

What are Local Government's roles and responsibilities in relation to NRM?



Photo courtesy of Dubbo City Council

All local councils in NSW, irrespective of their size or location, either make, or are in a position to make, a significant contribution to the management and protection of natural resources.

As the sphere of government closest to the community, local government is responsible for good governance and the care and protection of local communities and their environment within a framework of sustainable development. The principles of Ecologically Sustainable Development (ESD) are enshrined in the *Local Government Act* 1993 under the Charter for local government.

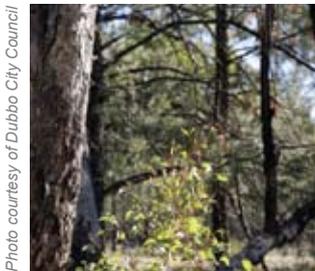


Photo courtesy of Dubbo City Council

Local government is responsible for undertaking, managing, supporting and regulating, a wide range of activities that may impact upon Natural Resource Management (NRM). This includes the development and implementation of land use planning schemes, managing public land, and regulating private activities. Local government also has a key role to play in translating the NRM policies of Commonwealth and State governments for local and on-ground projects. Other NRM functions include:

- **Strategic planning**
through land use zoning and statutory controls on all freehold land and locally managed public open space
- **Development control**
of nearly all activities and works on freehold land and crown land (except national parks and state forests) through development consent powers
- **Enforcement powers**
for development consent conditions, waste management and unauthorised land uses (e.g. land clearing, drainage, and filling)
- **Administrative responsibilities**
for state agency coordination through integrated planning, licensing and development concurrence
- **Stormwater management and control**
Sewerage and drainage works, and flood control
- **Risk control measures**
Pests, plant and animal
- **Incentive programs**
influence over land clearance patterns through incentive programs (planning amendments, rate differentials, levies, rural fire management and developer contributions)
- **Management of local open space**
To restore remnant vegetation and recreate habitat Co-ordinator of local community groups – as a primary advocate.



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The following table provides an example of NRM activities currently performed by councils around NSW:

Settlement or Land Use Strategies	A land use strategy provides direction for development assessment and decision making. It sets policy positions to land management objectives, which are implemented via the Local Environmental Plan (LEP), or other Council policies or advocacy, and is focused on economic and environmental sustainability. The development of land use strategies are guided by council responsibility under the <i>NSW Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979</i> (EP & A Act). An example is Dubbo City Council's Urban and Rural Area Development Strategy – http://www.dubbo.nsw.gov.au/PlanningandDevelopment/UrbanAndRuralStrategies.html
Local Environmental Plan, Environmental Protection Zones	A Local Environmental Plan is the principal legal document for controlling development at the council level. An example of how an LEP might be used to protect the local environment includes the use of "Environmental Protection Zones". The management objectives of these Zones are to protect the environment and development controls are used to meet these objectives. An example is Bega Shire Council's LEP Part 7 (Zone 7) which includes three Environmental Protection Zones: Environmental Protection Foreshore (Zone 7 b), Environmental Protection General (Zone 7 d), Coastal Lands Protection (Zone 7 f1), and Coastal Lands Acquisition (Zone 7 f2). For more information visit: http://www.begavalley.nsw.gov.au/Planning_Development/LEP2002/LEP2002.htm_
Strategic Plan – Corporate Planning	Cowra Shire Council has a <i>Futures 30 Strategic Plan</i> (2006 – 2036). Eight community groups have been formed to help implement the Plan, with one group for each strategic direction of the Plan. In particular, there is a group focusing on NRM. Strategic objectives in relation to the NRM group include: Make Cowra a centre of environmental excellence; Build partnerships with people who work with and care for the land to secure a healthy environment; and Promote practices to encourage Cowra to be an environmentally responsible community. Cowra Shire Council plays an <i>Advocate and Facilitator</i> role working with the local Catchment Management Authority, Environment and farmers' groups to meet these objectives. For more information visit: http://www.cowraregion.com.au/home/?id=2199
NRM Policy & Guidelines	Camden Shire Council won an LGSA Excellence in the Environment Award for Biodiversity Management in 2002-2003 for their Natural Assets Policy. The Policy seeks to achieve a balance between biodiversity conservation and development, both urban and agricultural. The Policy was designed to address the barriers to more effective Natural Resource Management at the local government level, limit complexity and establish a desired outcome for the Camden landscape. Countering complexity and establishing a desired outcome for the Camden landscape. For more information visit: http://www.camden.nsw.gov.au/page/natural_assets_policy.html#policy
Provisions/ Clauses in LEP/DCP	Local councils are increasingly incorporating water conservation principles (eg. water sensitive urban design) into their Local Environmental Plans (LEP). The benefits include obtaining the statutory power to enforce specific provisions contained in supporting planning instruments and policies (such as the WSUD component of a council's consolidated DCP). Botany Bay (and nearby coastal councils) in conjunction with the Sydney Metro CMA have been working to incorporate appropriate stormwater management/WSUD principles into their LEP. For more information visit: www.sydney.cma.nsw.gov.au/bbcc/WaterSensDesign.html
Conditions of Consent/	All approved developments are generally subject to Development Consent Conditions. Development Consent Conditions vary according to the land use zone involved and are established in consideration of the management objectives of the Zone. An example of development consent conditions used to protect the environment includes <i>Reg 26 Environmental Protection from the Dungog Local Environmental Plan 2006</i> – www.dungog.nsw.gov.au/planning/1825/1827.html

Roadside Vegetation Management Plan	<p>Lismore City Council has a Roadside Vegetation Management Plan which allows Council to protect environmental values associated with roadside vegetation while managing road assets. The Plan was prepared with an operational focus to guide routine roadside management activities such as slashing and side-arm mowing and the maintenance of roadside drainage and gravel roads.</p> <p>For more information visit: www.lismore.nsw.gov.au</p>
Plan of Management – Hyde Park Reserve	<p>Hyde Park is a Crown Reserve managed by Lithgow City Council. Unrestricted access, undefined use, and increased usage of the reserve resulted in massive erosion problems, habitat loss, and loss of Aboriginal artefacts. The development of a Plan of Management; community consultation; and an Archaeological Survey, have all allowed Council to appropriately manage the Reserve. For more information visit: david.durie@lithgow.nsw.gov.au</p>
Biodiversity Strategy	<p>Ku-ring-gai Council have adopted a Biodiversity Strategy with the key objectives of the Strategy to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevent loss of local native biodiversity on public and private lands by eliminating or ameliorating threatening processes • Protect, enhance and where appropriate increase local biodiversity on public and private lands • Protect and enhance aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems and habitats and connectivity between reserves • Increase awareness of biodiversity and its values within our community and Council <p>For more information visit: www.kmc.nsw.gov.au/resources/documents/Biodiversity_Strategy_May_2006_final_for_adoption1.pdf</p>
Biodiversity Conservation Program	<p>Randwick City Council manages nineteen (19) bushland reserves; supervises 20 bushcare and community parks groups; controls threats to biodiversity on public lands such as weeds and pest animals; and issues notices for the control of noxious weeds on private property. The recent preparation of a Biodiversity Conservation Strategy has assisted greatly in pulling the existing actions together and in enabling the commencement of new actions. The Biodiversity Conservation Program consists of smaller programs including data collection & monitoring, statutory protection measures, physical protection measures, community education, community participation, indigenous plant production, pest animal control, weed control, bush regeneration, & pollution control of stormwater. For more information visit: http://www.lgsa-plus.net.au/www/html/2723-award-winners-2007-2008.asp</p>
Tree Preservation Order	<p>Clearing vegetation is one of the major pressures on terrestrial ecosystems. In December 2005, the responsibility for the regulation of vegetation clearing in rural areas was transferred from local government to the Catchments Management Authorities. Councils still control vegetation in urban areas, mainly through the use of Tree Preservation Orders. A Tree Preservation Order is a piece of legislation Council can enforce for the protection of tree's – ultimately trying to protect the environment. Under a TPO residents must obtain a permit to cut, lop, prune or remove a tree that is more than 3 metres in height. A TPO is often supported by a Council Street Tree Strategy and community Tree Planting Days. Councils with TPO include: North Sydney Council (www.northsydney.nsw.gov.au/www/html/2196-tree-preservation-order.asp), and in regional NSW Conargo, Corowa and Deniliquin Shire Councils.</p>
Invasive Species Control	<p>Port Stephens Council's <i>Integrated Weed Management</i> project at Windeyers Creek (Raymond Terrace, NSW) demonstrates that the sequential application of different aquatic weed management techniques is more effective for controlling Alligator Weed (<i>Alternanthera philoxeroides</i>) than repeating individual techniques. Alligator Weed biomass has been reduced by greater than 95% in one growing season (summer 2006-07) and the creek, once choked with Alligator Weed and prone to frequent flooding, is flowing again. This represents the most successful large scale Alligator Weed control program in Port Stephens Council to date.</p>

Rehabilitation and restoration	Clarence Valley Council's project <i>Returning the Tides to Poverty Creek</i> aimed to return natural tidal exchange and fish passage to Poverty Creek, a natural coastal floodplain creek and wetland system fringed by mangroves and other healthy riparian vegetation. Poverty Creek (in northern NSW) was originally a fully tidal creek system and is recognised by the Clarence fishing industry as once being a major fish habitat area. It was blocked off from the Clarence River by an earth block and floodgate during flood mitigation works in the 1960s. This resulted in reduced passage for fish and other aquatic fauna, occasional fish kills, poor water quality and frequent algal blooms. A Management Plan for the creek system was prepared and the project has resulted in increased tidal exchange, improved water quality, fish and waterbird habitat, and better control of introduced aquatic weeds.
Water Quality Monitoring	16 councils within the Central West catchment area have established a <i>Central West Salinity and Water Quality Alliance</i> . The Alliance identifies strategic actions across the catchment that will not only meet targets identified in the Central West Catchment Action Plan but will help to maximum the NRM outcome of resources invested. The Alliance conducts Water Quality Monitoring, Vegetation Monitoring, and Regional State of the Environment Reporting. For more information visit: http://cw.cma.nsw.gov.au/
Stormwater Management and Control	Councils within the Northern Rivers catchment area have developed a <i>Development Design and Construction Manual</i> providing uniform development standards for the region derived from the Aus-spec Development Specification series. Both the community and the development industry now have clear instruction for development infrastructure requirements throughout the Northern Rivers area. This Manual includes requirements for erosion control and stormwater management. For more information visit: http://www.lismore.nsw.gov.au/cmst/lcc002/lp.asp?cat=240
Tree Planting Scheme	Conargo Shire Council provide native, locally propogated trees at a reduced price of 50 cents per tree to encourage landholders to plant more trees on their properties. The scheme has been very successful in the past and well supported by community.
Community Support: Landcare	Landcare groups are typically a group of neighbours with a common interest in managing or maintaining some part of the environment around their home. Groups may do a range of activities from removing weeds from a local patch of bush, revegetating degraded bushland areas, through to stabilising the coast, lake foreshore or river banks. Most groups meet on a semi-regular basis, which is determined by the level of interest in the group. <i>Lake Macquarie City Council</i> plays an important role in supporting Urban Landcare in their local government area. Council hosts a Landcare Coordinator position and also supports, in partnership with the state government, corporate sector and the local Landcare community, a local Landcare Resource Office. For more information visit: http://www.lakemac.com.au/page.aspx?pid=617&vid=14
Community Education – Rural Living Handbook	Goulburn-Mulwaree Shire Council has produced a Rural Living Handbook (RLH) to assist rural landowners and managers within the LGA. The RLH is aimed at both new and long-term property owners and provides information on topics such as buying a property, natural resources and property management. It also provides locally relevant information such as flora & fauna lists, references and contacts. It is a response to the fact that “ <i>our environment is under pressure from our collective lifestyles. It is important that the community, landowners and all levels of Government pursue sustainable development so that the assets we possess are protected for the future</i> ”. For more information visit: http://www.goulburn.nsw.gov.au/environment/4724/4726.html