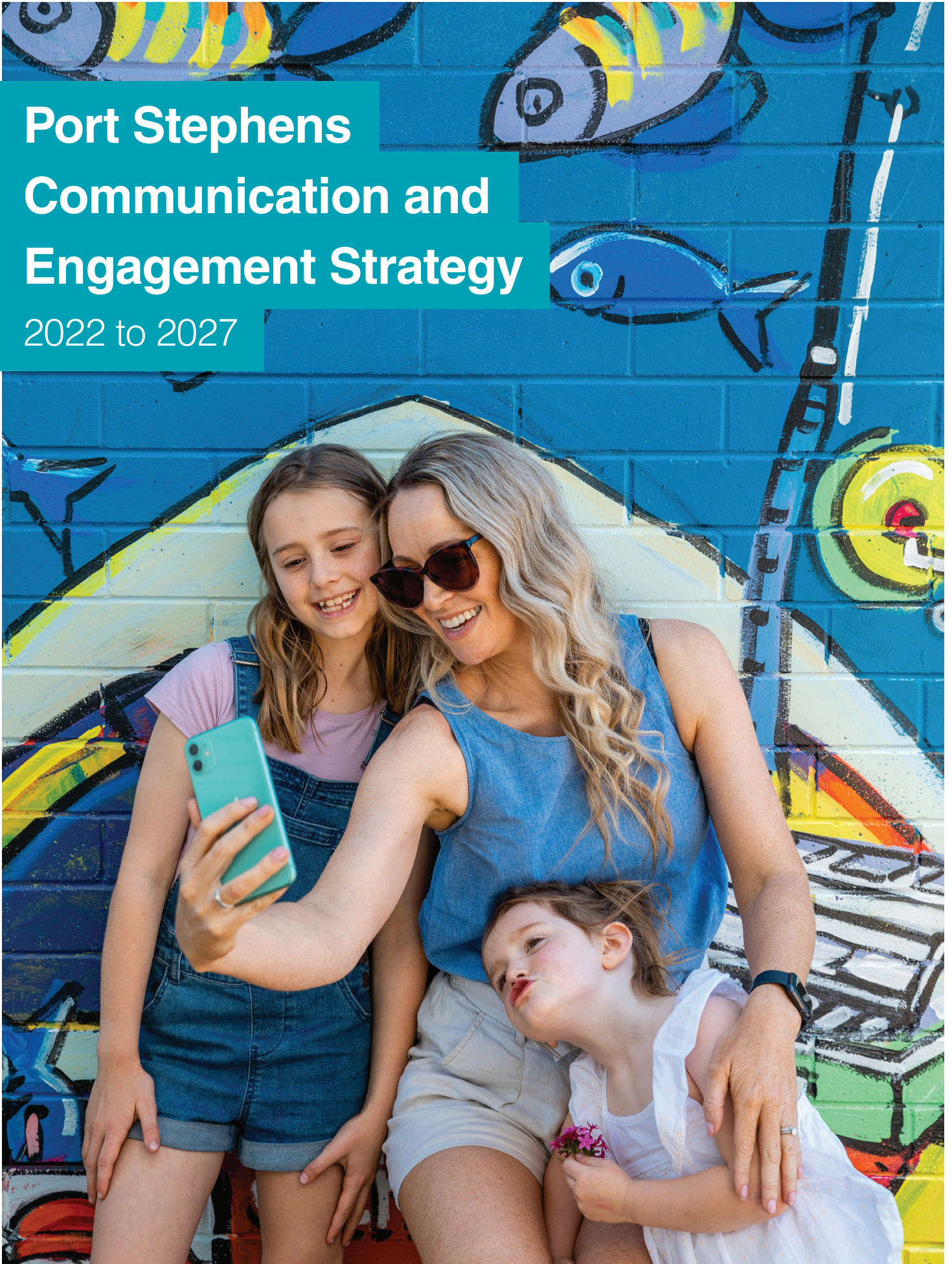# Port Stephens Communication and Engagement Strategy

2022 to 2027

Our vision is to actively communicate and engage in a way that tells our stories, listens to our community, informs our future and improves the wellbeing of those that live, work and visit in Port Stephens.
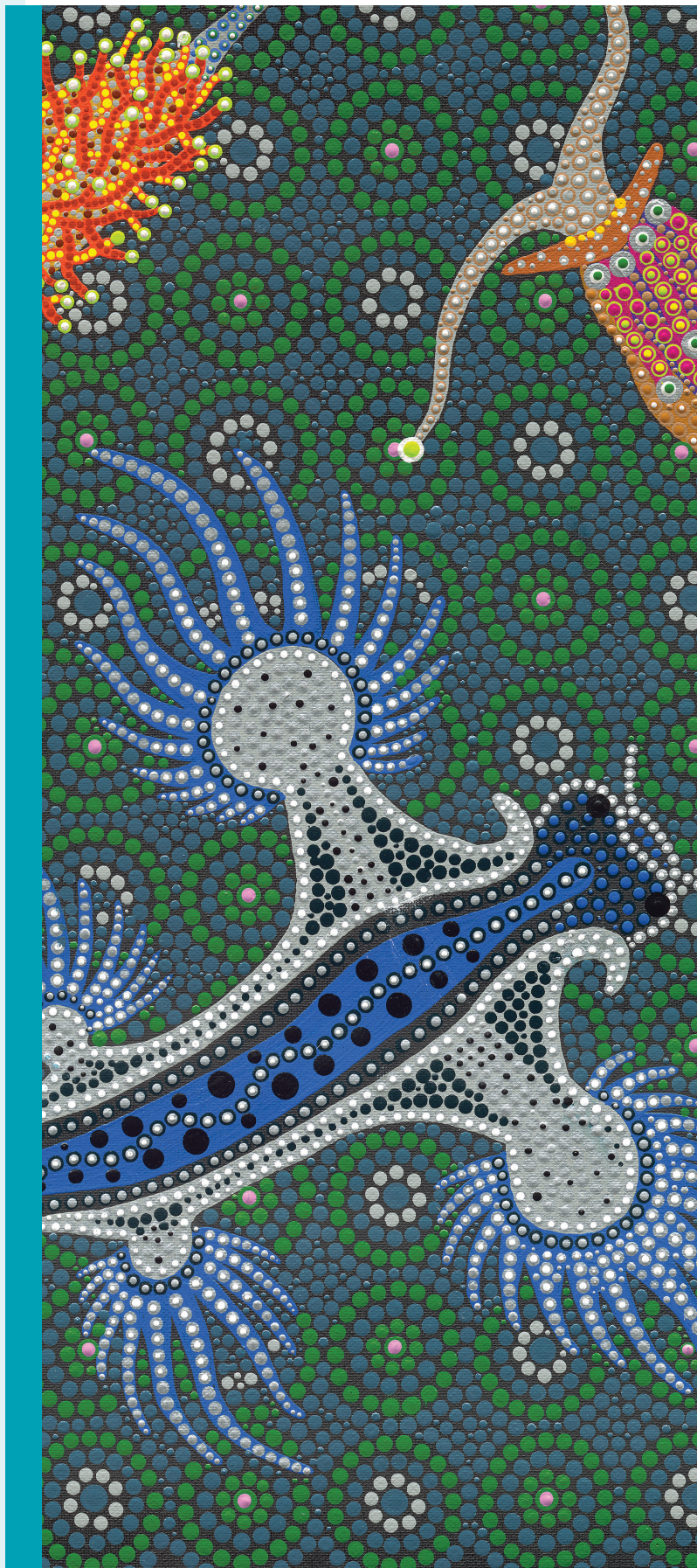
PORT STEPHENS
C O U N C I L

GUUDJI YIIGU

(GOO-JEE IK-KOO)

We welcome you to Port Stephens – part of the Worimi Aboriginal Nation. Port Stephens Council acknowledges the Worimi people as traditional owners and custodians of the lands and waterways on which we all live, learn, work and play.

We value and respect the Worimi people and the legacy 60,000 years of Aboriginal Nation traditions and culture brings with it. As part of Council's culture of acceptance, diversification and harmony we walk alongside the Worimi people on a journey of listening and learning.

Together we will strive to make this a better place for all peoples. As guardians of these lands, we ask that you tread lightly to help preserve the biodiversity and respect those who came before as well as those who will follow.

Artwork by Regan Lilley.

A message from the Mayor

Communication is key.

Council's communication is key to successfully engaging and involving our community in influencing the future of Port Stephens.

Our Communication and Engagement Strategy is a blueprint for successful and meaningful communication and engagement, reflecting our organisations commitment to genuinely involve and engage with the community we serve.

The Strategy will help create a consultative culture, embracing conversations where information is shared and feedback encouraged, nurturing a relationship built on transparency and trust. The Strategy reflects Council's commitment to inform and improve community awareness of programs, activities and services. More importantly it is about our commitment to listen and create open channels of communication for meaningful dialogue, idea generation and big thinking, to help shape our future direction.

Our communication and engagement needs to be clear, accessible and delivered effectively to meet the needs of a diverse society – enabling inclusiveness for all in our community.

Ryan Palmer
Mayor of Port Stephens

Strategy context

> " Strong communication in local government creates trust in its citizens. The hope is that this trust will inspire citizens to become involved in their communities.
>
> Diligent

Over the past few years, a fundamental shift has occurred in the approach to public sector communication and engagement. Our residents have increased expectation around access to information and a greater desire to engage in planning for their place.

We know that effective communication and engagement are directly linked to the liveability and wellbeing of our community. By listening to our community and providing genuine opportunities for engagement, we'll create a greater sense of community ownership and ultimately, improve the delivery of Council services that are aligned to community needs.

To achieve this, we'll deliver a genuinely integrated and inclusive approach to our engagement and communication. By bringing together our communication and engagement approach, we've already created a shift in thinking. Through this Strategy, we'll continue to evolve this approach and build a culture that celebrates our stories and informs the future of Port Stephens.

The Port Stephens Communication and Engagement Strategy has been developed to provide a framework for the delivery of open and effective communication that actively shapes and influences the future of Port Stephens.

The Strategy responds to the legislative requirements of:

- NSW Government Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework including the Community Strategic Plan

- Local Government Act (1993) and

- Environmental Planning and Assessment Act (1979)

The Strategy also responds to the key priorities of the elected Councillors.

Community Participation Plan

Attached to this Strategy is our Community Participation Plan (CPP) which is an easy to use guide for the community to provide input into planning decisions when Council is the consent authority. It ensures we meet our statutory requirements for notification and exhibition.

> **Communications is how we connect with our stakeholders. It is sharing the right message at the right time to inform our community.**
>
> NSW Government, All-Of-Government Communications Framework

> **Community engagement is a planned process with the specific purpose of working across organisations, stakeholders and communities to shape the decisions or actions of the members of the community, stakeholders or organisation in relation to a problem, opportunity or outcome.**
>
> NSW Government, All-Of-Government Communications Framework

Who we are

Our community

More than 75,500 people call Port Stephens home and this is expected to grow to over 87,933 by 2040.

75,276 people

Median age of is 47 years
NSW median age is 36 years

6.5% of our population

Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islanders

79.6%

have internet access from a dwelling (2016)

80%+

Australian population own a smartphone*

40.1%

finished year 12

33.1%

finished year 10 or above

family

2 person families most common at 33.8%

70 to 79

Largest age range increase at 33.2%

60 to 69

Most common age range

7.3%

of people have a severe disability

That require assistance with core activities

23,026

not in workforce

15,928

work full time

10,007

work part time

Source: ABS 2021
* statista.com

What we've heard

> "
> **Longer periods to digest and respond to documents including Council agendas.**
>
> Community member

> "
> **Opportunities to Have Your Say are numerous but there is little opportunity to find out the result of the engagement or what other people think.**
>
> Community member

Our engagement

Between 2021 and October 2022, we've had a phased approach to listening to the community about how we deliver communication and engagement.

2187 responses
Community Satisfaction Survey 2021

97 participants
Community Strategic Plan Review

6 community groups
Stakeholder Group meetings

DATA GATHERING

9 attendees and 8 groups represented
Community Focus Group attendees

DEEP DIVE

40 responses
Online surveys completed

9 submissions
Received via email and post

6 community focus group
3 attendees and 6 groups represented

PUBLIC EXHIBITION

- Improve sharing of information and transparency
- Involve the community in engagement design
- Be clear about where and why Council is seeking feedback
- Use simple and easy to understand language
- Make sure there are multiple points where information can be accessed
- Make engagement opportunities easy and accessible
- Reach a wider demographic
- Have a more consistent approach to communication and engagement across projects and programs

- Use community groups as an interface between Council and community
- Have longer periods of time to allow for considered contributions
- Have ongoing community conversations rather than project by project engagement
- Listen when feedback is received
- Close the loop, connecting feedback with decisions
- Improve measuring and reporting to help build trust in Council

WHAT YOU'VE TOLD US

Our strategy

> " Stories of the importance of community engagement range from creating change in local policies and service provisions that not only enrich everyday lives and liveability of communities, but help shape and envision a community's future, bringing with it wider societal change.
>
> Bang The Table

As the closest level of government connected to the community, we have a key role in communicating and engaging with our local residents.

With over 55 individual business units across the organisation and almost 600 staff, we deliver a large number of services to our community. We're also the link between our community and other levels of government, advocating our community's priorities.

Over the past few years, we've worked hard to engage with and inform our community. However, we know from feedback that we can do better. We've listened and are committed to working closely with our community to act on this feedback, responding to their needs and priorities.

Our purpose and vision

Our purpose

To create a framework for the delivery of transparent and timely communications and meaningful community engagement that builds trust and community participation in decision making for our place.

Our vision

We actively communicate and engage in a way that shares our stories, listens to our community, informs our future, and improves the wellbeing of those that live, work and visit in Port Stephens.

Our principles

1 We deliver relevant, timely and easy to understand information

2 We're honest and transparent

3 We're inclusive and encourage a diversity of voices to be heard

4 We listen, value and respect community input and feedback

5 We embrace innovation and encourage new ideas

International Association of Public Participation

The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) developed an international framework for community engagement and is considered a best practice approach worldwide.

Levels of communication and engagement

	Inform (least impact on decision)	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower (most impact on decision)
Our goal (Council's)	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problems, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision-making and/or developed budgets in the hands of the public.
Our role (Council's)	We'll keep you informed.	We'll keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We'll work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We'll look to you for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We'll implement what you decide.
Your role (Community's)	Keep in touch. Follow Council on social media. Subscribe to regular newsletters and updates.	Contribute ideas and feedback. Respond to surveys. Make public submissions.	Actively participate in the workshops and engagement sessions. Share ideas concerns and aspirations.	Work together to develop solutions. Join committees.	Make decisions and work with Council to implement them.

Social Justice Principles

The NSW Government identifies 4 principles that establish supportive environments for everyone. These principles are the driving force to address barriers to communication and engagement experienced in our community and are therefore at the heart of our Strategy's principles and key objectives. We have a commitment to remove barriers, ensuring more equitable and inclusive communication and engagement.

Equity

Communication and engagement should include stakeholders including hard to reach groups who may have barriers to participation.

Access

All people should have fair access to communication and engagement opportunities.

Participation

All people should have the opportunity to participate in decisions that affect their lives.
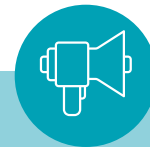
Rights

Communication and engagement opportunities ensure positive participation of linguistic, cultural and religious diverse communities.

Our stakeholders

We all have a role to play in shaping our places and there's roles for both Council and the community in initiating, leading, particpating in, and delivering engagement activities. It's vital that we identify and understand our stakeholders that are impacted by, or have an interest in a decision.

Our community

- Advisory committees
- Residents and ratepayers
- Local business and workers
- Interest groups
- Demographic groups
- Visitors to the area
- Community groups and organisations
- Government agencies
- Non-government agencies
- The Council
- The media

Methods of communication and engagement

We use a range of methods to communicate and engage with our community. We typically use a combination of methods to share information to ensure the greatest reach. Below are some of our common methods used across the IAP2 spectrum.

	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Communications					
Advertisements / public notices	✓				
Council events	✓				
E-newsletters	✓				
Emails and letters	✓				
Flyers, brochures, factsheets, posters, signs	✓				
Local Newspaper article	✓				
Media releases	✓				
On hold messages	✓				
Rates notice and inserts	✓				
Radio announcements	✓				
Social media	✓	✓			
Webinars	✓				
Community Engagement					
Advisory committees			✓	✓	✓
Council meetings	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Council website	✓	✓			
Focus group and workshops		✓	✓	✓	
Information and interactions with Council staff	✓	✓			
Drop-in / pop-up sessions		✓	✓		
Meetings with Council staff	✓	✓			
Public exhibition / submission		✓	✓		
Surveys / questionnaires / polls		✓			

Strategic priority 1

Community engagement

We will plan and deliver meaningful community engagement that enables community participation and builds trust in Council decision making.

Key objectives	Communication and Engagement Principles				
	1	2	3	4	5
Embed the principles of the International Association Public Participation (IAP2) into the organisational culture	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Implement a Communications and Engagement Advisory Group to provide input into how we will engage with stakeholders for major projects		✓	✓	✓	
Increase opportunities for the community to engage informally with Councillors and Executive		✓	✓	✓	
Design engagement opportunities that enable time for considered thought and contribution	✓		✓	✓	
Ensure engagement opportunities consider place, diversity and accessibility	✓		✓	✓	
Use technology to increase participation and increase the diversity of voice and opinion in engagement activities			✓		✓
Build on the use of social media as a tool for engagement and feedback			✓		✓
Report internally and externally on engagement outcomes, connecting community engagement and decision making	✓	✓		✓	
Improve stakeholder information management to ensure equitable representation across the community		✓	✓		
Deliver Council's Community Participation Plan (Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979)	✓	✓		✓	

Strategic priority 2

Community communication

We will deliver timely, creative and transparent internal and external communication that connect our stories, our people and our place.

Key objectives	Communication and Engagement Principles				
	1	2	3	4	5
Design communication that's easy to understand and accessible to all	✓	✓	✓		
Recognise our public website (portstephens.nsw.gov.au) as the core communication channel and continue to invest in its growth and improvement	✓	✓			✓
Develop a strong social media profile across a range of channels using audience profiles which encourage conversations and increase awareness of Council services	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Increase staff awareness and capacity to enable effective communication, engagement and promotion of council business	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Build Council's identity and brand through consistent visual communication	✓				
Maximise the use of live streaming and video across all communication channels			✓		✓
Use data to develop communication that is audience focused				✓	✓
Regularly benchmark and review internal and external communication platforms	✓				✓
Support elected members by keeping them informed so they can share information and increase awareness of council activities and services through community networks	✓	✓			
Measure, evaluate and report on all communication activities on a monthly basis	✓	✓			✓

Strategic priority 3

Media and public relations

We will build trust and reputation through proactive, consistent and trustworthy information that responds to issues and community priorities.

Key objectives	Communication and Engagement Principles				
	1	2	3	4	5
Build and maintain strong relationships with media to facilitate informed reporting	✓	✓			
Promote Port Stephens with positive and proactive media	✓	✓			
Work across the organisation to identify newsworthy stories	✓		✓		✓
Respond promptly to media enquiries to meet news deadlines	✓	✓			
Develop annual Community Advocacy Priorities and implement campaigns to drive awareness of key priorities	✓		✓	✓	
Build relationships with key decision makers in state and federal government to increase understanding of local issues			✓	✓	
Seek opportunities for elected representatives or Executive to speak at corporate, community and networking events		✓	✓		
Coordinate Council's emergency management communications	✓	✓			
Improve media record and information management	✓	✓			
Monitor, evaluate and report on all media and public relations activity on a monthly basis	✓	✓			✓

Measures of success

Measures of success

Continuous improvement is an integral part of improving our communication and engagement process. We'll monitor our communication and engagement activities for effectiveness against the principles and key objectives of this Strategy.

Some key considerations include:

- How effectively were barriers to engagement addressed?

- Did we reach people impacted by the project or people that are representative of our demograhic?

- Were the intended outcomes of the engagement process achieved?

- How well did we provide feedback to participants on the results of their contribution?

Our targets

Community Satisfaction Survey
49%+ of our community feel they can provide input into decision making
53%+ of our community are satisfied with their contact with Council

Port Stephens Liveability Score of 66+

1 million+ website visits

Have Your Say members increasing at 2.5% annually

Participation demographics accurately represent our community

Facebook followers increasing at 2.5% annually

Instagram followers increasing at 2.5% annually

LinkedIn followers increasing at 2.5% annually

e-newsletter subscribers increasing at 2.5% annually

30% of projects have an engagement level of 'involve' or above

80%+ employee engagement

Attachment 1

Community Participation Plan

Community Participation Plan

It's a statutory requirement for councils in NSW to prepare a Community Participation Plan (CPP) that is an easy to use guide for the community to provide input into planning decisions when Council is the consent authority.

How is community participation carried out

The CPP specifies requirements for notification and public exhibition. This can include:

- Giving written notice to neighbours, individual landowners or occupiers

- Advertising on Councils website

- Making documents publicly available online

Other methods are used to on a case by case basis, in line with statutory requirements.

If the exhibition period is due to close on a weekend or public holiday, it might be extended to finish on the first available work day. In accordance with the planning legislation, the period between 20 December and 10 January (inclusive) is excluded from the calculation of a period of public exhibition.

Plans or applications can't be made or determined until after the minimum period of public exhibition.

Making a submission

In addition to the requirements set out in the planning legislation, the submission should be:

- Received on or before the last day of the nominated timeframe for exhibition

- Made in writing (through the mail, email or hand delivered to Council)

- Contain the name and address (or email address) of the person making the submission

- Include the application number for reference (for development applications) or the name of the exhibited planning matter

- Include a statement of objection or support and reasons

Community participation requirements

Under the EP&A Act, the following minimum community participation requirements apply to local planning functions:

Table 1

Mandatory timeframes	Minimum community participation requirement
Division 1 — Schedule 1 to the EP&A Act	
Draft community participation plans	28 days
Draft local strategic planning statements	28 days
Planning proposals for local environmental plans subjects to a gateway determination	28 days or as specified by the Gateway Determination
Draft development control plans	28 days
Draft contributions plans	28 days
Division 2 — Schedule 1 to the EP&A Act	
Development Application for designated development	28 days
Environmental Impact Statement obtained under Division 5.1 (An Environmental Impact Statement prepared for certain development such as state significant development.)	28 days
Re-exhibition of any amended application or matter referred to above	The period (if any) determined by the person or body responsible for publicly exhibiting the application or matter.

Exhibition timeframes are measured in calendar days and include weekends.

Development applications

Table 2 outlines Council's minimum notification requirements for development applications. If there's an inconsistency between the notification requirements of this CPP and legislative requirements, the legislative requirements will prevail.

Table 2 – Community Participation Categories (Refer to Table 3 for details)

Exhibition types	
Type	**Requirements**
A	Not Notified Development Council may at its discretion decide to notify any of this type of development that may significantly impact on the amenity of adjoining land owners.
B	Advertised Development Written notification in accordance with 'type B' requirements and an advertisement published on Councils website. Development Application (DA) information published on DA Tracker. Additional advertisements may be placed in newspapers and/or through such other mechanisms as may be appropriate to ensure that the public is reasonably aware of the proposal. Council may also at its discretion decide not to advertise insignificant development.
Not included in Table 3	Notified Development A 14 day notification period will apply for development types not included in Appendix A. Written notification will be sent to all owners of land directly adjoining or opposite the development site. Additional owners and occupiers may be notified at the discretion of Council staff. Council may at its discretion decide not to notify development where impacts on adjoining land owners are considered minor in nature.

Modification applications

The need or otherwise to notify an application to modify a development consent will be undertaken in accordance with the requirements of the Act and Regulations or at the discretion of Council in consideration of the nature of the modifications proposed.

Table 3 – exhibition periods

Development category	Exhibition types	
	A	B
Rural development		
Agriculture	✓	
Farm buildings	✓	
Forestry		✓
Residential accommodation		
Dwelling — single storey	✓	
Residential ancillary (for example sheds, pools)	✓	
Rural worker's dwellings	✓	
Secondary dwellings	✓	

Development category	Exhibition types	
	A	B
Commercial development		
Home business / occupation	✓	
Entertainment facilities		✓
Function centres		✓
Sex services premises / home occupation (sex services)		✓
Restricted premises		✓
Community and entertainment facilities		
Places of public worship		✓
Recreation facility (major)		✓
Industrial development		
General industry	✓	
Industrial retail outlets	✓	
Industrial training facilities	✓	
Light industry	✓	
Storage premises	✓	
Warehouse or distribution centres	✓	
Freight transport facilities		✓

Development category	Exhibition types	
	A	B
Subdivision (all types of subdivision)		
Strata subdivision	✓	
More than 10 Torrens or Community title lots		✓
Tourist and visitor accommodation		
Caravan parks and camping grounds		✓

Development category	Exhibition types	
	A	B
Miscellaneous		
Boatshed	✓	✓
Electricity generating works	✓	✓
Environmental facilities / environmental protection works	✓	✓
Moorings / mooring pens	✓	✓
Signage — other than advertising structures	✓	✓
Extractive industries / open cut mines		✓
Air transport facility		✓
Airstrip		✓
Cemetery / crematorium / mortuaries		✓
Correction centre		✓
Helipad		✓
Marinas		✓
Passenger transport facilities		✓
Port facilities		✓

* Reasonable attempts must be made to notify a caravan parks or manufactured home estates Residents Committee, or equivalent where it is the subject of a new Development Application or S.4.55 modification application.