

Strategic Regional Priorities for the Hunter Joint Organisation Environment Division

Background

Hunter Councils, and now the Hunter Joint Organisation of Councils has been delivering regional environmental programs through the operations of the Environment Division (HCED) since 1996. The role of the Environment Division as identified by member Councils is to:

- Lead change, through evidence based research, information, programs and advocacy, to support member Councils to be environmental leaders in their local communities, the region and NSW.
- Facilitate collaborative and cost-effective research, planning and management initiatives to enhance the local and regional environment
- Build the capacity of Councils to continue to design, deliver and embed innovation and environmental sustainability into their business operations and strategic plans.

Since its establishment the Division has procured more than \$20 million in funding to the region to resource a wide range of regional environmental programs. These have been delivered in close collaboration with the 10 HJOC member Councils, Central Coast Council, State and Commonwealth Government agencies, Universities, industry groups and community organisations. Key delivery areas include:

- Regional biodiversity assessment, mapping and conservation planning
- Waste Management
- Water management (stormwater management / Water Sensitive Urban Design)
- Contaminated Land Management
- Urban and Corporate (Council) Sustainability
- Environmental Compliance (standards, systems and practices)
- Climate Change Research, Risk Assessment and Adaptation Planning
- Disaster Resilience Planning
- Environmental Education

Strategic Regional Priorities

With the recent establishment of the Hunter Joint Organisation of Councils, the Environment Division has engaged staff across all HCED member Councils, to identify strategic regional environmental priorities, Councils seek support from the HJOC to deliver over the next four-year period (i.e. 2018-22). This process included a particular emphasis on more closely integrating the goals and directions identified within the Integrated Planning and Reporting Frameworks and strategies of member Councils with the future directions and activities of the Environment Division.

The process for identifying strategic regional priorities included:

1. Review of member Council Community Strategic Plans and Delivery Programs, and State Government Regional Planning Strategies
2. Identification of key planning / delivery themes and program focus areas to guide the direction of regional environmental programs
3. Establishment of a strategic goal and objectives for each planning / delivery theme
4. Consultation workshops with all member Councils to review the status and directions of current and draft Council Delivery Programs and Operational Plans (in relation to draft planning / delivery themes and focus areas), and to confirm opportunities for the HJOC to support Councils in the delivery of these.
5. Drafting of strategic priorities for each regional focus area

6. Combined Strategic Planning Workshop with Council Planning and Environment Directors to refine and endorse regional priorities

Regional Environmental Planning / Delivery Themes and Focus Areas for the Hunter Joint Organisation of Councils

The consultation process with Councils identified 4 broad environmental themes to categorise the program activities of HCED.

Natural Systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coasts and Catchment Health • Water Sensitive Urban Design • Roadside Management • Biodiversity and Threatened Species • Biodiversity Reforms • Restoration and Rehabilitation works
Environmental Resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contaminated Land • Disaster Resilience • Climate Adaptation • Land, water, air and noise pollution • Biosecurity and Pest Species Management
Liveable Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ecologically Sustainable buildings, facilities and infrastructure • Renewables • Energy Efficiency/Resilience • Resource Extraction • Sustainable Agricultural lands and production • Urban Forests • Cultural Heritage
Resource Recovery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Waste Reduction • Recycling • Diversion from Landfill • Problem Wastes • Litter • Illegal Dumping • Infrastructure and Planning

It was identified that HCED is currently only resourced to deliver a small portion of the projects that Councils identified as beneficial to their activities and communities. The HCED team will continue to seek grant funding to activate new project activities, but Councils also acknowledged that there may be opportunity for them to directly fund activities to enable work to start immediately, as opposed to waiting until a suitable grant program commences. This direct funding model was utilised to undertake the Contaminated land project activities with great success and relatively small investment from Councils (much less than would have been required if a Council was to undertake the work independently).

Strategic goal and objectives for each planning / delivery theme

The following table provides details of the Goals and Objectives of each of the 4 thematic areas of the Environment Division.

Natural Systems

Strategic Goal:

Protect, maintain and improve the health, quality and condition of the region's natural systems.

Objectives:

1. Plan and coordinate collaborative, landscape scale approaches to management of the region's rich and diverse natural systems to:
 - Address threats to the natural environment
 - Protect, maintain and improve the health, quality and condition of catchments, rivers, wetlands and coastal environments
 - Protect and improve the condition and connectivity of natural areas
 - Conserve and rehabilitate high value terrestrial and aquatic biodiversity, threatened species and communities
2. Improve professional and community awareness of the benefits of the region's natural systems
3. Improve professional and community knowledge and capacity to protect and manage natural systems across the region.

Environmental Resilience

Strategic Goal:

The region's communities are prepared and resilient to environmental hazards.

Objectives

1. Through a risk based management approach, Councils and their communities are prepared and resilient to the hazards posed by a changing climate
2. Councils and their communities are well prepared for changes in the frequency and intensity of natural disasters
3. The community is well informed of projected hazards arising from a changing climate, and engaged in collaboratively identifying and implementing appropriate adaptation responses
4. Land, water, air and noise pollution and contamination is actively prevented or managed to ensure the health, safety and wellbeing of the community and natural environment
5. The risks posed by the long term and cumulative impacts of resource extraction are identified and managed to ensure the health, safety and wellbeing of the region's community and natural environment.

Liveable Communities

Strategic Goal:

Sustainable, healthy and engaged communities.

Objectives

1. Maximise economic, environmental and community health and wellbeing of the region's communities through:
 - Environmentally sustainable and climate resilient buildings, assets and facilities
 - Public places that provide for recreation, social connection, health, happiness and wellbeing
 - Protected and enhanced environmental and rural amenity
 - Well-connected and convenient transport options where walking, cycling and public transport are viable options for the majority of trips
 - The efficient use of water, energy and other resources
2. Protect and enhance the region's agricultural productivity by identifying and protecting highly productive agricultural land and encouraging sustainable agricultural practices
3. Support the region to transition to renewable energy and reduce carbon emissions
4. Support the region's Councils achieve maximum energy and water efficiency and reduced carbon emissions across their operations
5. A community that is actively engaged in environmental stewardship activities.

Resource Recovery

Strategic Goal:

To implement an evolving, adaptive and sustainable waste management system for the Hunter / Central Coast Region that uses resources more efficiently to benefit the whole community.

Objectives

1. Improve waste avoidance and waste reduction
2. Increase recycling
3. Divert waste from landfill
4. Manage problem household wastes
5. Reduce litter
6. Minimise the impacts of illegal dumping
7. Improve governance and lead by example.
8. Best practice management of new and existing services and facilities to optimise long term efficiency and capacity of waste management services and infrastructure
9. Land Use Planning integrates best practice resource recovery principles

Regional Strategic Environmental Priorities

The following table provides details of the Regional Strategic Priorities as identified by the HCED Directors Forum.

Theme: Natural Systems	
Focus Area: Coasts and Catchment Health	Resourcing Status
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Review and synthesise existing water quality monitoring being undertaken in the region and its purpose and application2. Design and implement an integrated (cross council/agency) water quality monitoring program that directly evaluates and informs catchment planning and management	Not resourced – limited opportunity to attract grant funding
Focus Area: Water Sensitive Urban Design (WSUD)	Resourcing Status
<ol style="list-style-type: none">3. Develop regional capacity building programs to enhance ability of Councils and industry to design and implement WSUD across functional areas4. Undertake research to identify water quality and hydrological needs of receiving waters to inform WSUD design approaches5. Undertake research to identify Hunter specific modelling parameters for rainfall and intensity data	Not resourced Potential to deliver training on a cost recovery basis (i.e. charging Councils to participate) Potential to re-establish a Community of Practice to progress the issue
Focus Area: Roadside Management	Resourcing Status
<ol style="list-style-type: none">6. Support councils to integrate roadside environmental assessment and management within their IP&R frameworks7. Review and update tools and resources on roadside management to reflect current legislative environment	Funded. Targeted project involving Upper Hunter, Muswellbrook and Port Stephens Council grant funded until March 2019
<ol style="list-style-type: none">8. Deliver regular training on roadside environmental assessment and management9. Continue to support councils to expand, deliver and monitor effectiveness of regional roadside marker scheme10. Support councils to identify and deliver on ground works to restore and protect roadside environmental values11. Identify regional conservation priorities located in or adjacent to roadside reserves	Not resourced & limited opportunity to attract grant funding. Potential to be resourced by Councils through collaborative funding model.

Focus Area: Biodiversity and Threatened Species	Resourcing Status
12. Establish a Regional Biodiversity Geographic Information System framework	Not resourced & limited opportunity to attract grant funding. Potential to be resourced by Councils through collaborative funding model.
13. Assist councils develop local scale Plans of Management for newly acquired crown lands	Not resourced & limited opportunity to attract grant funding. Potential to be delivered on a fee for service basis
14. Development of a Regional Biodiversity Investment and Conservation Strategy	Not resourced. Potential to seek funding from NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust
15. Advocate for accurate waterways mapping for use within the biodiversity conservation GIS framework	Resourced
16. Engage with stakeholders to establish a regional data hub within the Hunter Joint Organisation of Councils Environment Division 17. Develop a natural assets valuation framework that enables integration into existing asset management planning systems	Not resourced & limited opportunity to attract grant funding. Potential to be resourced by Councils through collaborative funding model
18. Facilitate a regional approach to the conservation and management of Flying Foxes	Resourced to deliver initial community and Council staff education initiative. Potential to attract grant funding / government / Council contributions to expand further
19. Development of a Regional Biodiversity Offsets Policy	Resourced to deliver through Regional Biodiversity Support Program
20. Establish a Community of Practice for Environmental Assessment processes applicable to council owned lands and operations	Not resourced & limited opportunity to attract grant funding. Potential to be resourced by Councils through collaborative funding model.
Focus Area: Biodiversity Reforms	Resourcing Status
21. Continue delivery of biodiversity support officer role until July 2019	
22. Develop support materials that will facilitate regional consistency in management of land clearing below the NSW offsets scheme thresholds.	Resourced until July 2019

Focus Area: Restoration and Rehabilitation works	Resourcing Status
<p>23. Proactively engage stakeholders to deliver targeted conservation and rehab works that protect and enhance regional priority areas</p>	<p>A limited number of projects currently resourced through grant funding. Potential may exist to secure funding through NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust.</p>

Theme: Environmental Resilience

Focus Area: Contaminated Land	Resourcing Status
<p>24. Provide ongoing technical and project specific support to Councils through a Regional Contaminated Land Program</p>	
<p>25. Support Councils to develop and maintain a local Contaminated Land Information System</p>	
<p>26. Assist Councils embed tools and resources into corporate systems that supports their role as the Regulatory Authority</p>	<p>Regional Contaminated Land Program and Technical Specialist Program currently funded by Councils through collaborative funding model.</p>
<p>27. Support Councils to identify, assess and prioritise management of Contamination on Council owned Land</p>	<p>Recommended to extend existing collaborative funding model until June 2020.</p>
<p>28. Support councils transition to their new role as regulator of the Underground Petroleum Storage System (UPSS) Regulation (commencing August 2019)</p>	
<p>29. Support Councils to remain aware of and develop capacity for the management of emerging contaminants</p>	

Focus Area: Disaster Resilience	Resourcing Status
<p>30. Support Councils to strengthen local emergency management planning</p>	
<p>31. Support councils to develop organisational resilience (through embedding business continuity planning) to disaster events</p>	
<p>32. Support councils to plan and build the resilience and capacity of local and regional waste management services and facilities to disaster events</p>	
<p>33. Develop regional communication tools and resources to support Councils deliver consistent and coordinated information around disaster events</p>	<p>Limited activities (development of some guideline resources and training) currently resourced through grant funding. Potential for further program work to be funded through additional grants and/or direct investment by NSW Government.</p>
<p>34. Support Councils build corporate and community resilience to natural disasters by improving data and risk modelling that identifies vulnerable communities and infrastructure</p>	

35. Support Councils to build local community capacity and capability to withstand and recover from disaster events

36. Support Councils to identify and implement recovery mechanisms to effectively support local communities recover from disaster events

37. Develop regional guidance resources to assist Councils understand the roles and responsibilities of agencies and other stakeholder organisations in relation to natural disaster events

Currently resourced (grant funding)

Focus Area: Climate Adaptation

Resourcing Status

38. Review and update Regional Coastal and Rural Councils Climate Change Risk Assessment and Adaptation Plans to identify regional adaptation priorities for Councils

39. Build capability of councils to apply the “Decision Support Tool for Coastal Adaptation: The Handbook” to identify management options (including long term adaptation pathways), in vulnerable coastal/estuarine areas

Not resourced & limited opportunity to attract grant funding. Potential to be resourced by Councils through collaborative funding model.

Focus Area: Biosecurity and Pest Species Management

Resourcing Status

40. Develop appropriate resources to assist councils better undertake their responsibilities in relation to biosecurity

Not resourced. Program responsibilities primarily lie with other regional organisations including Hunter Local Land Services.

Focus Area: Land, water, air and noise pollution

Resourcing Status

41. Support Councils in the delivery of pollution programs as required

Not resourced & limited opportunity to attract grant funding.

Theme: Liveable Communities

Focus Area: Ecologically Sustainable buildings, facilities and infrastructure

Resourcing Status

42. Develop regionally consistent approaches to land use planning that improves building sustainability

43. Regional collaboration on electric vehicle charging to ensure strategic spend of Council funds

Not resourced. Opportunity may arise to attract grant funding through the NSW Climate Change Fund scheduled to commence July 2018.

Focus Area: Renewables	Resourcing Status
44. Support Councils to attract innovative businesses to the region with a focus on energy technology	Not resourced. Opportunity may arise to attract grant funding through the NSW Climate Change Fund scheduled to commence July 2018.
45. Support Councils to identify, evaluate and deliver large scale renewable energy initiatives	
Focus Area: Energy Efficiency and Energy Resilience	Resourcing Status
46. Support Councils to establish consistent and accurate emissions baseline data	Not resourced. Opportunity may arise to attract grant funding through the NSW Climate Change Fund scheduled to commence July 2018.
47. Monitoring and analysis of energy measures and their effectiveness	
48. Support Councils to develop the business case for energy efficiency and renewable energy initiatives	
49. Develop a regional community engagement plan for emissions reduction and increase the uptake of renewable energy technology	
50. Support Councils to embed emissions/energy efficiency into capital works/asset projects	
Focus Area: Resource Extraction	Resourcing Status
51. Undertake advocacy to ensure lands dedicated to council at end of mining leases are accompanied by adequate resourcing	Not resourced & limited opportunity to attract grant funding. Potential to be resourced by Councils through collaborative funding model.
52. Develop support resources for councils to implement conditions and undertake compliance activities for revegetation on mine sites under their regulatory approval	
53. Provide support to Councils involved in the synoptic plan process	
54. Provide JO board with advocacy position on minimum level of consultation required with Councils for mining proposals	
Focus Area: Sustainable Agricultural lands and production	Resourcing Status
55. Undertake research and develop information resources on transferrable land activities arising from Climate Change impacts	Not resourced & limited opportunity to attract grant funding. Potential to be resourced by Councils through collaborative funding model.
56. Research regional infrastructure needs to support ongoing and future agricultural activities in the region	
57. Engage with Muswellbrook, Singleton and Upper Hunter Councils on use of biophysical agricultural lands map	
58. Develop resources for private land holders promoting sustainable agriculture that maintains appropriate access to conservation values	

59. Advocate for better consistent mapping and future export opportunities

Focus Area: Urban Forests	Resourcing Status
60. Regional capacity building to support councils develop urban forest programs	Not resourced & limited opportunity to attract grant funding. Potential to be resourced by Councils through collaborative funding model.

Focus Area: Cultural Heritage	Resourcing Status
61. Provide support to Councils to transition to new requirements and systems arising from introduction of Cultural Heritage Act	Not resourced and no grant programs currently available.

Theme: Resource Recovery

Focus Area: Waste Reduction	Resourcing Status
62. Reduce the Generation of waste by supporting and enabling waste avoidance and reuse behaviours through community education, engagement and involvement	Resourced through Regional Waste Program (NSW Government grant funding) until June 2021

Focus Area: Recycling	Resourcing Status
63. Support ongoing advocacy for regulatory reform that will enable a recycling industry in NSW	Resourced through Regional Waste Program (NSW Government grant funding) until June 2021
64. Develop a business case for funding the construction of a recycling facility/system in the Hunter Region	
65. Support development of a circular economy for waste generated in the region	

Focus Area: Diversion from Landfill	Resourcing Status
66. Expand the diversion of all types of waste from landfill through education, alternative technology, efficiency gains and innovation	Resourced through Regional Waste Program (NSW Government grant funding) until June 2021
67. Advocate for a functional Container Deposit Scheme for NSW	

Focus Area: Problem Wastes	Resourcing Status
68. Ensure adequate community access to the regional network of facilities that accept and manage problem wastes	Resourced through Regional Waste Program (NSW Government grant funding) until June 2021

Focus Area: Litter	Resourcing Status
69. Minimise environmental social and economic impacts of littering through community education, enforcement, deterrents and installation of appropriate infrastructure	Resourced through Regional Waste Program (NSW Government grant funding) until June 2021

Focus Area: Illegal Dumping (ID)	Resourcing Status
70. Continued support for RID activities as per the Regional Waste Management Strategy	Resourced through Regional Waste Program (NSW Government grant funding) until June 2021
Focus Area: Infrastructure and Planning	Resourcing Status
71. Encourage best practice management by Councils of new and existing services and facilities	
72. Optimise the long-term efficiency and capacity of waste management infrastructure and services across the Hunter/Central Coast Councils	
73. Land use planning integrates best practice resource recovery principles	Resourced through Regional Waste Program (NSW Government grant funding) until June 2021
74. Review and develop model policy/DCPs that promote best practice resource recovery in new development	
75. Advocate for a clearer planning approval process for new facilities	