



PORT STEPHENS
COUNCIL

Six-month Progress Report July to December 2023





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 people. 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.

Acknowledgement

We acknowledge the Worimi as the original Custodians and inhabitants of Port Stephens. May we walk the road to tomorrow with mutual respect and admiration as we care for the beautiful land and waterways together.

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The six-month progress report from July to December 2023 has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Integrated Planning and Reporting Guidelines (September 2021) Essential Element 4.9. ‘The General Manager must ensure that progress reports are provided to the council, with respect to the principal activities detailed in the Delivery Program, at least every six months.’

All financial figures included in this report are preliminary, unaudited and subject to review as part of the audited 2023-2024 financial statements for Council.



General Manager's message

We're halfway through our Delivery Program for 2022 to 2026, with this being the third progress report of the period. I am proud to share the progress we have made over the past six months.

Delivering on our key priorities

The Delivery Program identified as a key priority the development of several plans and strategies. At its ordinary meeting in December 2023, Council endorsed the draft Community Wellbeing Strategy, the draft Shoal Bay Place Plan and reviewed the Carbon Neutral Action Plan Progress Report. We have progressed the Coastal Management Program to Stage 4, are reviewing the Port Stephens Local Housing Strategy and are continuing to build on our financial sustainability with a strong performance in non-rate revenue streams to start the 2023-2024 financial year.

Completing key projects

Over the last 6 months we've been able to complete a range of key projects across Port Stephens; shared pathways, roads, tables and accessible change rooms at the Little Beach Precinct; Avenue of the Allies, Tanilba Bay; Sturgeon Street Raymond Terrace pavement rehabilitation; the Port Stephens Drive Koala Road Strike Project; and the opening of the new Raymond Terrace Depot. We've also ticked off a major action from our Waste Management Strategy with the introduction of our Garden Organics bin system across Port Stephens.

Checking in with our community and employees

Our community members are key to all that we do at Council and we're committed to delivering outcomes that improve wellbeing of our residents. Every year, we check-in with our community through the Community Satisfaction Survey to see if we are on track.

Over September and October we heard from 880 community members, who rated their overall satisfaction with the performance of Council's services as a mean score of 2.94 out of 5, translating to 45% satisfied, 42% dissatisfied and 13% neutral.

Waste and Recycling rated the highest, with a mean score of 3.96 out of 5, understandable given the rollout of the Garden Organics system. We knew that roads was still our biggest area to work on with a mean score of 2.15 out of 5, which will be assisted greatly with \$10M in funding from the NSW Government for local road repairs planned to be delivered over the next 2 financial years.

We've also established a number of Advisory Groups to focus on matters of homelessness, heritage, environment, communications and engagement. In addition, we held the inaugural Port Stephens Housing Forum to explore ways we can work together to tackle the housing crisis across our community.

Another important measure that underpins what we do at Council is having a highly engaged workforce. I am pleased to announce that in 2023, our engagement score increased to 84%, our highest ever result.

Recognition of great work

The efforts of our passionate Koala Sanctuary employees was recognised at the NSW Tourism Awards when they won gold in the prestigious 'Tourism Attraction' category. This is well-deserved recognition for a unique and important attraction.

I want to acknowledge and thank our Mayor and Councillors for their commitment to our community and our teams for their dedication to delivering outcomes that matter. The highlights, stories and challenges provided below are only a small representation of the many services and projects delivered over July to December 2023.



Tim Crosdale
General Manager of Port Stephens Council



Our key highlights



For Our Elders

Celebrating NAIDOC
Week

28 It's On!

Event activations across
Port Stephens



17,000+
potholes
filled

2023 Community Satisfaction

Survey completed



Garden Organics

Green bin service
launched

Port Stephens Housing Forum

60+ participants



Koala Sanctuary Gold Award

Tourist attractions
NSW Tourism Awards

Foreshore Projects: Little Beach & Lemon Tree Passage

Substantially completed



Scorecard

Our six key result measures underpin everything we do at Port Stephens Council:



Service Delivery

Target: >95% Integrated Plans delivered on time
 Achievement: 100% on track
 (as at 31 December 2023)



Community Satisfaction

Target: new baseline to be established 2023-2024
 Achievement:



Overall satisfaction with Council's services:

- 45% satisfaction
- 2.94 out of 5 score

Average aggregate satisfaction with Council's core services:

- 46% satisfaction
- 3.12 out of 5 score



Employee Wellbeing

Target: >80% Employee Engagement
 Achievement: 84%
 (Source: 2023 Employee Engagement Survey)



Risk Management

Target: >85% Risk Management Maturity score
 Achievement: 86%
 (As at August 2023)



Financial Sustainability

Target: Underlying financial result better than budget
 Achievement: Anticipated \$1,030,000
 (As at December 2023 Quarterly Budget Review)



Asset Management

Target: 100% asset maintenance ratio
 Achievement: 105.58%
 (Source: 2022 to 2023 Annual Report)



ON TRACK: Operational Plan
 Actions are on track to achieve the target



MONITOR: Operational Plan
 Actions are within 5% of the target



OFF TRACK: Operational Plan
 Actions are > 5% off the target



Achievements – progress of principal activities

Key Priorities update

The community and Councillors identified several key priorities in the Delivery Program for 2022 to 2026. Learn more about these priorities in our [Delivery Program](#).

Community Advocacy Program

In 2023, we identified a number of community advocacy priorities, aligned to the NSW State Election. Since then, we've met with a number of State and Federal Ministers and staff to raise awareness around key issues impacting our local community. This includes: housing supply, affordability and diversity; integrated planning for the Williamstown Defence and Aviation precinct; the future of the Tomaree Hospital site; the Hunter Offshore Wind Zone; opportunities to support PFAS impacted landowners and; funding to support the upgrade of the Port Stephens road network.

Birubi Point Aboriginal Place Tourism Transport Interchange

In consultation with the Worimi Local Aboriginal Land Council, Crown Lands, Worimi Conservation Lands and NSW National Parks, Council have lodged a Development Application(DA) modification to the Birubi Point Aboriginal Place Tourism Transport Interchange.

The original plan for the facility required the removal of a large amount of sand from the site to enable the build. In 2023, we were provided with the opportunity to work in partnership with the Worimi Local Aboriginal Land Council to retain the sand and create a vegetated dune boundary on adjoining land owned by the Worimi Local Aboriginal Land Council.

This approach will ensure greater long-term protection of the development site by reducing the impacts of windblown sand, reduce maintenance costs of the facility and more importantly, maintain the cultural integrity of this site by keeping remnant soils and materials on Worimi Country.

A joint, vegetated sand dune stabilisation program also provides added protection to otherwise exposed, cultural materials within the Birubi Point Aboriginal Place.

The changes to the DA have impacted timelines and funding sources for this project. We're currently applying for a new Federal grant to enable the revised project to be delivered.

Carbon Neutrality

Council has a goal of achieving carbon neutrality by 2025 and to deliver this goal we're developing a Carbon Neutral Action Plan. The Carbon Neutral Action Plan will define the necessary initiatives and changes to Council's operations over the short, medium, and long-term as we look to achieve both our 2025 goal and any requirements under the State and Federal Government commitments to be Net Zero by 2050.

We've calculated our Carbon footprint for the 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 financial years, and have seen a drop in carbon emissions of nearly 40% over that time. This change is largely due to a Power Purchasing Agreement we signed in January 2021 for 100% renewable electricity, along with a number of other initiatives including ongoing roll-out of solar panels on Council facilities.

Coastal Management Program

In collaboration with NSW Department of Planning and Environment, we've been developing 2 Coastal Management Programs (CMPs).

The Port Stephens CMP is currently in Stage 4 of 5, which includes the preparation of the CMP document, public exhibition, finalisation, certification and adoption. During Stage 2, we completed hazard mapping and modelling, identifying coastal erosion, coastal inundation and wind-blown sand as the key coastal hazards along the coast and estuary. We recently completed Stage 3 of the CMP with the assistance of coastal experts, to develop a comprehensive list of management options. The proposed management options underwent a detailed assessment, which included a feasibility, viability, and acceptability assessment. Extensive consultation was undertaken during Stage 3 with the community and stakeholders to help us make decisions.

The Hunter Estuary CMP is being developed by the Hunter Estuary Alliance (HEAL), led by Maitland City Council and includes partner Councils and key organisations. The project is currently in Stage 2 of 5, which will investigate the key risks, vulnerabilities and opportunities within the Hunter Estuary. Studies currently underway include inundation mapping, habitat and erosion mapping and impacts to water quality.



Community Engagement

A key priority in the Communications and Engagement Strategy is embedding the IAP2 principles into the organisational culture. The embedding of the community engagement process earlier in a project cycle is now more formalised within our project management framework.

We've also held 3 Communication and Engagement Advisory Group meetings providing input into the coastal management program, local housing strategy review and smart parking. We've been actively working to implement key priorities into new engagement programs such as Smart Parking, Mallabula and Lakeside Master Plans, Local Housing Strategy Review and the Wellbeing Strategy.

Over the last 6 months, our community communication has aligned to a number of the strategic priorities outlined in our Communications and Engagement Strategy. This includes developing social media guidelines to drive reach and engagement on our social media platforms, formalising processes to ensure we improve integration of our communications, and categorising news and information on our website using a place focus.

Community Wellbeing

After comprehensive communications and engagement, the draft Community Wellbeing Strategy has been developed and endorsed by Council to be placed on public exhibition in February 2024. The Community Wellbeing Strategy includes the Disability Inclusion Action Plan as an attachment.



Eastern Groyne, Nelson Bay Precinct

Funding has not been secured for the Business Case, however this project continues to remain on our list with further updates to be provided when funding is secured.

Financial Sustainability

Throughout the 2022-2023 fiscal year, we demonstrated a commitment to financial sustainability, reflecting a commitment to maintaining prudent financial management and strategic planning. We are continuing to improve our financial sustainability strategy and roadmap.

Revenue diversification and cost control measures are key elements of Council's Financial Sustainability Strategy. To date, the 2023-2024 financial year has seen strong performance in non-rate revenue streams along with robust budgetary controls around expenditure.

Of note, specific areas of non-rate revenue include the expansion of smart parking which will assist Council to deliver improved Public Domain plans for the relevant precincts. In addition, our investment and loan portfolios continue to be prudently managed in excess of budget targets.

Natural Environment

Council is committed to achieving a great lifestyle in a treasured environment so that current and future generations can enjoy, and benefit from, a healthy natural environment.

As part of our program of work to manage and protect the natural environment, we've undertaken a number of grant funded environmental restoration projects to enhance the Port Stephens environment and key Koala habitat. Including:

- Completing the Koala Strike Mitigation project aimed at reducing Koala road strikes on Port Stephens Drive.
- Completing Crown Reserve Improvement Fund projects, aimed to target priority weeds, feral pests and facilitate biosecurity compliance.
- Commencing work funded through the Commonwealth's Koala Community Grant aimed at enhancing and protecting Koala habitat and mapping native vegetation within the local government area (LGA). Drone surveys have also been undertaken to model the density of Koalas within Port Stephens, in partnership with the University of Newcastle.

Pathways and Connections

We're reviewing our [Pathways Plan](#), which shows the proposed location of future footpaths and cycle ways. The review considers works completed and additional demand since original adoption, introducing a prioritisation framework to guide grant-funding applications.

During the period, we've completed the following pathway upgrades: Victoria Parade and Beach Road path upgrades in Nelson Bay and Little Beach; and Marine Drive Fingal Bay, shared path construction as part of the landslip remediation.

In progress is: Henderson Park to Rudd Reserve Lemon Tree Passage, shared path.

We're finalising planning on the: shared path design from Shoal Bay to Little Beach, Nelson Bay; Headland boardwalk, Corlette; boardwalk improvements, Tanilba Bay; and shared path, Brandy Hill.

As the volume of missing links and additional pathways needed is in excess of \$80M, Council has continued to search for additional income sources to fund these projects.

Place planning

Place Plans are plans that put people and places first. Place Plans are guided by strategic documents - we put a local filter on all of our Council's existing strategies to make one easy-to-read, action-oriented plan. They also include an analysis of potential opportunities for a place in line with the community's vision, values and priorities.

The status of Council's Place Plan program is as follows:

- Karuah and surrounds (adopted March 2022 and now in implementation phase)
- Medowie and surrounds (adopted April 2023 and now in implementation phase)
- Hinterland (adopted November 2023 and now in implementation phase)
- Draft Shoal Bay Place Plan (currently on Public Exhibition until February 2024)
- Tilligerry Place Plan is currently in development

Both Shoal Bay and Tilligerry Place Plans are expected to be considered by Council in 2024.

Anna Bay Place Plan is currently on hold pending the finalisation of a number of studies and feasibility.

Place Plans start with our community – your values and priorities for your place. Together, we identify the unique local character of a place and the ways our community can shape, enhance or protect these aspects.

Raymond Terrace Depot project

The new Depot was commissioned for operation in two stages (July and October 2023) in order to allow Council staff to complete final fit out prior to occupation. The staged approach also accommodated delays associated with a power upgrade. Our workshop staff were the first to commence operations from the new Depot in October, with the remaining teams progressively moving in over the following months. By December 2023, the majority of our Raymond Terrace based operational staff had relocated to the new Depot.

Roads

Infrastructure planning and renewal continued in the 2023-2024 financial year, with a program mostly funded from NSW State Government stimulus funding and external grants including Black Spots improvements and the Australian Government's Local Roads and Community Infrastructure Program. Recovery works and claims associated with the natural disaster in March 2021, February 2022 and July 2022 continue.

Key road projects

While many other roads projects will be introduced as funds become available, progress of the following key roads for the reporting period are as follows:

- Avenue of the Allies, Tanilba Bay (numerous stages: road widening, drainage works including kerb and gutter from Poilus Parade to King Albert Avenue) - commenced and to be completed this financial year.
- Main Road 90, Bucketts Way, Twelve Mile Creek from No.125 to 215 (road pavement rehabilitation) - design in progress, with construction to commence this financial year and completed next financial year.
- Sturgeon Street Raymond Terrace (pavement reconstruction from Glenelg Street to Jacaranda Avenue) - completed September 2023.
- Mustons Road, Karuah (culvert replacement and road widening) - design in progress, with construction planned for next financial year.
- Brandy Hill (shared pathway) - design in progress, with construction to commence this financial year and completed next financial year.
- Fly point (shared pathway upgrade) - completed October 2023.
- Nelson Bay ((High Pedestrian Activity Area (HPAA) extension)) - completed July 2023.

Maintaining local roads

Recent fine weather has enabled the Roads team to respond to pothole defects and pavement failures in a proactive manner. Resources have been prioritised to remediate defects on the heaviest trafficked roads first. Our advocacy for roads funding is also gaining traction, with recent funding announcements providing additional resources to tackle the extensive road pavement failures across our LGA.

Smart Parking rollout

We've progressed the delivery of Smart Parking with the roll out completed at Shoal Bay and Nelson Bay. We've completed the necessary procurement processes, technical studies/reviews and community engagement for a further expansion of Nelson Bay to Little Beach. Fingal Bay and Birubi Headland are on track for reporting to Council for final decisions on their rollout.

An upgrade to the Ngioka Centre Carpark has been completed, which is the first item under the new Nelson Bay Smart Parking Infrastructure Plan.

Waste Management Strategy implementation

The Waste Management Strategy 2021-2031 was adopted in October 2021.

We've achieved introduction and implementation of the third bin system (Garden Organics) over the past six months, with early results very positive. We are finding good presentation of bins at kerbs, very low contamination and good communication about the introduction.

The Waste Management team will be focusing efforts over the next four years on the continuation of:

- Circular Economy initiatives, involving the Hunter Joint Organisation and the journey to carbon neutrality.
- Trialling and monitoring smart devices across the Council area including bin-monitoring sensors in Nelson Bay during holiday seasons on Public litter bins.

These smart devices will be used to monitor and collect data for future decision-making and implementation of these devices into the future. The data will also monitor litter trends and volumes in these areas, for the use of delivering better services in the future. Ongoing education will also be a key component of the smart devices implementation, the road to the implementation of Food Organics Garden Organics (FOGO), circular economy with processing versus landfilling and movement toward waste to energy.

All of the above initiatives will help to contribute to improving Port Stephens Council's diversion to landfill, in order to meet the new NSW Governments target of an 80% reduction in waste by 2030.

Williamtown management area

We continue to monitor the implementation of the Department of Defence PFAS contamination remediation program and liaise with relevant agencies, community groups and residents as appropriate. In June 2023, Council resolved to continue the rate reduction for properties in the Williamtown Management Area for the 2023 to 2024 financial year. A special subcategory of rates applies for residents in the primary zone, secondary zone and broader zone. Council continues to consider sub-categorisation through our normal process of setting the rates each year.

Williamtown Special Activation Precinct (SAP)

The Williamtown Special Activation Precinct was subject to the 2023 NSW Government's Strategic Infrastructure Review.

Following consideration of the review's findings, the NSW Government decided not to proceed with Williamtown Special Activation Precinct project. The decision was made on the basis that the funding needed to address the complex hydrology, flooding and drainage issues made the development cost prohibitive.

We continue to work closely with the NSW Government, Department of Defence and City of Newcastle around alternate planning solutions for the Williamtown Precinct and support the delivery for Astra Aerolab and the expansion of Newcastle Airport.

We also continue our advocacy about the value of the Williamtown and Tomago areas, seeking solutions to allow growth and support delivery of new opportunities to the region.

Delivery Program update

In this report, we use the icons below to indicate the status of our Operational Plan actions, which form part of the Delivery Program 2022 to 2026.

ON TRACK: Operational Plan Actions are on track to achieve the target



MONITOR: Operational Plan Actions are within 5% of the target



OFF TRACK: Operational Plan Actions are > 5% off the target





Our Community

An accessible and welcoming community respecting diversity, heritage and culture.

C1 Community wellbeing

Improved wellbeing for our diverse community supported by services and facilities

Operational Plan Actions

 On track – 3

Community Development & Wellbeing

Our draft Community Wellbeing Strategy endorsed by Council for public exhibition in December 2023 is designed to align the goals of social planning with the principles of liveability. By bringing together directions from a number of existing strategies and policies, the Strategy recognises the complexity and interconnectedness of elements that collectively contribute to the wellbeing of the community. It draws on actions from the Ageing Strategy, the Port Stephens Crime Prevention Plan, the Port Stephens Disability Inclusion Access Plan (DIAP) and, the Port Stephens Multicultural Policy to provide a roadmap for measures that will improve the wellbeing of our community.

The strategy will be available for the community to view and provide final feedback in February 2024. You can find out more about the Community Wellbeing Strategy [here](#).

Volunteers

Our volunteers continue to give their time and energy to make Port Stephens a better place, contributing to:

- Keeping our parks, reserves and cemeteries pristine
- Improving our natural bushland areas
- Participating in our advisory councils and cultural committees
- Running our community centres, halls, libraries, Stories in the Street Literacy Program and Visitor Information Centre.

Without them, many of our services and programs could not exist.

C2 Recognised traditions and lifestyles

Operational Plan Actions

✓ On track – 4

Our community supports the richness of its heritage and culture

Delivering Yabang Gumba-Gu

We've commenced the Aboriginal Protocol Project which will guide Council and staff processes surrounding the use of Aboriginal heritage and culture. We've also partnered with Terrace Central to create a mural on the Sturgeon Street Bus Shelter.

Port Stephens Heritage

We've continued to support heritage in Port Stephens with the Heritage Advisory Group (The Group) holding their second meeting in November 2023. The Group has worked during the period to develop a work plan, incorporating heritage conversation and educational projects and finalisation of the Heritage Events Calendar.

Community Coming Together

Through delivery of Our Incredible Place Strategy we have continued to focus on partnering and delivering events this period across all areas of Port Stephens, for both the community and local businesses. We supported 11 events in 2023 through the Community Event Development Fund and awarded 9 grants through the Community Support Fund.

Artwork by Regan Lilley



Highlights

Community Development & Wellbeing

- ✓ Constructed new accessible amenities at Little Beach (including dedicated changing places, toilets with wheelchair circulation space, adult-sized change table hoist, automatic door, accessible toilet, 2 change rooms and 4 external beach showers).
- ✓ Constructed new 2.5m shared pathway to connect Little Beach to both Fly Point and Halifax Holiday Park.
- ✓ Completed shared pathway on Lemon Tree Passage reserve.
- ✓ Improved Brandon Park amenities with an accessible toilet.
- ✓ Received funding for a new sporting complex at Yulong Oval, Medowie to include accessible amenities.
- ✓ Redeveloped Mylink Community information page.
- ✓ Youth Advisory & Community Interagency meetings held.
- ✓ 28 It's On activations delivered, and 4 major events
 - Raymond Terrace Festival
 - Night at the Beach, Anna Bay
 - Goanna Academy Clinic, Raymond Terrace
 - New Year's Eve Fireworks, Nelson Bay.
- ✓ Supported 11 events in 2023 through the Community Event Development Fund.
- ✓ Created Nelson Bay Art Walk.

Childcare

- ✓ Significant increase in overall childcare places filled.
- ✓ Family Dare Care (FDC) assessed as "Good" through an external assessment and rating process.
- ✓ New enrolment process streamlined.
- ✓ Review of "Behaviour Management and Support" procedure completed in collaboration with parents.

Recreation facilities

- ✓ Managing and facilitating Community & Commercial contracts, leases and licenses of Council's community land.

Port Stephens Heritage

- ✓ Heritage events calendar finalised.

Our Community snapshot

Community Wellbeing

- Finalised the Port Stephens Community Wellbeing Strategy for public exhibition
- The Disability Inclusion Action Plan was submitted to the NSW Government

Childcare

Positions filled:

- 54,555 in OOSH
- 3,906 in FDC
- 389 FDC compliance visits
- 49 registered FDC Educators
- 89 procedures reviewed

Pools

- 68,428 aquatic centre visits

Beaches

- 501,395 beach visitations

Our Incredible Place Strategy

- Actions progressing

Highlights

Yabang Gumba-Gu

- ✓ Delivered the Night at the Beach
- ✓ Partnered with Terrace Central to have Aboriginal Artist Jason Russell of Koori Colours Art Gallery paint a mural on the Sturgeon Street Bus Shelter.
- ✓ Installed Aboriginal Artist Adam Manning's work on street furniture in William Street Raymond Terrace.
- ✓ Awarded 1 Aboriginal Project Fund grant for \$6K to Tomaree Neighbourhood Centre

Libraries & community spaces

- ✓ Events Celebrated:
 - National Library & Information Week 2023.
 - Book Week: "Read, Grow, Inspire" - creating fun and colourful displays and interactive story time sessions.
 - Adult Learners Week: "It's never too late" - free workshops including Brain Training sessions, writing workshops, Tech help sessions and a movie.
 - Irrawang Public School Careers Day – discussing all things libraries.

Volunteers

- ✓ Stories in the Street volunteers read to 398 children.
- ✓ 1,655 trees planted thanks to volunteers.

Challenges

- ✗ Childcare – Meeting evolving expectations and requirements.

Our Community snapshot

Yabang Gumba-Gu

- A review of actions was undertaken and is currently under review by the Aboriginal Strategic Committee

Our Library Services

- 147,177 items borrowed
- 13,312 enquiries
- 5,138 people attended 416 programs
- 842 new library members
- 289 home deliveries
- 40 customers used Call & Collect

Our Place

A liveable and connected place supporting community wellbeing and local economic growth

P1 Strong economy, vibrant local businesses, active investment

Our community has an adaptable, sustainable and diverse economy

Operational Plan Actions



On track – 2

Supporting Sustainable business development

We have continued to partner with businesses to deliver various business development opportunities, showing new tourist, innovations and procurement opportunities. During the six months we coordinated the Hunter Innovators Roadshow and showcased the innovation ecosystem growing in Tomago.

Destination Port Stephens continues to deliver a high level of services to members and the overall tourism industry.

Attracting and facilitating major events

We have continued to sponsor major events that attract visitation and vibrancy, with a focus on partnering and delivering events and activities across all areas of Port Stephens for community and business.

This period we delivered a range of events, including Night at the Beach (Anna Bay), Raymond Terrace Festival, Goanna Academy Clinic (Raymond Terrace) and Fireworks for New Year's Eve.

P2 Infrastructure and facilities

Our community's infrastructure and facilities are safe, convenient, reliable and environmentally sustainable

Operational Plan Actions

 On track – 4

Managing, providing and maintaining Infrastructure

While weather conditions have been fairer over the period we've continued to make progress on the backlog of works associated with natural disasters/wet weather over previous years. As a result of continued dry weather, outstanding potholes to be repaired have been significantly reduced, with heavy patching also continuing at a steady pace.

Whilst there were a number of challenges, we were able to complete a significant amount of projects in the last six months - refer Highlights and Challenges from page 26 below.

Drainage and floodplain work

Drainage improvement works have been completed at Karuah and Nelson Bay, with further designs for drainage improvements for Nelson Bay in progress. Investigation into catchment drainage issues at Salamander Bay and Little Beach are continuing, along with continuation of the review and update to the Shoal Bay drainage model.

Work continues on the Anna Bay and Tilligerry Creek Floodplain Risk Management Study and Plan. Progress also continues on the Lower Hunter Floodplain Cumulative Development Impact Study and Plan.

P3 Thriving and safe place to live

Our community supports a healthy, happy and safe place

Operational Plan Actions

 On track – 7

Strategic Planning

There has been a continued focal point on development of the Local Housing Strategy, with a focus on prioritising residential developments to assist in providing critical housing supply in the LGA. We held a Housing Forum in November 2023 as part of reviewing the Local Housing Strategy, which was well received across Government, Development Industry, Support Services and community groups.

Development Applications (DA)

We've seen a reduction in development applications lodged during the period, however the cost of development has increased. This relationship between metrics shows that smaller scale development is reducing, whilst major projects remain largely active. This project trend has resulted in an increased workload for Council staff, given the scale and complexity of the major projects.

Process changes for lodgement and determination procedures have been implemented. Most notably, we have transitioned to the determination of applications via the NSW Planning Portal, which was mandated by the Department of Planning in July 2023. We're part of only a small cohort of Councils who are currently utilising the portal for determinations. This is a reflection of the resources and time invested by staff in preparing for this transition.

The NSW Government established the Faster Local Assessment Grant Program (FLAG) to help support 14 selected councils across the state in Development Application and Planning Proposal assessments. We have been selected to participate in the program, with an allocation of \$350,000 to enable process improvements to be made through a range of activities, such as the appointment of additional professional assessment staff, training and system improvements. The FLAG program was completed in December 2023 with all actions and process improvements completed.

Highlights

Economy & Business

- ✓ 120 guests attended the Port Stephens Business Leaders Lunch to learn more about the Tomaree Coastal Walk
- ✓ Small Business Month events held across Port Stephens
- ✓ Hunter Innovators Roadshow
- ✓ Shop local campaigns implemented to increase local shopping over Christmas

Infrastructure Planning and Renewal

- ✓ 17,000+ potholes fixed.
- ✓ Engineering Services processed:
 - 108 Flood Certificate requests
 - 83 drainage and flooding related Development Application referrals
 - 194 engineering Development Application referrals.
- ✓ Progressing the Anna Bay & Tilligerry Creek Floodplain Risk Management Study and Plan and Lower Hunter Floodplain Cumulative Development Impact Study and Plan.
- ✓ Parks Unit undertaking field renovations ready for the summer sport season.
- ✓ Completed capital works:
 - Pavement rehabilitation - Lemon Tree Passage Road Seg 190-250; Italia Road Seg 120; Sturgeon Street; Lavis Lane.
 - Road Works & Pathways - Fly Point to Halifax pathway; Teramby Road landslip (1) rectification.
 - Buildings - Medowie Childcare Centre shade shelter; Raymond Terrace depot.
 - Drainage improvements - Bourke Street pipe and levee.
 - Sports fields & Parks - Salamander Sports Complex irrigation/drainage upgrade; King Park facilities upgrade; Brandon Park facilities upgrade.
 - BBQ replacements – Boomerang Park; Aliceton Reserve playground.
 - Town centre improvements - Lemon Tree Passage Town Centre upgrade.
 - Aquatic Centre Works - Tomaree Aquatic Centre filter socks installation; Tilligerry Aquatic Centre playground; Lakeside Leisure Centre pool grid mesh.
 - Other works - Hannah Parade carpark maintenance works; Little Beach access ramp, fish cleaning table, park furniture, irrigation upgrade and retaining wall; Birubi Surf Club air conditioning replacement; Tanilba Bay foreshore furniture replacement; Marine Drive embankment stabilisation; Beach Road & Victoria Parade HPAA, Nelson Bay Town Centre HPAA; Port Stephens Drive koala crossing project.

Compliance, Ranger & Environment Services

- ✓ Rangers received over 1500 customer requests.
- ✓ Completing campaigns for Unlawful Advertising Signage.
- ✓ Completing inspection programs for Underground Petroleum Service Stations (UPSS).

Our Place snapshot

Visitor Information Centre

- Launch of the new Nelson Bay Scavenger Hunt and Art Walk

Economic Development Strategy

- Actions on track

Engineering, flooding & drainage

development referrals processed within agreed timeframes:

- All Flood Certificates
- 100% of flooding & drainage DA referrals
- 86% of development engineering DA referrals

Development Services & Strategic Planning

- Planning proposals assessed within DPE timeframes
- Meeting DA determination target of 40 days
- 314 DA's approved at value of \$179M
- Local Housing Strategy in review

Highlights

Place Planning & Activation

- ✓ 28 It's On! Activations delivered across Port Stephens.
- ✓ Licensed 102 external events and 10 sponsored events.
- ✓ Delivered 4 Major Events including Night at the Beach, the Raymond Terrace Festival and the Goanna Academy.

Strategic Planning & Development Assessments

- ✓ DA 100 day list at 33 in June has reduced to 30 in December 2023.
- ✓ 292 Construction Certificates approved (126 by Council).
- ✓ Adoption of the draft Local Infrastructure Contributions Amendment.
- ✓ Port Stephens Housing forum held.
- ✓ Adoption of Shoal Bay Place Plan for public exhibition.

Emergency Management

- ✓ Delivery of the Port Stephens Pre Event Recovery Plan.
- ✓ Council involvement in an Emergency Operations Centre exercise hosted by the RFS at Lower Hunter Fire Control.

Challenges

- ✗ Resourcing - delivery of large-scale projects within the general operational workload.
- ✗ Price increases/variances, inflation and contractor availability - continue to impact our ability to deliver projects on time.
- ✗ Planning portal determinations – system software limitations to enable the system transition. This may result in some delays in assessment timeframes during the ongoing implementation period.
- ✗ APZ management - increased customer requests for APZ management, tree pruning and removal with dry weather and increased fuel loads intensifying.

Our Place snapshot

Community Financial Assistance

- \$40K Mayoral donations
- \$11K Councillor donations

Emergency Management

- Strategic objective actions on track

Our Environment

Port Stephens environment is clean, green, protected and enhanced

E1 Ecosystem function

Our community has healthy and dynamic environmental systems that support biodiversity and conservation

Operational Plan Actions

✓ On track – 2

Environmental Strategies & Programs

We are continuing to develop and build on our strategic framework for environmental matters, with the focus over the last period including initiation of the Environment Strategy, commencement on the 2023-2024 Biosecurity and Rehabilitation Program and completion of the draft Carbon Neutral Action Plan. Refer Key Priorities 'Natural Environment' page 12 for more information on grants secured and environmental education undertaken.

Koala Habitat Mapping

Development of revised koala habitat mapping is ongoing. Stage 1, being field surveys and draft GIS mapping of the eastern portion of the Port Stephens Local Government Area (LGA) is now complete. Stage 2, mapping of the central portion of Port Stephens LGA to commence in 2024.



E2 Environmental sustainability

Our community uses resources sustainably, efficiently and equitably

Operational Plan Actions

 On track – 2

Developing a Carbon Neutral Action Plan

Progress of the Carbon Neutrality Project has been discussed with Council and Council's Environmental Advisory Committee, which was well received by the community members in attendance for the Committee.

We've completed Council's 2021-2022 Carbon Footprint which was reviewed in consideration of our goal to be Carbon Neutral by 2025, alongside our State and Federal commitments to be Net Zero by 2050. Council's Carbon Neutral Action Plan will continue to aim to reduce our emissions in line with Council, State and Federal goals. Refer Key Priorities page 10 for more information.

Implementing the Waste Management Strategy

Refer to Key Priorities on page 15 for more information.

E3 Environmental resilience

Our community is resilient to environmental risks, natural hazards and climate change

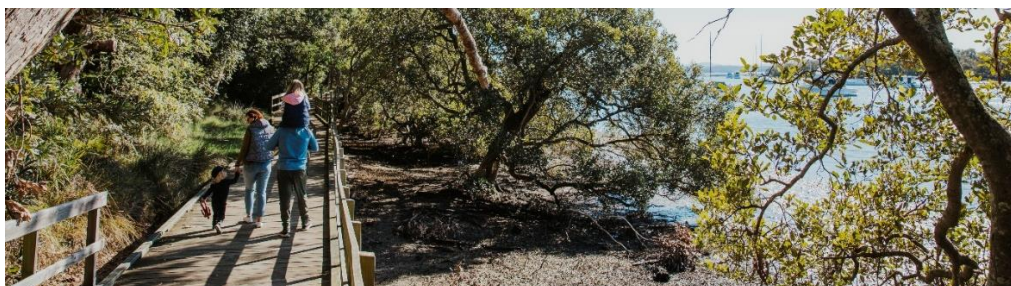
Operational Plan Actions

 On track – 1

Coastal Management Program (CMP) update

Refer to Key Priorities on page 10 for more information. Stage 3 of 5 of the CMP has been completed with stage 4 now underway, which includes:

- Preparation of the draft CMP
- Public exhibition
- Finalisation of the CMP
- Endorsement and Certification of the CMP



Highlights

Environmental Policies, Strategies & Rehabilitation .

- ✓ Commencing 2023-2024 Biosecurity and Rehabilitation Program. 55 of 66 natural areas receiving 1 day or more of bush regeneration works, totalling 3269 hours in total.
- ✓ 439 inspections have taken place to ensure biosecurity risks are managed on private properties.
- ✓ Tree Permits: received - 82, determined - 79, average turnaround time - 21 days.
- ✓ Tree Notifications: received - 12, determined - 16, average turnaround time - 41 days.
- ✓ Stage 1 of revised koala habitat mapping completed.
- ✓ Council's Carbon Emissions reduced by nearly 40% between 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 financial years.

Waste management

- ✓ Garden Organics (GO) bin implementation, collecting 600 tonnes on average per month.
- ✓ GO contamination rates remaining less than 1%.
- ✓ Recovered approx. 400 m3 of polystyrene at Salamander Bay Waste Transfer Facility.

Challenges

- ✗ Resourcing - high demand for resourcing across a broad range of projects.
- ✗ Arborist - Council's contractor arborist is currently conducting inspections every 5 to 6 weeks, resulting in a slower turnaround time for tree permits requiring arborist services.

Our Environment snapshot

Environmental strategies and frameworks

- In progress

Carbon Neutral Action Plan

- Draft in progress

Coastal Management Program

- Progress refer page 10

Waste Management Strategy 2021-2031

- On track

Our Council

Port Stephens Council leads, manages and delivers valued community services in a responsible way

L1 Governance

Our Council's leadership is based on trust and values of Respect, Integrity, Teamwork, Excellence and Safety (RITES)

Operational Plan Actions

 On track – 13

Advocacy Priorities & Newcastle Airport

We're continuing with our advocacy priorities, refer to Key Priorities on page 9.

NAPL Board has approved a terminal expansion program to undertake significant upgrades of the terminal and other infrastructure including an international route expansion along with the current upgrades to the runway.

Further detailed planning to enable the commencement of commercial buildings in the Astra Aerolab development has been completed, with initial development applications for commercial buildings in the Astra Aerolab approved.

Community Satisfaction

Over September and October 2023, we invited residents to participate in the 2023 Community Satisfaction Survey and have their say. We used social media, newspaper advertisements, flyers and our website to reach as many people as we could.

We undertook a simplified approach with this year's survey, following Council's resolution in December 2022 to reset the rating scale, asking residents their thoughts about our core services.

These results are important in identifying areas for improvement and for setting metrics that allow us to track Council's performance. Available on our website is a handy [4 page report](#) which outlines the results and what we're doing to improve.

Workforce, Corporate Systems, Governance and Integrated Planning

Our Human Resources, ICT, Finance, Business Improvement, Governance, Communications & Engagement and other back of house teams are the key enablers to assist our organisation deliver our services to the community in the best possible way. During the past six months, a number of key initiatives and programs have been delivered to ensure that we have:

- Appropriate workforce planning (recruited, retained, developed and engaged).
- Sufficient Council financial resources to allow staff to deliver their key priorities (refer Key Priorities page 12 for more information).
- Technology that is fit for purpose, and managed in response to ongoing cyber security risks.
- Provision of digital services such as e-planning and online services.
- Appropriate governance and risk management checks and balances.
- A service review program to regularly and systematically ensure we are providing efficient and effective services the best possible way.
- Reported (annually and six-monthly) on what we said we were going to do and reviewing our core IP&R documents.



L2 Financial Management

Our Council is financially sustainable to meet community needs

Operational Plan Actions

✔ On track – 3

Managing our financial resources

Refer Key Priorities on page 12 for more information.

During the period, we have implemented the new Special Rate Variation (SRV) and Rates Assistance program. While the approved SRV will provide support in maintaining services and improving community infrastructure, it is essential that financial sustainability practices and measures continue to be a focus in our decision-making.

Beachside Holiday Parks (HP) & Koala Sanctuary (Sanctuary)

We've completed many projects at the Holiday Parks during the period, including new kitchens, floors, deck & handrail replacements in cabins and villas and a new number plate technology implemented at Halifax Holiday Park.

The Koala Sanctuary received improvements during the period, including installation of CCTV, a new concrete pool surround and an additional BBQ & shelter.



L3 Communication and engagement

Our Council is committed to enabling an engaged and informed community

Operational Plan Actions

 On track – 2

Customer Experience

Visitation to the Visitor Information Centre (VIC) has continued to increase over the period, with the 2023 Christmas and school holiday period the busiest we have experienced since 2020.

We have been working to broaden the availability of our communication channels for our customers, including the implementation of Web Chat functionality on our website and increased utilisation of outgoing SMS and email services.

Communication and Community Engagement

Our Communication and Engagement Strategy actions continue to be implemented, with some significant campaigns already completed under this framework.

A number of key communication and engagement programs have taken place within the period including the Coastal Management Program, Local Housing Strategy Review, Hinterland Place Plan, Tilligerry Place Plan, Shoal Bay Place Plan, Smart Parking, and the roll out of the garden organics communication campaign.

We held 6 Community catch ups across Port Stephens where Councillors and Executive staff has the opportunity to connect with the community.

We completed communication campaigns for key infrastructure projects including the Port Stephens Drive Blackspot program and Little Beach upgrades.

Highlights

2023 Community Satisfaction Results

- ✓ Overall average satisfaction with Council's services: 2.94 out of 5
- ✓ Overall average satisfaction with Council's services: 45%
- ✓ Average aggregate satisfaction score for Council's core services: 3.12 out of 5
- ✓ Average aggregate satisfaction with Council's core services: 46%
- ✓ Highest rated services and facilities:
 - Waste Services
 - Clean and safe public spaces
 - Council Website.

Newcastle Airport, Hunter Councils

- ✓ Initial development applications for commercial buildings in Astra Aerolab have been approved.
- ✓ Grant funding of \$66M has been announced by the Federal Government to assist with the widening and strengthening of the Airport runway to enable Code E (wide bodied) aircraft. Works are underway by Defence contractors.
- ✓ Grant funding of \$55M has been announced by the Federal Government to assist with the expansion of an international terminal. Terminal development is in progress.

Citizenship & Workforce

- ✓ 2 Citizenship Ceremonies held.
- ✓ 84% employee engagement score (increase from 2022)

Corporate Systems

- ✓ Improvement initiatives on track including:
 - Support and fit out of the Raymond Terrace Depot
 - Continue to digitise application forms and automation of their processes
 - Completion of NSW Planning Portal integration

Governance, Legal, Internal Audit & Risk, Finance

- ✓ Deployment of Key Risk Indicator program.
- ✓ Consolidation of Council Business Continuity Program.
- ✓ Processed 38 formal GIPA applications, 689 informal requests for information and 110 plan requests.
- ✓ Provided 84 legal advices and 6 court matters finalised.
- ✓ Commenced the 2023-2024 Internal Audit plan with a number of internal audits nearing completion.

Managing Property & Holiday Parks (HP)

- ✓ 23 leases and licences were renewed with 6 additional entered into
- ✓ Gold Award for Tourist Attractions – NSW Tourism Awards, Koala Sanctuary
- ✓ 25 new kitchens installed in the villas across Fingal Bay and Halifax HPs
- ✓ Net Promoter Score for HPs was 74.61%
*A Net Promoter Score of 70% is 'world class'.

Challenges

- ✗ Resourcing - issues during the period have now been resolved through recruitment.
- ✗ Inflation and cost of living pressures on debt collection processes.

Our Council snapshot

Workforce Management Strategy (WMS)

- Delivering on 4 strategic objectives

Corporate Systems and Data Management

- Delivering on 5 strategic objectives

IP&R and Service Review program

- On track

Financial Sustainability Strategy and Roadmap

- implementation ongoing

Governance & Internal Audit program

- On track

Property Portfolio

- In accordance with Property Investment Strategy Property

Holiday Parks and Koala Sanctuary

- Delivery plans on track

Customer Experience & Communication and Engagement

- Communication & Engagement Strategy program on track



PORT STEPHENS
COUNCIL