

Why and how can Councillors get involved in NRM?



Photo courtesy of Dubbo City Council



There are a number of excellent reasons for Councillors to become involved in Natural Resource Management (NRM). They include:

Increased community expectation

The NSW Department of Environment and Climate Change (DECC) social research survey *Who Cares About The Environment*, conducted every three years since 1994, found that the community demand for environmental protection continues to grow.

Healthy landscapes create healthy communities

The natural environment provides resources that are essential for good health and quality of life. Deterioration of water supply and/or productive soil in some rural areas has seen communities decline.

Effective NRM creates special places to live, work & play

Having a clean and healthy environment in which to live is supported by all Australians. In our increasingly busy lives, quality recreational time is extremely important and access to healthy, natural areas is sought after.

It's great for the local economy

Effective NRM can generate significant positive economic benefits for local communities, particularly in relation to more productive soil and waterways, and greater opportunities to attract tourists.

Council needs to set the example

The community looks to council for leadership in the decisions they make. It is difficult to motivate other land owners, for example farmers and businesses, to commit to and implement NRM programs if council is not being seen to play their part.

Legal responsibility – It's the law!

Councillors need to be aware of the laws which bind Council to certain actions (e.g. consideration of development applications under *Environmental Protection & Assessment Act 1979*, consideration of ESD in accordance with the Councils Charter in the *Local Government Act 1993*) and other laws that Council is charged with implementing in relation to NRM. See Factsheet 6 for more information.



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What role can you play as a Councillor?

It is important not to underestimate the influence that one motivated Councillor can have by using the tools and resources at their disposal.

You can review and influence strategic direction

One of the most important roles you can play is influencing strategic direction. Review your existing plans and supporting documents and ask yourself: 'Will they support our long term NRM goals?'

You can review land use planning decision support tools

Familiarise yourself with Council's Local Environment Plan (LEP) and Development Control Plans used to guide development decisions. Play a role in reviewing these decision support tools to ensure that they clearly state the intent of Council – especially in relation to NRM.

You can review appropriate policies and guidelines

Be informed about Council's current policy frameworks. Ensure council policies are current and in line with Council's strategic direction. Clear policies and guidelines encourage consistency and transparency. Policies are also essential for long term impact.

You can promote and investigate partnerships

The importance of Council working in partnership with other groups in the region should not be understated. Nowhere is this more the case than in natural resource management. Water from upstream affects water quality and quantity in your area, just as the water leaving your local government area affects those downstream. Weeds don't stop at administrative boundaries, nor do feral animals.

Seek funding and support

Seek funding and support, but make sure that core funding is allocated to the things Council considers a key direction. Major internal funding sources include allocations in Council's Management Plan, levies (for example, Stormwater levy), and special rates. External funding sources for councils include the Australian Government's 'Caring for our Country' program and the *New South Wales Environmental Trust* program. In addition, at a regional level, CMAs and Regional Organisation of Councils also have funding opportunities from time to time.

Don't forget the day to day stuff

It is equally important that you remember the day to day stuff!

- Get involved and support local "hands on" community projects
- Continue to talk to the community
- Encourage Council officers to nominate for awards – obtain recognition for Council's efforts
- Encourage and support council officers applying for grants