green star rating for passenger vehicles of 3.91 and 2.66 for light plant vehicles.
 - Smart devices utilised in 'triage' decisions for work crews during storm clean-ups, saving up to 75% of paperwork
 - A draft Ballina Bike Plan has been developed

Key Learnings

Council is constantly learning, and 'checking in' with the community to gauge its success. Managing the public face of a project is always challenging, yet Council works hard to ensure its community is as informed as possible and equally that community members are able to provide informed feedback. The success of a project sometimes needs to be considered over a slightly longer timeframe to ensure the full picture is available.

Another key challenge is avoiding the situation where positive action occurs only where a staff member has a personal interest in that outcome. Teamwork has proved the key whilst keeping the interest of those key committed people and providing support to them. This is a lesson that Council is still learning.

Council's Environmental Action Plan, apart from achieving environmental outcomes, has been a mechanism to recognise and encourage staff. The EAP has been an important step in the process of moving us onward both in an environmental and teamwork sense.

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This project was the 2016 winner of the Local Sustainability Award at the LGNSW Excellence in the Environment Awards



[Lennox Headland Planting Days – Students of Lennox Head Public School; Local Real Estate Agents.](#)