

FILE NO: PSC2022-02249

TITLE: ENVIRONMENT POLICY

OWNER: STRATEGY AND ENVIRONMENT SECTION MANAGER

1. PURPOSE:

1.1 Port Stephens 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. This policy outlines Council's commitment to the environment by providing leadership and direction for improved environmental performance, sustainable outcomes and enhanced condition of the natural environment.

2. CONTEXT/BACKGROUND:

2.1 Port Stephens is a diverse region, comprised of natural features including bushland, rivers, wetlands and coastal areas. A healthy natural environment is critical to the people of Port Stephens as it provides essential environmental services such as clean air, clean water and healthy soils. In turn this supports ecological, cultural, recreational, economic and aesthetic values. It is also recognised that growing evidence suggests that time spent in nature provides increased health benefits.

2.2 Local government plays an important role in protecting and enhancing the natural environment in order to achieve Ecologically Sustainable Development (ESD). Specifically, the charter for NSW Councils reinforces Council's role "to properly manage, develop, protect, restore, enhance and conserve the environment of the area for which it is responsible, in a manner that is consistent with and promotes the principles of ecologically sustainable development".

2.3 The natural environment is a complex and interdependent system making it challenging to accurately quantify and assess impacts. The principles of ESD are therefore embedded in the Local Government Act 1993 which states that "ecologically sustainable development requires the effective integration of economic and environmental considerations in decision-making processes". The principles are incorporated within local government decision-making processes including planning, regulation, administration and operations.

2.4 The principles underpinning ESD as identified by Local Government NSW are:

- a) Precautionary principle – prevent environmental degradation and manage and mitigate risk
- b) Intergenerational equity – today’s actions maintain or enhance the environment for future generations
- c) Conservation of biological diversity and ecological integrity
- d) Improved valuation and pricing of environmental resources – recognising the value of the environment to the community
- e) Commit to the principles of the circular economy and minimise the consumption of finite natural resources.

2.5 Ecologically sustainable development requires the effective integration of economic, social and environmental considerations in decision-making processes. The Integrated Planning and Reporting framework also requires councils to address social, environmental, economic and civic leadership (the quadruple bottom line) issues in an integrated way.

3. SCOPE:

3.1 This policy provides direction for Council's approach to its application of ESD principles and overall environmental performance.

3.2 Council’s approach to maintaining and enhancing environmental values for intergenerational equity recognises human-induced climate change impacts on the conservation of biological diversity. Council recognises the need to manage the natural environment of Port Stephens to the standards of Council’s resourcing and budgeting capabilities, including of quality and connectivity, to build resilience and reduce the risk of species loss.

3.3 Whilst Council's approach to environmental risk is influenced by this policy, Council's Risk Management Policy provides the overall direction on Council's systematic management of risk. Therefore, these 2 policies should be considered together.

3.4 Council has a dedicated environmental risk program, centered on the Environmental Management System (EMS). The EMS provides a set of tools to support risk-based decisions that appropriately consider Council’s environmental, cultural and heritage objectives and operational threats. The program is designed to be compliant with relevant external obligations.

4. DEFINITIONS:

4.1 An outline of the key definitions of terms included in the policy.

Biological Diversity and Ecological Integrity	The variety of life forms, the different plants, animals and microorganisms, the genes they contain and the ecosystems they form.
Ecologically Sustainable Development (ESD)	Effective integration of economic and environmental considerations in decision-making processes.
Intergenerational Equity	That the present generation should ensure that the health, diversity and productivity of the environment is maintained or enhanced for the benefit of future generations.
Circular economy	A model enhancing the production, assemblage, selling and usage of products to minimise waste and reduce environmental impact.
Precautionary Principle	If there are threats of serious or irreversible environmental damage, lack of full scientific certainty should not be used as a reason for postponing measures to prevent environmental degradation.

5. STATEMENT:

- 5.1 Council ensures a healthy natural environment is maintained for the wellbeing of the Port Stephens community.
- 5.2 Council is committed to empowering its employees to assume accountability and responsibility for the continuous improvement of its environmental performance by creating and promoting a culture of participation and by providing a robust process for monitoring and review.
- 5.3 Council is committed to the principles of Ecologically Sustainable Development.
- 5.4 Council meets all its statutory responsibilities under environmental legislation.
- 5.5 Council is committed to achieving environmental results through a sustainable approach to the planning, procurement and delivery of its services and assets. Across its organisational business units and functions, Council seeks to maximise energy and resource efficiency, reduce waste and transport, and minimize or negate adverse impacts on the natural environment.

- 5.6 Council is committed to maintaining and improving the natural environment of Port Stephens by the development and implementation of strategies to provide leadership and direction for continuous improvement in environmental performance and sustainable outcomes.

6. RESPONSIBILITIES:

- 6.1 Strategy and Environment Section is responsible for monitoring, reviewing and providing advice on the policy.
- 6.2 Implementation of and compliance with the Environment Policy is the responsibility of all staff, with the Senior Leadership Team responsible for ensuring the policy is implemented throughout the organisation.

7. RELATED DOCUMENTS:

- 7.1 Local Government Act 1993
- 7.2 Port Stephens Council Community Strategic Plan
- 7.3 Port Stephens Local Strategic Planning Statement
- 7.4 Climate Change Adaptation Action Plan
- 7.5 Asset Management Policy
- 7.6 Climate Change Policy
- 7.7 Commercial Operators Policy
- 7.8 Compliance Policy
- 7.9 Economic Development Policy
- 7.10 Heritage Policy
- 7.11 Enterprise Risk Management Policy
- 7.12 On-Site Sewage Management Policy
- 7.13 Pricing Policy
- 7.14 Procurement Policy
- 7.15 Property Investment Policy
- 7.16 LGNSW Policy Platform: Environment
- 7.17 Sustainable Energy Planning and Design for Projects and Activities.

CONTROLLED DOCUMENT INFORMATION:

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EDRMS container No.	PSC2022-02249	EDRMS record No.	23/75935
Audience	Councillors, staff and community		
Process owner	Strategy and Environment Section Manager		
Author	Environmental Officer		
Review timeframe	3 years	Next review date	14 March 2026
Adoption date	March 2016		

VERSION HISTORY:

Version	Date	Author	Details	Minute No.
1.0	8 March 2016	Environmental Strategist / Environmental Management System Officer	Original Policy.	051
2.0	26 June 2018	Environmental Strategist	Policy adapted to new Policy Template. No Amendments.	178
3.0	December 2020	Environmental Officer	1.1 – Deletion of the wording “its vision statement of” from the Purpose 2.5 – Deletion of LGNSW Interim Policy Statement and replacement with most current LGNSW Sustainability Position Statement 3.3 – Deletion of “Integrated” and replacement with “Enterprise” to reflect organisational changes	278

Version	Date	Author	Details	Minute No.
			<p>5.5 – Inserted new paragraph: “Council is committed to achieving environmental results through a sustainable approach to the planning, procurement and delivery of its services and assets. Across its organisational business units and functions, Council seeks to maximise energy and resource efficiency, reduce waste and transport.”</p> <p>7.1 – Added hyperlink to Local Government Act 1993</p> <p>7.4 – Added Climate Change Policy</p> <p>7.9 – Deletion of “Integrated” and replaced with “Enterprise” Risk Management Policy to reflect organisational changes</p> <p>7.14 – Deleted Social Impact Policy as this policy has been revoked</p> <p>7.14 – Inclusion of LGNSW Policy Platform</p> <p>7.15 – Inclusion of Sustainable Energy Planning and Design for Projects and Activities</p> <p>Controlled Document Information – Deleted the title of the author Environmental Strategist and replaced with Environmental Officer to reflect organisational changes.</p>	
4.0	14 March 2023	Environmental Officer	<p>The policy has been updated in the new policy template and updates version control</p> <p>Minor grammatical errors corrected</p>	051

Version	Date	Author	Details	Minute No.
			<p>1.1 – Added “and enhanced condition of the natural environment.” Deleted “and”.</p> <p>2.1 – Added “It is also recognised that growing evidence suggests that time spent in nature provides increased health benefits.”</p> <p>2.4 – Updated the Ecologically Sustainable Development principles in line with LGNSW Environment Fundamental Principles 2022</p> <p>2.5 – Deleted “(LGNSW Sustainability Position Statement)”</p> <p>3 –Added 3.2 “Council’s approach to maintaining and enhancing environmental values for intergenerational equity recognises human-induced climate change impacts on the conservation of biological diversity. Council recognises the need to manage the natural environment of Port Stephens to the standards of Council’s resourcing and budgeting capabilities, including of quality and connectivity, to build resilience and reduce the risk of species loss.”</p> <p>3.3 Deleted “Environmental performance refers to the environmental results that are achieved through Council's management and control of the environmental aspects of its systems, policies, processes, procedures, services and</p>	

			<p>activities (ISO14001:2015). Environmental performance can be improved when beneficial environmental impacts are increased and adverse environmental impacts and risks are reduced.” and “enterprise”</p> <p>Added 3.4 “Council has a dedicated environmental risk program, centered on the Environmental Management System (EMS). The EMS provides a set of tools to support risk-based decisions that appropriately consider Council’s environmental, cultural and heritage objectives operational threats. The program is designed to be compliant with relevant external obligations.”</p> <p>4 - 4.1 – Deleted definition for “Improved Valuation, Pricing and Incentive Mechanisms”. Added Circular economy definition.</p> <p>5 – 5.5 Added “and minimize or negate adverse impacts on the natural environment.”</p> <p>Added “5.6 Council is committed to maintaining and improving the natural environment of Port Stephens by the development and implementation of strategies to provide leadership and direction for improved environmental performance and sustainable outcomes.”</p> <p>5.6 Added “continuous improvement in” Deleted “improved”.</p> <p>5.3 – Deleted “4”</p> <p>7 – Added 7.3 “Port Stephens</p>	
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			<p>Local Strategic Planning Statement” Added 7.4 “Climate Change Adaptation Action Plan.” 7.15 – Added “Environment”.</p>	
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