Integrating Natural Resource Management into NSW Local Government Operations

Volume 1:
Corporate Planning and Reporting

Local Government and Shires Associations of NSW

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List of Abbreviations

CAP	Catchment Action Plan
CBD	Central Business District
CEC	Community Environmental Contact
CMA	Catchment Management Authority
CSP	Community Strategic Plan
DA	Development Application
DCP	Development Control Plan
DECC	Department of Environment and Climate Change
DLG	Department of Local Government
DoP	Department of Planning
DPI	Department of Primary Industriees
EEO	Equal Employment Opportunity
EIS	Environmental Impact Statement
ESD	Ecologically Sustainable Development
GRI	Global Reporting Initiative
LEP	Local Environmental Plan
LGMA	Local Government Managers Association
LGSA	Local Government and Shires Association of NSW
MAT	Management Action Target
MER	Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting
MERI	Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Improvement
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NRC	Natural Resources Commission
NRM	Natural Resource Management
PAS	Priority Action Statement
RCMG	Regional Co-Ordination Management Group
RCT	Resource Condition Target
ROC	Regional Organisation of Councils
SEPP	State Environmental Planning Policy
SoE	State of the Environment Report
TBL	Triple Bottom Line
UNEP	United Nations Environment Program
VCN	Volunteer Coordinators Network

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1. Introduction

What is in this section?

1.   What is NRM?
2.   What is Corporate Planning and Reporting?
3.   Why is this Volume 1?
4.   Who is this guide for?
5.   What does this guide aim to do?

1.1 Natural Resource Management (NRM)

In 2008 the LGSA conducted a survey of NSW councils on the capacities of local authorities to engage and participate in NRM. The survey sought feedback on "the top NRM issues facing your council". There was considerable commonality of view among inland, coastal and metropolitan councils, with the top three NRM issues identified as: biodiversity – native vegetation, water (quality and quantity) and dealing with development pressures.

More broadly this and other surveys have identified the following as challenge areas:

Water quality	Salinity
Native vegetation management/loss	Acid sulfate soils
Threatened species	Soil erosion
Loss of biodiversity	Coastal management
Weed management	Stormwater management

Councils are important agents for delivering natural resource management (NRM) in NSW. They have many statutory responsibilities to do so, and in particular the Local Government Act Charter specifies that Councils must abide by Ecologically Sustainable Development principles. NRM is also a role which is often expected of a council by its community, and the challenge which local government shares with other NRM agencies is to maintain a natural landscape which sustains the activities of future generations.

Natural resource management is a discipline in the management of natural resources such as land, water, soil, plants and animals, with a particular focus on how management affects the quality of life for both present and future generations.

Environment – The natural environment, commonly referred to simply as the environment, is a terminology that is comprised of all living and non-living things that occur naturally on Earth or some region thereof.

Sustainability – a means of configuring civilization and human activity so that society, its members and its economies are able to meet their needs and express their greatest potential in the present, while preserving biodiversity and natural ecosystems, planning and acting for the ability to maintain these ideals in the very long term.

http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/

1.2 Corporate Planning and Reporting

One of the key processes for organising councils' activities and resources is corporate planning and reporting, and this is governed by legislation in the *Local Government Act 1993*. Councils are currently obliged to prepare a three year Management Plan, and to publicly report on the achievement of their plan both quarterly and annually. The corporate planning and reporting process in councils commonly includes:

- Management plans, budgets, Annual Reports and Quarterly Reports;
- Planning staff who co-ordinate the preparation of the corporate plans and reports;
- A collaborative process of collecting information and making decisions amongst staff, managers, directors and elected councillors; and
- Community consultation then formal adoption by the Council.

The NSW Department of Local Government is currently reviewing the legislation governing corporate planning and reporting processes, and new components that are being encouraged by the Department and adopted by councils to improve their corporate planning and reporting are:

- **Community Strategic Plans** which have a longer time horizon, and which aim to capture community aspirations for the local government area;
- **Longer term resourcing plans** which aim to better equip councils with adequate financial, workforce and asset management in order to meet their long term goals and responsibilities;
- **Better operational planning** which anchors longer term visions in concrete actions, outputs and outcomes; and
- **Reporting** on external conditions and the actions of councils which influence their environment.

Corporate planning and reporting covers every aspect of council activities in the city, in regional and rural areas, at small, medium and large scales. Therefore Natural Resource Management (NRM) needs to be integrated into a council's community, strategic and management planning, along with many other priority areas. NRM has implications for the majority of council functions, and is therefore very appropriately and effectively addressed in corporate planning and reporting schemes.

1.3 Why is this Volume 1?

This guideline is part of a package which aims to support councils in NSW to integrate natural resource management (NRM) into local government operations. The package comprises an overview and two principal documents (Volume 1 and Volume 2). The Overview is aimed at catching the interest of senior staff, councillors and others with a general interest in NRM, with Volume 1 and 2 outlined below:

Foundations for Council Planning and Operations	**Community Engagement / Direction** Volume 1 Section 4 Volume 2 Section 3	**Legislation / Policy / Institutional Frameworks** Volume 1 Section 2 Volume 2 Section 2

Corporate Planning Guideline Volume 1	**Good Council Processes** leadership in responding to community & legislative foundations	**Land Use Planning** Guideline Volume 2
Community Strategic Plans Section 4	**Strategic Planning**	**Strategic Land Use Plans** Section 3
Resource Planning Section 5		**Local Environmental Plans** Section 4
Operational / Action Planning Section 6	**Policy Adoption / Decisions Taken**	**Development Control Plans** Section 5
Monitoring and Reporting Section 7	**Support for Sustainable Outcomes on the Ground**	**Development Assessment** Section 6

Figure 1: *Guideline Content*

1.4 Who is this guide for?

The guideline has been commissioned by the Local Government and Shires Associations of NSW (LGSA) and designed for local government professionals, managers and councillors who are working in corporate planning and reporting and/or NRM in NSW local government. In particular, the guide is for the following people in Councils:

- Management planners and Annual report writers;
- Environmental Management and NRM professionals and State of the Environment report writers;
- Managers and Directors; and
- Elected Councillors.

The guideline may also be useful to NRM and corporate planning consultants, Catchment Management Authorities and other State agencies who support and influence NRM in local government.

This guide is particularly relevant for council **officers and managers** who are responsible for ensuring that councils fulfil their **legislative requirements** for corporate planning and reporting, and also for those who ensure council meets its commitments for natural resource management.

1.5 Aims of this Guide

The corporate planning and reporting process in NSW councils can be a powerful tool to ensure the delivery of outcomes in a local government area, and this guide focuses on the way that this process in particular can deliver NRM outcomes:

Outcomes through Corporate Planning and Reporting

Integrating NRM into Corporate Planning and Reporting

Outcomes for Natural Resource Management
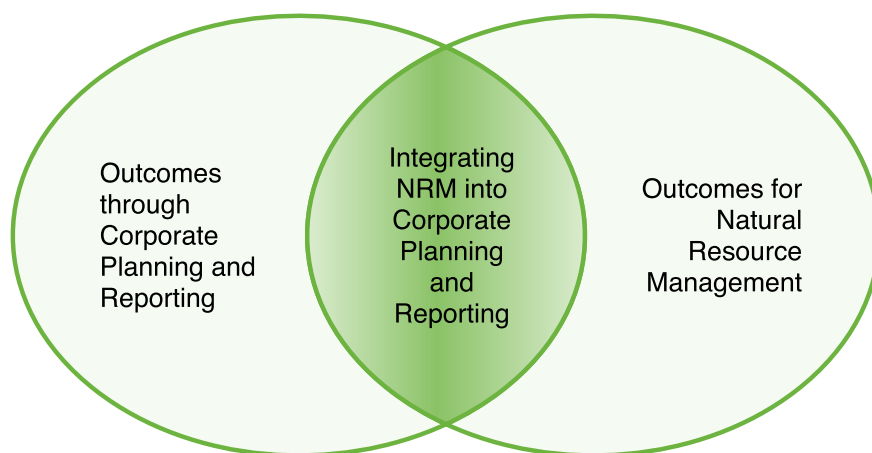
Figure 2: *How to deliver NRM outcomes*

Achieving each of the aims within these circles will be different for every council depending on local issues, geographic and council size, physical environment and council skills, functions and financial resources. Taking this into account, this guide aims to give people in councils:

• Good reasons to better integrate NRM into corporate planning and reporting;
• Understanding of the broader NRM context and how councils can benefit from aligning with this;
• Principles and practices for better corporate planning and reporting;
• Options for representing NRM within the corporate planning and reporting process;
• A description of common challenges, and ways to meet them;
• A range of current examples, case studies and good ideas from council practice;
• Tools, information and resources to support each of the above.

2. The Broader Planning Context

What is in this section?

1. An overview of the broader NRM planning context:
   - National Frameworks for NRM
   - NSW State Plan
   - Regional Strategies
   - Catchment Action Plans
   - Other useful policies and plans
2. Benefits of considering these within council corporate planning and reporting
3. Context of changing legislation for corporate planning and reporting in NSW

Natural resource management issues are rarely confined to one local government area. These kinds of issues in particular can benefit from regional, statewide and national efforts to co-ordinate planning, delivery and reporting efforts from all spheres of government.

Within each of these spheres there are a multitude of other plans and strategies which can influence and inform Council's preparation of their corporate plans and reports. By understanding and aligning with the content of these plans, Councils can use them to guide the setting of local priorities.

Local NRM outcomes can also be strengthened through the development of strategic partnerships which may also lead to attracting external support and funding. Aligning with these plans can also ensure that Councils' efforts are not duplicating the role of other agency programs.

2.1 NRM Planning – National, State and Regional

National Frameworks

The Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council, which includes representatives of the Australian Government and all states and territory governments, was established to develop a coordinated approach to issues affecting NRM in Australia. The Council endorsed two national level documents to help set targets, monitor, evaluate and report on natural resource management. These documents are the:

• National Framework for Natural Resource Management Standards and Targets; and
• National Natural Resource Management Monitoring and Evaluation Framework

A set of Resource Condition Indicators was also developed to provide more detail on how to monitor each 'matter for target' set out in the National Framework for Natural Resource Management Standards and Targets.

The NSW State Plan

The NSW State Plan was adopted in 2006 by the NSW Government, and focuses on five areas of activity:

• Rights, respect and responsibility;
• Delivering better services;
• Fairness and opportunity;
• Growing prosperity across NSW; and
• Environment for Living.

The State Plan sets out goals, priorities and targets for each of these five key areas over the next 10 years. Delivery of the State Plan is driven locally by 34 regions across the state, with regional managers across the State Government working within a Regional Co-Ordination Management Group (RCMG) to report and plan on progress and initiatives in each region. Regional delivery plans are intended to be prepared, and annual updates are provided on the progress of State Plan delivery for each region. The components of the State Plan which are relevant to NRM are:

Our Goals:	Our Priorities:	Our Targets:
Securing our Supply of Water and Energy	E1 – A secure and sustainable water supply for all users	• Meet performance standards for service reliability and water quality • Increase water recycling both in Sydney and regional centres • Improve efficiency of water use • Restore water extraction from rivers to sustainable levels
	E2 – A reliable electricity supply with increased use of renewable energy	• Achieve electricity reliability for NSW of 99.98% by 2016 • Achieve 15% renewable energy consumption by 2020
Practical Environmental Solutions	E3 – Cleaner air and progress on greenhouse gas reductions	• Meet national air quality goals in NSW • Cut greenhouse emissions by 60% in 2050
	E4 – Better environmental outcomes for native vegetation, biodiversity, land, rivers and coastal waterways	• Meet NSW Government targets for protection of our natural environment

The E4 targets which cover NRM in the State Plan are as follows:

Biodiversity

1. *By 2015 there is an increase in native vegetation extent and an improvement in native vegetation condition*
2. *By 2015 there is an increase in the number of sustainable populations of a range of native fauna species*
3. *By 2015 there is an increase in the recovery of threatened species, populations and ecological communities*
4. *By 2015 there is a reduction in the impact of invasive species.*

Water

5. *By 2015 there is an improvement in the condition of riverine ecosystems*
6. *6. By 2015 there is an improvement in the ability of groundwater systems to support groundwater dependent ecosystems and designated beneficial uses*
7. *By 2015 there is no decline in the condition of marine waters and ecosystems*
8. *By 2015 there is an improvement in the condition of important wetlands, and the extent of those wetlands is maintained*
9. *By 2015 there is an improvement in the condition of estuaries and coastal lake ecosystems.*

Land

10. *By 2015 there is an improvement in soil condition*
11. *By 2015 there is an increase in the area of land that is managed within its capability*

Community

12. *Natural resource decisions contribute to improving or maintaining economic sustainability and social well-being*
13. *There is an increase in the capacity of natural resource managers to contribute to regionally relevant natural resource management.*

Department of Planning: Regional Strategies

The Department of Planning has prepared regional strategies in high growth areas which describe the future land uses within each region. Each strategy contains population projections, and identifies locations for residential and industrial development. These strategies are being referenced by the Department of Planning in their oversight of the development of Local Environmental Plans, and they also identify key natural resources for protection and management, for example biodiversity and water resources. The regional strategies support the two state plan targets relating to jobs closer to home, and affordable housing.

Catchment Action Plans

Catchment Management Authorities (CMAs) manage NRM at a regional level, and each CMA is responsible for developing a Catchment Action Plan (CAP) in partnership with its community and government agencies. These regional plans are intended to drive and integrate community and government investment and action in NRM. They are a primary mechanism for delivering on the State Plan's Priority E4 targets and to realise the state's aspirational goal of resilient landscapes.

The Natural Resources Commission (NRC) is responsible for auditing the implementation of the whole of community and government CAPs. The NRC is required to report on the effectiveness of CAP implementation in terms of progress in achieving compliance with the state's *Standard for Quality Natural Resource Management* (the Standard) and meeting the state-wide targets.

DoP Regional Strategies have been prepared for:

- Alpine (Snowy Mountains) Region
- Central Coast
- Hunter Region
- Northern Region
  – Far North Coast
  – Mid North Coast
- Southern Region
  – Illawarra
  – South Coast
  – Sydney-Canberra Corridor
- Western NSW

www.planning.nsw.gov.au/plansforaction/whatshappening.asp

Other Useful NRM Policies and Plans

Depending on each NRM issue there are often relevant plans, strategies or policies at a state or federal level which can inform council plans and reports. Some of these are listed in the following table:

NSW State Plan	Sets priorities for government action across NSW public sector response areas. NRM issues addressed at Priority E4, but State Plan needs to be read as a whole.
NSW Biodiversity Strategy 1999-03 2008 Discussion Paper	Identifies and tackles particular threats. Includes goals, guiding principles and defines a "landscape planning model". Revised strategy under preparation1.
NSW Coastal Policy (1997)	Provides for population growth but with an Integrative philosophy based on ESD principles, including NRM. Council's need to show consistency with policy in new LEPs.
State Water Management Outcomes Plan	Overall policy context, targets and strategic outcomes for the development, conservation, management and control of the State's water sources.
NSW Salinity Strategy (2000)	Provides a strategic outline to addressing inland salinity issues. Includes update reports. References the Murray Darling Basin Commission's Basin Salinity Management Strategy.
Regional Strategies	Presented as "State Government's long term plan" for nominated regions. Prepared for 9 regions or subregions to date: Snowy Mountains (Alpine) Region, The Central Coast, The Hunter Region, Far North Coast, Mid North Coast, Southern Region – Illawarra, Southern Region – South Coast, Sydney – Canberra Corridor Region, Western NSW.
NSW Invasive Species Plan 2008-2015	Invasive species is one of the greatest threats to biodiversity and primary production in NSW. The NSW Invasive Species Plan provides actions that aim to prevent and effectively manage the introduction and spread of invasive species so that this significant threat is minimised.
Threatened Species Recovery Plans	Recovery plans focus on threatened species, populations and ecological communities.
Threat Abatement Plans	Threat abatement plans tackle "key threatening processes". All available plans and drafts can be accessed from this DECC website.
Priority Action Statement (PAS)	The PAS is intended to take a more strategic approach to recovery and threat abatement, including improving local council capacity to contribute eg local biodiversity strategies.
Regional biodiversity plans	Regional biodiversity management plans may be developed for certain areas: • Northern Rivers • Western Sydney urban bushland and biodiversity planning
Catchment Action Plans	CMAs develop these to demonstrate how the State NRM targets will be achieved. See CMA websites.

2.2 Using these Plans to Inform Council's Plans and Reports

By aligning the content of Council's planning initiatives to the below higher level regional, state and national plans and frameworks, councils can gain improved NRM outcomes such as aligning resources and activities to maximise outcomes and better access to grant funds:
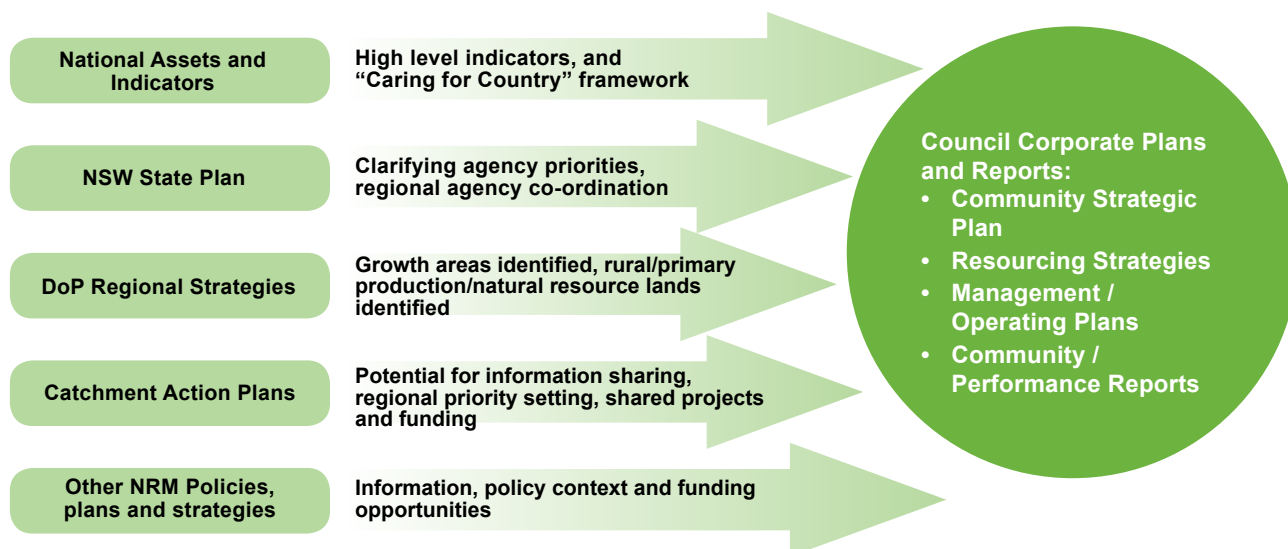
Figure 3: *Regional, State and National plans & frameworks*

2.3 Changing Legislation for Corporate Planning and Reporting

Current Management Planning and Reporting Provisions

The *NSW Local Government Act 1993* has been in force now for over fifteen years, during which time councils have been preparing three year management plans updated annually which outline their principal activities, objectives, means and measures. These management plans have been reported on annually, and a component of the annual report has been an annual State of the Environment Report. These reports were required under the Act to address particular NRM issues, in the pressure-state-response format, with a comprehensive report being prepared every four years. In February 2000 the Department of Local Government prepared the Management Planning for NSW Local Government Guidelines which can be viewed at www.dlg.nsw.gov.au/Files/Information/mplan.pdf.

However in a 2006 review, the existing system was found to have several problems:

• It doesn't encourage councils to take a long-term view;
• It isn't sufficiently flexible to accommodate the varied needs and resources of different councils;
• It is overly prescriptive, encouraging a focus on compliance rather than strategic direction;
• It focuses too heavily on operational matters;
• It doesn't encourage integration with other systems, such as long term
• financial planning, asset management and land use planning; and
• The planning and reporting timeframes don't align.

(Source: DLG Integrated Planning and Reporting Options Paper, November 2006)

Local Government Act 1993:

402. Preparation of draft management plans

403. Contents of draft management plan with respect to council's work and activities

404. Contents of draft management plan with respect to council's revenue policy

405. Public notice of draft management plan

406. Adoption of management plan

407. General manager to report periodically on implementation of management plan

428. Annual Reports

Proposed Integrated Planning and Reporting Reforms

The NSW Department of Local Government has been in recent years undertaking a review of this legislation. A new planning framework has been suggested by the DLG in the following diagram:
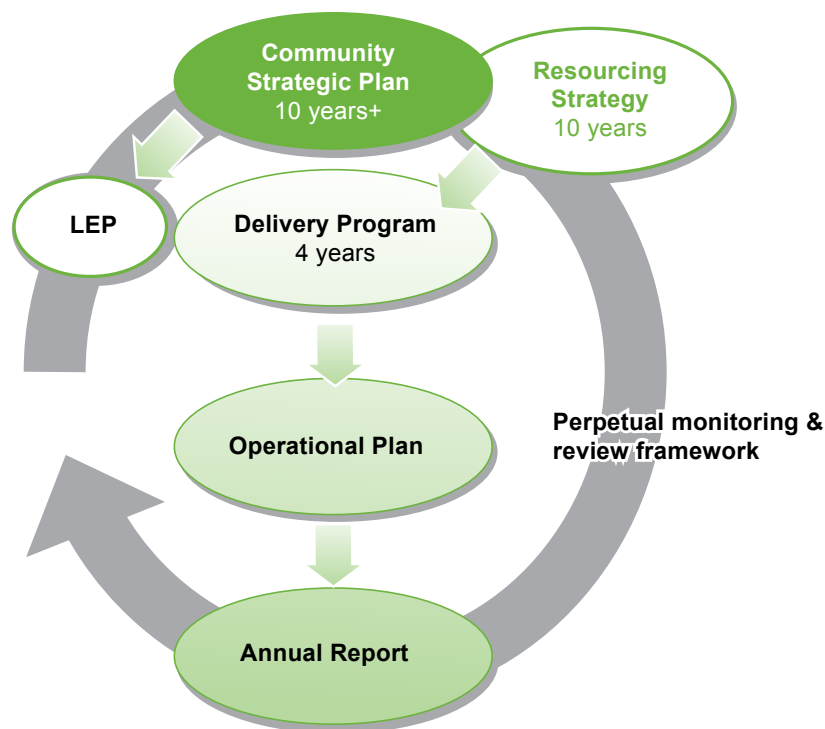
Figure 4: DLG Proposed Integrated Planning and Reporting Reform Framework

At the **time of writing** these guidelines, the DLG's proposed new arrangements for integrated planning and reporting had **not been finalised**. However, the concepts proposed still represent a sound approach for achieving an integrated and long-term strategic planning process.

Under the new arrangements which have not yet been finalised, early indications from the Department of Local Government suggest that Councils might be required to:

- Prepare a Community Strategic Plan spanning a ten year period;
- Prepare complementary minimum long term financial, workforce and asset management plans;
- Develop a four-year 'delivery program' and an annual 'operational plan' with associated performance measures to ensure the community strategic plan is implemented effectively;
- Allocate specific projects, responsibilities, timeframes and budgets to higher level strategies;
- Improve data collection and research to support the planning process; and
- Strengthen annual reporting arrangements.

3. Integrating Corporate Planning and Reporting and NRM

What is in this section?

1. An overview of NRM in council operations

2. An overview of corporate planning and reporting:

   • What is it for?

   • What makes successful corporate planning and reporting?

   • What makes it difficult?

3. How does corporate planning and reporting deliver outcomes and benefits for NRM?

4. Case Study – Lake Macquarie City Council

3.1 NRM in Council Operations

Council has a range of responsibilities for NRM, as defined in the *Local Government Act 1993* **Charter**, which states that councils are obliged:

'*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', to 'have regard to the long term and cumulative effects of its decisions', and 'to ensure that, in the exercise of its regulatory functions, it acts consistently and without bias, particularly where an activity of the council is affected*'.

The principal functions of Local Government in relation to NRM include:

• Management of community lands and 'open space' (playing fields, parks and reserves, bushland);

• Vegetation management (roadside vegetation, noxious weeds);

• Biodiversity and landscape management (threatened species conservation, rehabilitation of degraded sites);

• Flood mitigation and floodplain management;

• Estuary and coastal management;

• Pollution control and environmental management of land, water and air including public health issues);

• Water supply and wastewater (sewerage) management (in country regions);

• On-site wastewater management (inspections, licencing of systems, etc.);

For more information go to the Discussion Paper entitled "**The Role of Local Government in the Sustainable Management of the Natural Resources of NSW"**, prepared in December 2003 by the University of Western Sydney *www.lgsa.org.au/www/ html/1571-nsw-research.asp*

- Land use planning (zoning, LEPs);
- Development and building controls (DCPs; compliance in regard to soil erosion, on-site stormwater management, use of chemicals, etc.); and
- Construction and maintenance of infrastructure (roads, drainage systems, recreation/leisure facilities).

In carrying out these functions Local Government works under many different pieces of legislation (see *Local Government Act 1993* and more recent amendments). The most important in regard to NRM are:

- *Local Government Act 1993* itself, which amongst other aspects requires management planning for community lands, and regular State of Environment reporting;
- *Environmental Planning & Assessment Act 1979*, which controls land use plan making, and guides implementation of plans;
- *Protection of the Environment Operations Act 1997*, which controls pollution discharge through an environment protection licencing system;
- *Contaminated Land Management Act 1997*, which requires investigation of potentially contaminated land and remediation to be undertaken prior to development approval;
- *Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995*, which requires an assessment of the potential impact of development on threatened/vulnerable species and endangered ecological communities to be undertaken prior to approval; and
- *Noxious Weeds Act 1993*, which permits inspections for noxious weeds to be undertaken on private land and remedial works to be required where necessary.

Councils have been increasingly active in NRM for several decades, and in summary the activities and functions commonly undertaken in local government operations are:

- **Research** – understanding the problem
- **Education** – explaining the problem
- **Enforcement** – reinforcing the message
- **Infrastructure** – building solutions
- **Incentives** – persuading people to change
- **Working together** – building relationships and alliances
- **Good communication** – every step of the way
- **Monitoring & evaluation** – what we have achieved

There are some inherent challenges for local governments in tackling NRM issues. NRM issues are complex and interrelated, and it is difficult to address one problem at a time. Resources are likely to be insufficient, and problems are very often larger than one local area. Responsibilities are likely to be splintered between multiple agencies, each of whom will probably have their own boundaries and processes which councils must understand and transcend before any real co-operation can occur. This guideline aims to suggest ways in which the corporate planning and reporting process can tackle some of these challenges.

Councils are highly complex organisations, and the NRM functions which they undertake are often based on:

- Their **capacity** to respond, in staff and dollars;
- The **funding** they can secure from other organisations;
- **History** – what they have provided in the past;
- **Community** demands and expectations;
- Local and **geographic** factors; and
- **Individuals** who have been a catalyst for change – councillors, community representatives, managers or staff members.

3.2 Corporate Planning and Reporting Overview

The Purpose of Corporate Planning and Reporting

The future of local government depends largely on its capacity to anticipate, challenge and respond to the forces that will shape our communities in the coming years. It is a challenge that faces all levels of government in Australia, as our society continues to change – the need to respond in measured, strategic and relevant ways, the need for leadership, and the need for vision (Department of Local Government, 2006).

The purpose of corporate planning and reporting is to embed vision and leadership within an organisation. A strategic approach to corporate planning:

- Involves conceptual and reflective thinking which focuses on the longer term, bigger priority issues, sometimes called a "helicopter perspective";
- Changes the direction of an organisation so that ideals can be realised;
- Positions an organisation to meet an uncertain future;
- Is motivated by a concern about current directions and their implications, threats that loom on the horizon, and challenges to current practices and activities;
- Is used to focus action, and to give an organisation a new or renewed sense of purpose;
- Is informed by examining important trends, data and information, then backed up by plans and actions to put purpose into practice;
- Focuses on outcomes and increased value to stakeholders; and
- Is original, logical, flexible and informed.

Experience suggests that the following factors are necessary within a Council before the corporate planning and reporting process can be effective:
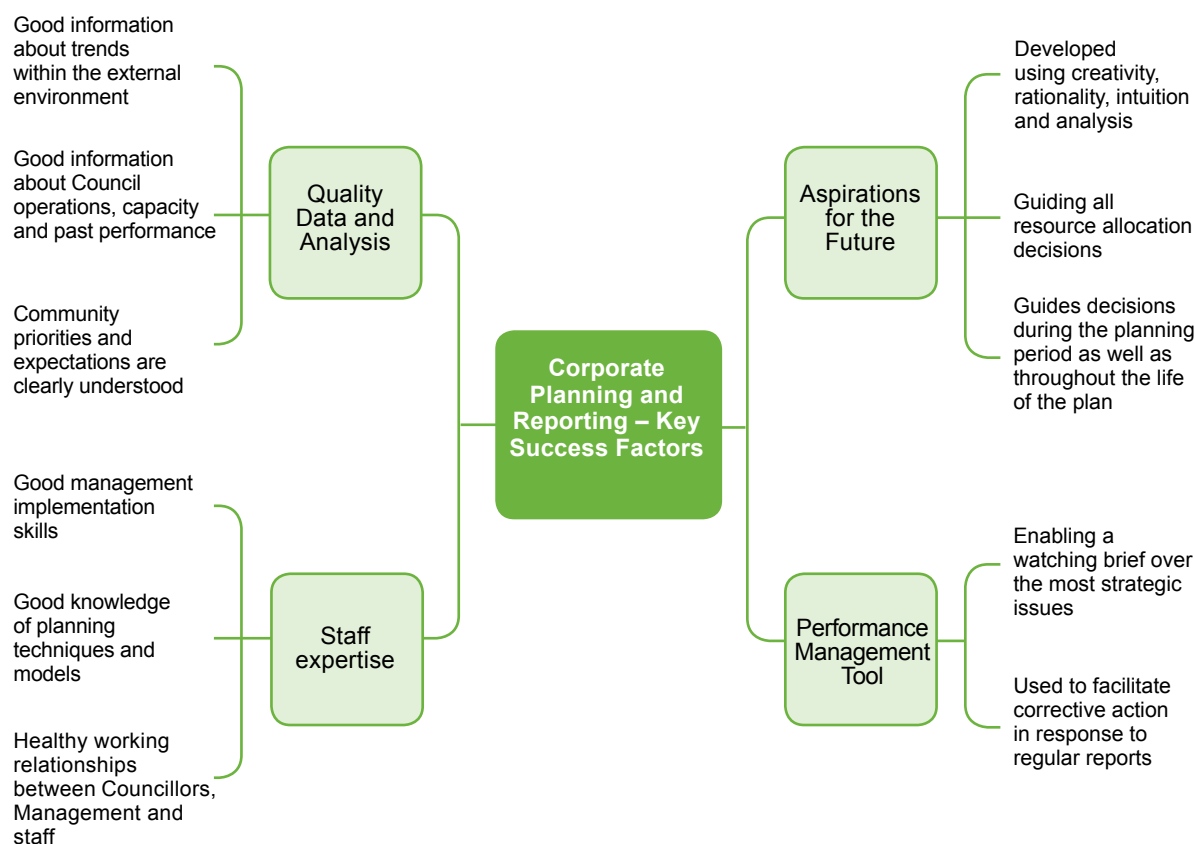
Figure 5: *Corporate Planning and Reporting – Key Success Factors*

Why is this often difficult?

The art of developing strategy originated as a military concept, and theories of strategic planning were developed further within the private sector environment. However, there are some unique factors within local government which ensure that the practice is often challenging and difficult:

1.	**Political Accountability**	Committing to long-term targets may take away political powers of decision-makers, and reduce an organisation's flexibility to change direction;
2.	**Time Horizons**	The planning and budgeting process is slow, and environmental change might negate earlier decisions. The timing of the electoral cycle is also a consideration, and may work against efforts over the longer term;
3.	**Local Focus**	Most decisions within a council apply tightly to their own geographic boundaries, but strategic issues are often broader than this, with councils often required to solve regional issues to make local gains;
4.	**Many Different Functions**	Due to the number of different services and functions of councils, senior staff and elected representatives need to familiarise themselves with strategic challenges and options relating to a range of fields;
5.	**Forecasting**	In the same way the complexity of issues makes predicting the future difficult and probably inaccurate;
6.	**Choosing between Objectives**	The need for ranking priorities and allocating resources between such diverse services is unique to the corporate planning process of local government. The complexity combined with a lack of information tends to result in decisions made on a historic rather than strategic basis;
7.	**Setting Targets**	Numerical targets work well when profit is the goal, but local community issues tend to be more complex and longer term. High ideals are difficult to measure and evaluate;
8.	**Monitoring Performance**	Monitoring the progress of plans should be a catalyst for making improvements, and most councils monitor the performance of their plans. However understanding and correcting deviations from an original course is more difficult;
9.	**Strategic Skills**	Developing a good plan requires conceptual, analytical, motivational and strategic leadership skills, which can be in short supply; and
10.	**Lack of Control**	A strategic approach implies an ability to control outcomes, however Councils must comply with many legislative requirements, and they also have limited control over their own finances.

Cascading and Integration

There are two concepts which help to ensure that the multitude of plans within a council are organised, efficient and achieving the higher level visions:

- Cascading

  means that anything contained in your higher level plans is carried through in all your lower level plans.

  Every aspiration or goal or objective is followed through with action and resources.

  Nothing in your lower level plans exists which is not specifically achieving part of the higher level vision.

- Integration

  means that no plan conflicts with any other plan.

  There is no overlap, duplication or inconsistency within the multitude of council plans.

  Each plan works with the others to achieve the overarching vision.

3.3 Corporate Planning and Reporting – Benefits and Outcomes for NRM

The advantage of integrating NRM into corporate planning and reporting is that NRM issues can be addressed in the very highest level of Council plan, and that implementation is then adequately managed, co-ordinated, resourced, implemented and monitored across the whole of council's operations.

By considering each of the major corporate planning and reporting vehicles in councils, then benefits and outcomes can be gained by the participation and inclusion of NRM at every level.

Community Strategic Plans

Not currently required under legislation, these plans are being promoted as good practice by the Department of Local Government and are now being prepared by many councils across NSW. Community Strategic Plans have a longer timeframe, are often prepared through a more extensive community engagement process, and cover issues of strategic importance for the whole local government area. By actively ensuring the consideration of NRM during the development of a longer term Community Strategic Plan, the outcomes can include:

- Better and wider understanding of community NRM priorities through dialogue and engagement;
- Participating in a more thorough research and information gathering process;
- Gaining community support for NRM;
- Gaining political support in response to expressed community NRM priorities;
- Addressing longer term issues through a medium-long term action plan;
- Setting up a strategic framework which guides Council action planning and resource allocation to NRM;
- Gaining a whole-of-Council commitment to NRM; and
- Gaining agency support for NRM goals and initiatives outside the scope of Council activity.

The following is a quote from the **Blue Mountains Council Vision:**

"In 2025 we live in vibrant, healthy communities. Our towns and villages are distinctive and contained. We have maintained the bush between our settlements and protected the World Heritage environment that surrounds us… We use our available resources wisely, ensuring their fair distribution… The Blue Mountains is recognised nationally and internationally as a centre of excellence for learning about sustainable living and sustainable communities". *www. sustainablebluemountains. net.au/our-city-vision/ introduction-to-the-blue- mountains-city-vision/*

Longer Term Resourcing Strategies

In order to be realistic about available resources to implement community visions and aspirations, councils need to prepare longer term 4-10 year resourcing strategies which cover longer term budgeting, workforce planning and asset management planning. By actively ensuring the consideration of NRM during the development of longer term resourcing strategies, the outcomes can include:

• Identifying and understanding important future trends and issues about available resources;

• Gaining more secure and longer term income sources for NRM efforts;

• Accessing funding sources for NRM which require longer term planning and legislative compliance such as levies, developer contributions, or fees and charges;

• Targeting NRM skills planning and development for Councillors, managers and staff;

• Establishing individual performance reporting and management systems which ensure delivery of Council NRM plans;

• Harnessing the efforts of community volunteers; and

• Including natural assets into Council asset management systems.

Management and Operating Plans

Specific targets, strategies and action plans to achieve community aspirations are fully defined in lower level whole-of-council plans, called Management Plans in the current system or Delivery and Operating Plans in the proposed new system. By actively ensuring the consideration of NRM in Management and Operating Plans, the outcomes can include:

• Describing and defining a public commitment to specific NRM goals, projects and initiatives;

• Internal decision-making process which facilitates an ongoing commitment to NRM functions, actions and projects;

• Setting clear targets for achievement of NRM objectives over the council term;

• Ensuring that adequate and specific resources are made available;

• Outlining the changes in natural resource condition which will result from council activities; and

• Building professional networks and capacity for NRM beyond those units with direct responsibilities.

Monitoring and Reporting

The corporate reporting framework in NSW Councils includes an Annual Report, a State of the Environment Report, and quarterly performance reports. By elevating the importance of NRM in preparing these reports then the outcomes can include:

• Collecting and collating data on changes in the condition of natural resources and the extent to which objectives and targets are being met;

• A broader and wider understanding across council of the NRM pressures and issues; and

• Quarterly, annual and 'end of term' reports which ensure the all of council is held accountable to achieving those objectives and targets.

The following case study gives a brief overview of how a council has integrated a particular NRM issue into its operations. Further details are provided throughout the Guideline on how to achieve this integration.

The following is a quote from the **Queanbeyan City Council Management Plan**:

"A Draft Management Plan and Budget is produced annually by Queanbeyan City Council. This Plan sets out the Council's significant activities for the Financial Year and how these will be funded (the Budget). Council is required to consult with the Community to seek their views on the proposed activities. Once Council has heard submissions from the Public it then adopts the Management Plan."

www.qcc.nsw.gov.au/page aspx?page=614

3.4 Case Study: Lake Macquarie City Council

Case Study

Lake Macquarie City Council

The Lake Macquarie City Council corporate planning and reporting framework is based on the integrated planning framework proposed by the Department of Local Government. It aligns organisational planning, processes and performance to the Lake Macquarie Community Plan. The framework consists of the following:

• **Community Engagement** – one of the underpinning principles of the various strategic and operational documents comprising the planning framework

• **Lifestyle 2020: A Strategy for our Future** – sets the direction for future land use planning for the LGA

• **10 Year Community Plan** – outlines short, medium and long term priorities, directions, strategic objectives and progress indicators

• **Four Year Delivery Program** – describes resourcing strategies required to achieve the priorities and strategic objectives outlined in the ten year plan (currently being developed)

• **Annual Operational Plan and Budget** – a financial and resource allocation plan

   Quarterly Review – a succinct review of performance against progress indicators

• **Annual Report** – reports on Council's objectives, operations and performance for the financial year.

The framework is demonstrated in the following diagram:

This framework contains all of the elements as proposed by the DLG's Integrated Planning and Reporting Reforms.

Informed by community and stakeholder **engagement**, each of the plans **cascade** down from the **aspirational** longer term plans to the shorter term **concrete** actions and measures.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

| Lifestyle 2020 | → | 10 Year Community Plan | → | 4 Year Delivery Program |
| Annual Report | ← | Quarterly Reviews | ← | Annual Operational Plan & Budget |

Lake and Water Quality has been chosen in this case study as a key NRM issue for this Council. Inclusion of this issue at each of the planning levels demonstrates the Council's commitment to achieving better NRM.

The information below demonstrates how the priorities for improved water quality for the lake and catchment are tracked through the various corporate plans and reports – from the Lake Macquarie Community Plan through to the Annual Report.

3. Integrating Corporate Planning and Reporting and NRM

Lake Macquarie City Council Vision

The community plan contains a vision for the future which addresses five key points: community participation, balanced economic growth, cultural diversity, community spirit and wellbeing and the environment. The vision for the environment is:

"Be a place where the environment will be protected and enhanced and where people and native flora and fauna will co-exist in harmony."

Community Strategic Plan

Lake Macquarie Community Plan 2008 – 2018

This **Community Strategic Plan** specifies a general policy commitment as well as some key directions, strategic objectives and performance indicators.

The Council has adopted a ten year Community Strategic Plan which includes provisions for NRM including:

Focus Area 1 – Caring for the Environment
• Objective: Provide integrated environmental management, strategic planning outcomes and waste management to enhance and sustain the natural, social, cultural and built environment and contribute to an equitable regional and global ecological footprint.

In the plan this will be achieved by a number of actions, including:
• Identifying and quantifying threats to and from the environment;
• Developing and implementing policies and strategies to maintain and enhance the health of the city's terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems; and
• Improving lake and catchment water quality.

Going into further detail, Focus Area 1 has six key priorities, including:
Priority 1.5 – The Lake
Direction:
• Improve water quality for the lake and catchment
• Empower local community to protect and enhance the lake, waterways and catchments.

Strategic objectives:
• *Year 1* – streambank and catchment rehabilitation works; bush regeneration works; install water quality improvement devices in priority areas; Lake foreshore improvement works; community education and empowerment programs; monitoring of critical estuarine habitats
• *Years 2 to 5* – determine future of Office of the Lake Macquarie and Catchment Co-ordinator; convergent evolution and fusion of lake and ecosystem enhancement priorities
• Years 6 to 10 – convergent evolution and fusion of lake and ecosystem enhancement priorities.

Indicators:
• Stabilisation and improvement of key water quality indicators
• Measure community awareness and action
• Regeneration and ecosystem enhancement works
• Water conservation and quality outcomes.

Lifestyle 2020

This strategy which sets the direction for future land-use planning contains five strategic directions, including:

5.1 – A City responsive to its environment –

> *The Lake Macquarie area is recognised and appreciated by the community and visitors to the City as a place of significant natural assets."*

Each of these strategic directions contains specific strategies, including:

"*Natural assets will be protected by ensuring development:*

* *Protects and enhances the City's biodiversity*
* *Protects and enhances the aquatic ecology and quality of ground and surface water, including all wetlands, waterways, coastal beaches and the Lake*
* *Maximises opportunities for environmental enhancement*
* Ensures that the physical and natural environment is capable of sustaining development
* Minimises air pollution
* Promotes the efficient use of renewable resources."

Lake Macquarie Management Plan 2008/09

The Management Plan contains more specific and short term actions which the Council will undertake, resource and monitor including:

Priority 1.5 – The Lake

What we will do this year:

* *Streambank and catchment rehabilitation and improvement works*
* *Bush regeneration works in priority catchment areas*
* *Install water quality improvement devices in priority areas*
* *Lake foreshore improvement works*
* *Community education and empowerment programs*
* *Monitoring of critical estuarine habitats.*

Performance measures:

* *Complete three water quality improvement projects by June 2009*
* *Complete three lake foreshore improvement works in priority areas*
* *Undertake two major environmental awareness campaigns*
* *Monitor water quality in up to 25 nominated swimming sites*
* *Maintain stormwater quality improvement devices in accordance with maintenance agreements at least 90% of the time*
* *Sweep streets and pedestrian areas in the main CBDs five times per week*
* *Sweep streets in the suburban business areas three times per week.*

This Management Plan specifies **key activities** of the Council, as well as some specific **performance measures** against which the Council will be publicly held to account.

Annual Report

This Annual Report takes the actions specified within the previous Management Plan and reports on whether the Council has **fulfilled their commitments**.

State of the Environment Report

The State of the Environment Report provides scope to **describe the NRM issues** in more detail, and to include resource condition monitoring information as well as to **report on Council's performance**.

Issues included in this report are then **actioned** and **resourced** through council's planning and budgeting process.

Annual Report – 2006/07

Principal Activity – Lake and Coastline Management

Performance targets:

- *Install three stormwater quality improvement devices – achieved*
- *Complete Upper Flaggy Creek remediation project – achieved*
- *Investigate and trial the installation of permanent litter baskets in the Winding Creek catchment – achieved*
- *Investigate opportunities for using recycled water for irrigation and public toilet facilities – achieved*
- *Monitor water quality in up to 25 nominated swimming sites – achieved*
- *Maintain stormwater quality improvement devices in accordance with maintenance agreements at least 90% of the time – achieved*
- *Sweep the streets in the main CBDs five times per week – achieved*
- *Sweep the streets in suburban business areas three times per week – achieved.*

State of the Environment Report – 2007/08

Coasts and Estuaries – At a Glance

State – Improving:

- *The health of Lake Macquarie remains an issue of high community concern. Analysis of water quality and seagrass coverage shows some signs of improvement.*

Pressure – Increasing:

- *The pressures of urbanisation, industry and recreational use of the lake and coastline continue to increase*
- *The impacts of climate change will have an impact on the stability and functioning of coasts, estuaries and foreshores.*

Response – Good:

- *Actions of the Council, the Office of Lake Macquarie and Catchment Co-ordinator and the community are proving effective at arresting the historic decline in lake health, with improvements in recent years.*

4. Community Strategic Plans

What is in this section?

1. A description of Community Strategic Plans – features and benefits

2. What makes a good information and research process?

   a. Sources and ideas for good background research
   b. Principles and practical ideas for community engagement
   c. Benefits of working with other agencies
   d. Ideas for selecting key strategic NRM issues

3. Tips and examples for incorporating NRM into visions, objectives, strategies and measures

4. Case Study – Randwick City Council

One of the key elements of the NSW Department of Local Government Integrated Planning and Reporting reforms is the requirement for all Councils to produce a Community Strategic Plan covering at least the next 10 years. Many Councils are already producing plans along the lines proposed even without a legislative imperative, because they can be a useful vehicle which assists them to formulate strategic directions and priorities, and communicate them to the community:

Community	✓ Informed by community input and participation ✓ Covering all aspects of community life, not just existing Council functions ✓ Readable and interesting to the community
Strategic	✓ Looking to the medium and long term future, stretching over at least three if not more electoral cycles ✓ Focused on issues of most relevance and importance to the local community and environment
Plan	✓ Council's public commitment to future directions ✓ Containing clear aspirations, goals and targets for the future ✓ Outlining a framework which leads on to more detailed action plans

"*The term **Community Strategic Plan** has been used to refer to the strategic plan, to reinforce the view that it is a **plan for the community**, rather than just the council. There is no intention to mandate what councils should call their plan.*"

"*However, all plans (might) include **four mandatory themes**: Social;*

Environmental; Economic; and Governance, which must be addressed in some way."

Quote from 2006 paper **Planning a Sustainable Future – Integrated Planning and Reporting for NSW Councils** at *www.dlg. nsw.gov.au/Files/Information/ Integrated%20Planning.pdf*

The process of preparing a Community Strategic Plan can also be highly beneficial in terms of a more systematic approach to NRM. Previously the State of the Environment Report was the flagship document for NRM, however despite the development and communication of quality information about pressures on the natural environment, these reports often did not effectively inform council management plans.

The opportunity presented by the Community Strategic Plan is to develop a forward looking and more influential document which describes NRM aspirations, goals and targets that will be translated into a 4-year Delivery Program and then shorter term Management or Operating plans. The proposed new system for annual reporting will also see council SOE reports link directly back to objectives within the Community Strategic Plan, removing previous requirements to report on issues not necessarily of concern for the local community.

Using Community Strategic Planning to achieve NRM outcomes

- Thorough background research into longer term NRM issues
- Engagement with the Community
- Partnerships with Other Agencies
- Vision, objectives and strategies describing a commitment to the "environment" or the "natural environment"
- Specific and measurable long term targets
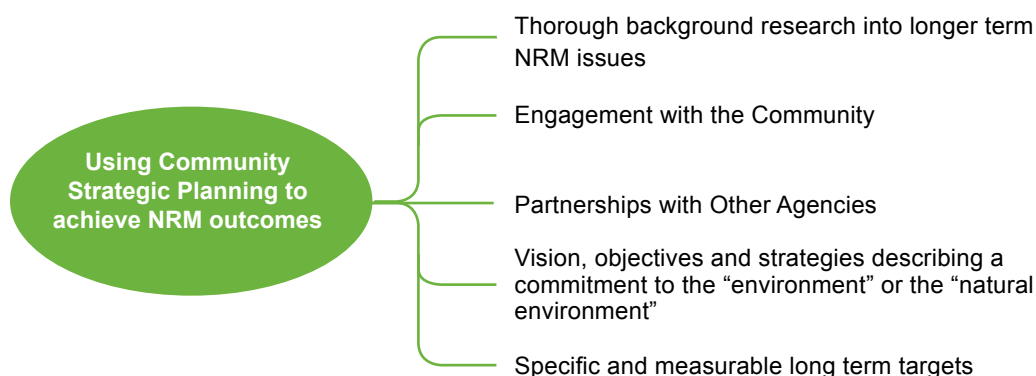
4.1 Conducting Background Research

Rather than beginning a community engagement and plan development process with a blank slate, most Councils would choose first to conduct a thorough background research process. There are a multitude of sources of information which might be relevant for preparing to address NRM issues within a Community Strategic Plan, and they might include but not be limited to:

• National strategies and policies;

• NSW State Plan;

• Regional Strategies (if relevant);

• local Catchment Action Plan;

• previous State of the Environment and Annual Reports;

• available community survey information;

• outcomes of Council's recent community engagement activities; and

• any of Council plans, strategies and studies with relevance to NRM or Land Use planning.

Case Study

Randwick City Plan: Environment Background Paper

In the development of the Randwick City Plan, a thorough consultation and research process was undertaken and documented in a series of background papers which are available on the Council website. One of these background papers related specifically to environmental issues, and the following quote comes from the council website:

"In implementing the Randwick City Plan, Randwick City Council is committed to achieving the directions that are within Council's control and that Council is responsible for, and to advocate on the community's behalf. We developed the five background papers that accompany the City Plan after we researched and consulted with the community, government agencies and Council, from 2000 onwards.

"In preparing the background papers, our aim was to identify and explore the key issues associated with each of the five themes. Each background paper contains directions in which we outline the position and approach we will adopt to address the issues over the next 20 years. We used this framework to develop the actions we set out in the City Plan in response to the key issues identified.

"'**Background Paper 5: Looking After Our Environment'** – In this background paper, we give an overview of Randwick City's local and regional natural environment and recreational context. We also:

- Discuss key national and international trends that might have implications for our local natural environment and recreation areas;
- Summarise our community's demographic characteristics and anticipated trends;
- Summarise Council's and the State Government's key responsibilities and requirements;
- Discuss the major issues related to the natural environment and recreation in Randwick City, including issues identified during the consultations that took place in 2000 to 2004; and
- Present a series of key directions in which we outline Council's approach to planning in relation to the natural environment and recreation."

(Source: www.randwick.nsw.gov.au/)

By conducting a thorough information-gathering process prior to engaging with the community, the Randwick City Council ensured that **community views** were informed by a good **understanding of NRM issues** within the local government area.

This paper covered five topics which framed and informed the community debate:

- **trends**
- **demographics**
- **responsibilities**
- **nrm issues**
- **council directions**

4. Community Strategic Plans

4.2 Engaging with the Local Community

A Community Strategic Plan will be more credible if it is informed by a community engagement process which aims to check that the longer term vision for the local government areas has been developed in a partnership between council and the community. The proposed new system includes the need for councils to develop and implement a Community Engagement Strategy.

Consideration of the NRM issues with the community is likely to be termed the "environment" component, or even developed as a "sustainability" component to the plan. A separate community engagement process to consider these issues has its advantages and disadvantages:

NRM engagement separately or whole-of-Council?	Community Engagement for the CSP covering NRM issues separately	Community Engagement for the CSP covering NRM issues and all other relevant issues
Advantages	• Process can focus on NRM issues; • Invitations can target specific environment groups or sympathetic community members; and • Content can offer more detailed coverage of NRM.	• May be a better resourced process; • Might demonstrate community priority for NRM over other issues; or • Opportunities to work with other Council staff to build a shared response.
It would be important to…	• Provide good information on outcomes to other areas of Council; and • Demonstrate an inclusive and representative approach.	• Ensure that thorough background information about NRM is available; • Anticipate and manage any conflicting opinions or perspectives; and • Design opportunities through the process to focus on NRM specifically.

Community Engagement Toolkits are readily available on the internet, and provide a good range of information and guidance on how to conduct positive community engagement processes. To access these, a web search will reveal a range of resources:

Web Search – Try a couple of these words:
Community – Consultation – Engagement-
Participation – Local-Government-
Toolkit – Policy – Manual

For example, the **Liverpool City Council** Community Engagement Toolkit offers the following ten steps in conducting community engagement:

1. Inform the community
2. Consult before decision-making
3. Don't over-consult
4. Be upfront and open
5. Ongoing communication
6. We are not always the experts
7. Provide feedback
8. Evaluate
9. Core part of Council's role
10. Be representative

(Liverpool City Council – Community Engagement Tool Kit
www.liverpool.nsw.gov.au/haveyoursay/communityengagementtoolkit.htm)

The following case studies are presented using the words of each of the Councils, and describe a range of community engagement processes which lead to the preparation of their Community Strategic Plans. The process that each Council used was designed and shaped to suit their own local communities, and the techniques used throughout the process have been highlighted:

Case Study

The Hills Shire Council – "Hills 2026"

- **Visioning Questionnaire** used with Targeted and Inter-Agency Forums, staff and one-on-one interviews with community members. Targeted Forums included business leaders, Service Clubs, seniors, schools, and Scouts.

- **Photographic Competition** was conducted to encourage creative expression of what is important to our residents. The subject was "Your Picture of the Future".

- "**Big Postcards Project'** was conducted in conjunction with Cultural Development to identify what was important about 'our place'. Schools and community groups created large posterboards that creatively communicated what is important to them.

- **'Postcards from the Future'** Primary School activity to encourage year three and four students to describe what they see for the future of the Shire. They described the environment, transport, people and buildings in the year 2026.

- A **Community Summit** was held to further explore the issues raised through Stage 2 of the project and establish clearer sense of expectations from the community. Facilitated discussions and 'Vision Hats' were used to describe visions for the future and council and community roles.

- **Infrastructure Interagency Forum** – transport was identified as the largest issue in the Baulkham Hills local area. In response to this, a forum was held with relevant stakeholders to explore strategies for this issue and other infrastructure issues in the Shire.

- **Hills 2026** – Looking Towards the Future Civic Event – The Community Strategic Direction launched by the Mayor at an event aimed at communicating back to the community what we have heard. This is an opportunity to view the 'vision document' and artworks and pictures from the engagement process.

(Source: UTS Centre for Local Government – "Just Communities" Case Study,
prepared by Michelle Coleman – The Hills Shire Council 2008)

The Hills Shire Council process was impressive because of the **diversity of methods** they used to target different sectors of their community:

- Questionnaires
- Forums
- Schools
- Inter-agency involvement
- Pictures, photos, postcards
- Civic Summit
- Vision document
- Mayoral involvement

www.thehills.nsw.gov.au/
Hills-2026.html

The Sutherland Shire Council process encompassed a **level of resourcing** which enabled a broad **cross-section of the community** to be involved:

- Across a **range of locations**
- **Different methods** eg workshops and surveys
- **Number of residents** involved – over 3,000
- **Sectors of the community** targeted eg young people
- Process was **repeated over time**

Case Study

Sutherland Shire Council: Our Shire, Our Future: Guide for Shaping the Future to 2030

In updating the Plan which was first prepared in 1999, the Council went back to the community to find out if the vision and directions were still relevant. Two rounds of workshops were conducted at 16 locations throughout the Shire. The first round canvassed broad issues that participants saw as being important into the future. The second round of workshops then examined those issues to develop strategies to address them. In addition two major surveys were conducted to determine community priorities and examine the agreement with strategies suggested in workshops.

Altogether over 3,000 residents and community members had some input into the development of this updated plan. These represent a broad cross section of the community. Importantly young people aged 18 and under were specifically consulted about their desires for the future.

Case Study

Orange 2020 – Community Views

A series of Orange 2020 workshops were held, and attended by over 250 people. These included 8 community workshops, as well as workshops with the Youth Council, Aboriginal Women's Group, Councillors and Sports Facility Reference Group.

Orange City Council officers and Councillors facilitated the workshops, and a consultant was then retained to summarise the process and write a report which then evolved into the *Orange 2020 – Expressed Community Views report*.

4.3   Working with Other Agencies

By their nature NRM issues are ongoing, and require co-operative approach from all relevant agencies. A Community Strategic Plan can be a useful vehicle to develop relationships with other agencies:
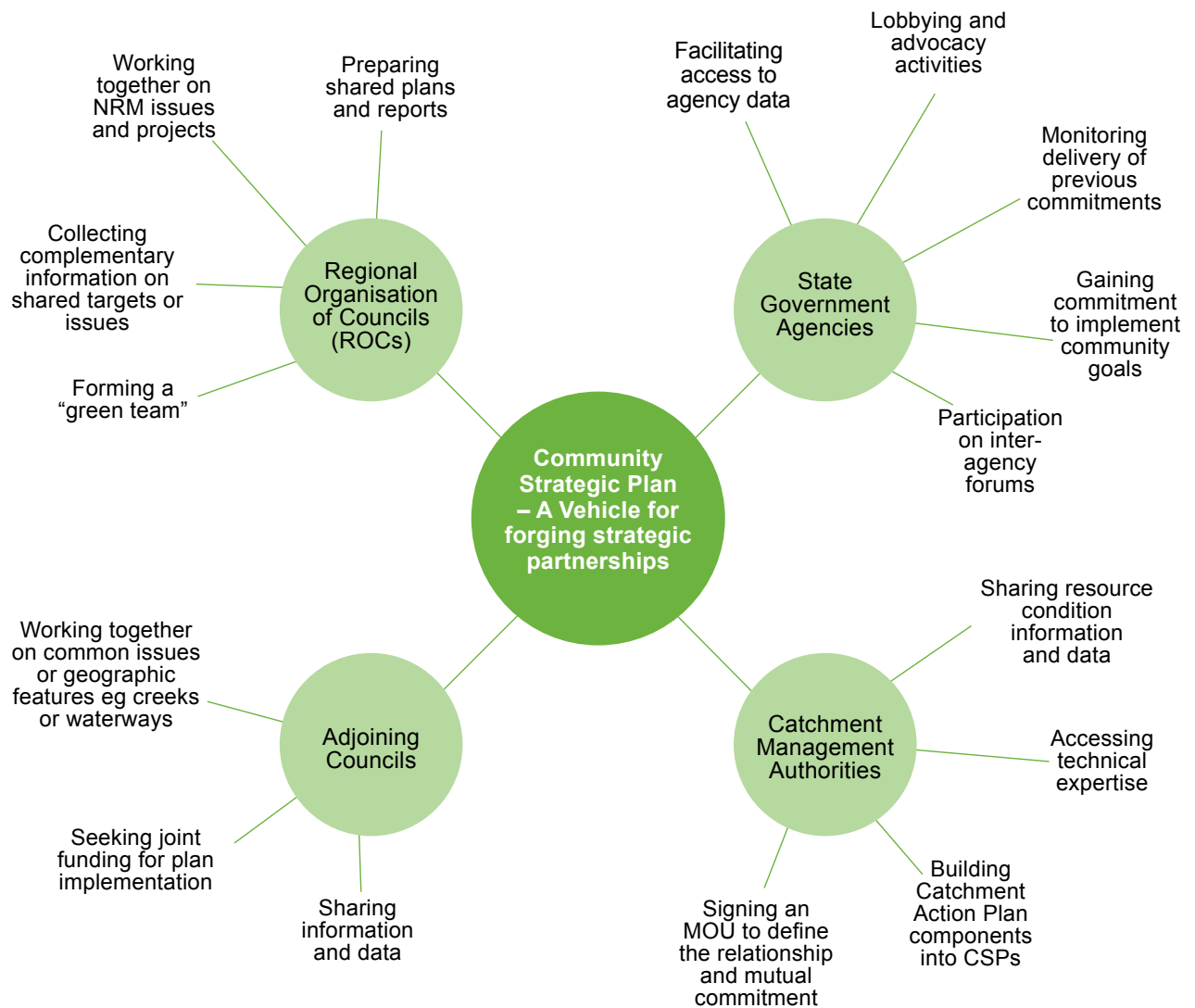
Figure 6: Community Strategic Plan as a tool for forging strategic partnerships.

4.4 Defining, Scoping and Shaping NRM Issues

Within the Community Strategic Plan Councils will need to focus on only the key strategic NRM issues. This process will sometimes be difficult, as there are often a multitude of NRM issues that could be tackled. The following criteria were developed through the **Port Stephens Council** Environmental Management Plan (2000), and were designed to assist the Council in determining what level of priority to give each of the issues including:

• What evidence is there – either anecdotal or scientific – demonstrating that there is a significant issue of strategic concern?

• Is there sustained or widespread community concern about the issue?

• Does Council have a legal responsibility in this area?

• Can Council make a significant difference to the issue?

• In addressing this issue, would Council be duplicating previous work, existing programmes or other authority's responsibilities?

• Is the issue likely to become a dangerous or expensive problem for the community or Council if it is not addressed?

• If the issue is not addressed, will there be irreversible environmental damage?

• What kind and level of Council resources would be required? How does this compare with the benefits that could be achieved?

• Would this issue require a one-off or an ongoing commitment from Council?

(Source: Port Stephens Council Environmental Management Plan 2000)

In scoping the NRM issues these criteria were useful in balancing community opinion with other considerations which are relevant to Council. Other factors important in scoping NRM issues include the content of National, State and Regional priorities and plans, as well as the consideration of local and broader health, social and economic issues.

4. Community Strategic Plans

4.5 NRM in Visions, Objectives, Strategies

Under the new proposed system a Community Strategic Plan may need to contain a community vision statement, a series of strategic objectives for the community and strategies for each objective. A vision statement can be an effective and descriptive motivational tool to describe a commitment and aspiration to achieve NRM outcomes. Objectives and strategies provide levels of information and detail which support the implementation of the vision statement. The terms "environment" or "natural" are most commonly used in aspirational statements like visions or objectives, and language is most engaging when the statement is written as it might be spoken. A selection of strategies is important to ensure that activities and available resources can best address the chosen NRM issue. The following statements are inspiring, specific and descriptive:

Fairfield City Council – **Vision for the City**	*A clean, green city with restored waterways, cleaner air and a wide range of open spaces that support increased biodiversity as well as recreation opportunities*
Clarence Valley Vision 2020 – **Ecology Objective**	*Our intention is to protect and maintain a robust, healthy natural environment, and visually diverse natural landscape, including the rivers, wetlands, forests, floodplain and coastline, and ecological values in our settlement areas, actively protected and cared for by our whole community, supported by effective resources and environmental education.*
Sutherland Shire Council – Our Shire: Our Future – Our Guide to Shaping the Shire to 2030 – **Key Direction**	*Reduced greenhouse emissions and better air quality*
Wagga Wagga City Council – Community Strategic Plan: Our City, Our Tomorrow 2008-2018 – **Environmental Goals**	*An integrated approach to water resource management* *A sustainable built and natural environment* *Sustainable management of natural resources* *Promote environmental sustainability*
Kempsey Shire Council – Our 20 Year Vision – **Goal One**	*To facilitate ecologically and economic sustainable development in the Shire*

Vision Statement → Objectives → Strategies → Measures

4.6 Specific, Measurable and Realistic Targets

While a long term plan by its nature is quite general, a Community Strategic Plan still needs to have concrete measures which ensure that the plan in anchored in reality, and that its progress can be monitored and reported to council and the community. The content of the Community Strategic Plan should be specific enough to guide the preparation of delivery plans and even position descriptions and performance contracts at lower levels of Council's planning hierarchy.

The following might be some concrete and realistic kinds of actions which Council might put into their Community Strategic Plans:

• Clear descriptions of Council's key responses
• Describing partnerships in achieving the actions
• Some detail about Council programs
• Naming key projects
• Numeric and measurable targets
• Resource condition targets
• Targets for council's own operations

Case Study

Randwick City Plan: The Natural Environment

The following is an excerpt from the Randwick City Plan, a twenty year Community Strategic Plan which contains five key elements including one about the Natural Environment. Presented below are all the Key Directions and Action from the environmental section of the plan:

Key Directions	Actions
10a. Council is a leader in fostering environmentally sustainable practices	• Expand the 'Sustaining our City' Programme • Provide education, information and opportunities to participate in sustainability and permaculture initiatives • Partnerships with local businesses, key organisations and community groups are expanded to deliver sustainability solution
10b. Environmental risks and impacts are strategically managed	• Develop and implement policies, programmes and strategies to manage environmental risks and impacts
10c. Land use planning and management enhances and protects biodiversity and natural heritage	• Expand Bush care, pocket park, native haven and bush regeneration programmes in all Council managed bushland and encourage other landholders to participate • Prepare and implement a Biodiversity Strategy • The protection and enhancement of biodiversity is facilitated through partnerships with the community • Create corridors throughout the City, linking and enhancing local native flora and fauna habitats

Clear descriptions of Council's key responses

Describing partnerships in achieving the actions

Some detail about Council programs

Naming key projects

10d. Sustainable alternative waste technologies and environmentally sound collection systems are identified and implemented. **10e.** Our community is encouraged to implement waste minimisation strategies.	• 66% of the City's waste will be diverted from land fill by 2014 • No untreated waste to be sent to landfill by 2020 • Waste to Resource initiatives are implemented	*Numeric and measurable targets*
10f. A total water cycle management approach including water conservation, reuse and water quality improvements is adopted.	• Council to increase water saving initiatives across our buildings and all areas of operation • Quality of freshwater and saltwater is improved • Work with our community and other key stakeholders to reduce potable water demand	*Resource condition targets*
10g. Greenhouse gas emissions are reduced 10h. Local air quality is improved	• Council buildings to have zero net greenhouse gas emissions by 2025 • Work with our community and local businesses to reduce air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions	*Targets for council's own operations*

4. Community Strategic Plans

5. Resource Planning for NRM

What is in this section?

1. Finance planning and Revenue Policies for NRM

    a. Identifying future trends and impacts

    b. Using legislative corporate revenue policy provisions to secure funding for NRM

2. NRM and Workforce planning – training, skills shortages, performance management and working with volunteers

3. Natural Asset Management – integrating natural assets into Council's corporate asset management systems

Councils are currently required under the *Local Government Act 1993* to provide a **detailed estimate of income and expenditure** for the next year and a general estimate for the following 2 years. (S404.(1))

While a Community Strategic Plan sets out the community's aspirations for the future of the local government area, the Council must also conduct careful longer term planning of its resources to ensure that it can deliver on the community's vision. The vision may then require reshaping after a realistic assessment of available resources. In particular the Council needs to look at long term financial issues such as forecasting and responding to future income and expenditure needs, ensuring that its workforce is adequately adapting to meet future requirements, and planning for long term asset management.

The legislative framework which drives resource planning in councils includes a number of existing and proposed requirements. The *Local Government Act 1993* outlines specific requirements for preparing Council's Annual Management Plan, which must include budgeted income and expenditure, and also a range of information within a Revenue Policy including detailed information about rates, user charges and fees.

The Department of Local Government released a position paper in 2006 called *"Asset Management Planning in NSW Local Government"* which can be found at *www.dlg.nsw.gov.au/dlg/dlghome/documents/information/Asset%20Management%20Planning%20for%20NSW%20LG%20Position%20Paper.pdf*

The proposed framework for Integrated Planning and Reporting includes more rigorous and longer term planning in the shape of a ten year financial plan, four year workforce management plan, and a ten year asset management plan. Natural resource management should be an important element under consideration when the Council undertakes this longer term resource planning. These legislative provisions can be used to better plan for resources to undertake NRM.

By doing so the benefits for NRM can be as outlined in the following diagram:

```
                                    ┌──────────────────────────────────────────
                                    │  Identifying and understanding important
                                    │  future trends and issues about available
                                    │  resources
                   Financial        │
                   Planning ────────┤  Gaining more secure and longer term
                   and Revenue      │  income sources for NRM efforts
                   Policy           │
                                    │  Targeting NRM skills planning and
                                    └  development for Councillors, managers
                                       and staff;

  Using existing and                ┌  Establishing individual performance reporting
  proposed resource    Workforce ───┤  and management systems which ensure
  planning provisions to Planning   │  delivery of Council NRM plans;
  better resource  NRM              │
                                    └  Harnessing the efforts of community
                                       volunteers

                   Asset            ─  Including natural assets into Council
                   Management          asset management system
```

Councils face significant resourcing challenges in managing their natural resources, and in a recent 2008 survey of 64 NSW Councils, the LGSA report the following responses regarding councils' capacity to undertake NRM:

- Over 75% of councils derive less than 25% of the funds they need for NRM from their annual operating budget. Other major sources of funds are environmental levies, project allocations within council, and grant or external funding;
- 11% of surveyed councils rely solely on external grants to carry out NRM activities;
- 77% of surveyed councils stated that they have less than adequate or no human resources to manage their natural resources;
- 40% of surveyed inland councils claimed to have low levels of expertise in managing their natural resources; and
- Of those councils who currently monitor the condition of their natural assets, 50% currently undertake only a basic level of assessment, 46% at an intermediate and 4% at an advanced level.

The full report of these survey results is **the Capacity of NSW Local Government to engage and participate in Natural Resource Management**, and a copy is available for download on the LGSA website at *www.lgsa.org.au/www/html/2489-nrm-survey.asp?intSiteID=1*

5.1 Financial Planning and Revenue Policy

Councils activities and efforts to undertake NRM are often funded principally through short term grants. While this is often a positive boost to stimulate the development of NRM programs and initiatives, it can leave Council financially and politically vulnerable when the funding is exhausted. Accessing grant funding is also a resource intensive process requiring a good knowledge of available and appropriate funding sources, staff resources to research and prepare grant applications, management of a program which is outside Council's recurrent operations, and often an evaluation and reporting process which also takes time and resources.

If the Community Strategic Planning process has identified that NRM is important to the community, then the Council's longer term financial planning process needs to reflect this in allocating resources to address NRM pressures and responses.

The following section outlines some mechanisms which can provide for the longer term financial requirements of NRM. All of these tools have a tight legislative framework but can be tailored to address local NRM issues.

Longer Term Financial Plans

Ultimately, all NRM activities must be included in a Council's annual budget to enable them to proceed. NRM Management Plans (eg Biodiversity Strategies or Stormwater Management Plans) need to include detailed and realistic cost estimates that will enable more informed and credible information to be fed into the corporate budget process.

Long-term financial planning will undoubtedly highlight the significant financial difficulties faced by many NSW councils. These difficulties are particularly in relation to infrastructure maintenance and renewal backlogs, as well as shortfalls in income from rating due in part to the rate-pegging system that has applied over the past 30 years. These difficulties have been highlighted in recent reports by the LGSA (Allan Report) and Productivity Commission.

A major challenge for NRM will be to identify those pressures that councils really need to address over the longer term, and then to find sufficient council resources to have a meaningful impact. Another major NRM challenge is to identify how the ongoing management of natural resources will generate incomes or offset costs and therefore justify the allocation of limited resources. In the past, incremental budgeting, which builds each budget on the one before, has often failed to address changing pressures or community priorities. Therefore key questions which should be thoroughly addressed in a longer term financial planning process include:

- What are going to be the likely NRM pressures and impacts over the next 10 years?
- In the context of an infrastructure funding crisis, is council giving NRM issues and pressures the level of priority which is expected by the community?
- How much will it cost council to adequately manage future NRM issues and pressures?
- If council does not act now, will addressing the NRM issue be more expensive in the future? Will preventative action sooner save council money in the longer term?
- Will council require additional funds? If so, should council divert resources from other activities, or look to other sources of funding?
- How can council reduce its reliance on grant funding and secure more reliable funds?
- Would the community support additional expenditure on NRM? Would they be willing to pay additional rates and charges for NRM?

*If the Community Strategic Planning process identifies that **NRM is a high priority** for the community, then Council's longer term financial planning process should reflect this by **allocating resources** to address NRM pressures and responses.*

Mosman Community Environmental Contract (CEC)

In 2000 Mosman Municipal Council were successful in receiving approval from the Department of Local Government to fund a 12 year environmental management program. This program was underpinned by what the Council termed the CEC. This document outlined the rationale, objectives and specific works required over the time period.

The CEC is funded by a 5% rate increase over 12 years and the contract is Council's guarantee to the community that all money will be spent on specific, budgeted environmental projects. It includes objectives, funding programs and key performance indicators for stormwater quality, bushland, seawalls, creeks and integrated projects. A separate Annual Report is produced each year which specifically describes the performance against the original goals.

(Source: www.mosman.nsw.gov.au/)

By clearly publicising a **longer term program** for their environmental levy, the council gave a guarantee to their community that NRM priorities would be funded over a longer timeframe. This would also have committed the council to **quarantine** these funds which would then be unavailable for other uses.

Special Rate Variations

While increases in ordinary rate revenue are limited by the state government through rate pegging, councils can apply to the Minister for Local Government for a Special Variation, and many have successfully done so on the basis of proposed NRM initiatives under section 508(2) or section 508A of the *Local Government Act 1993*.

Special Variations are intended for locally specific purposes such as environmental, sustainability or infrastructure levies. The application process is detailed and resource intensive and needs to demonstrate broad community support for increasing rates, but such support is often forthcoming when the need for additional revenue is carefully explained, and Special Variations can therefore produce significant additional funding for NRM.

Under section 508 of the Act, the Minister may give a council approval to increase its annual general income beyond the general variation. When applying for a special variation, councils must demonstrate prudent fiscal management and a level of community support or understanding for the increase (DLG Annual Report 07-08).

Excerpt from the DLG Annual Report 2007-08

"A total of 22 applications for special variations were submitted for consideration under section 508(2) for 2008–09. Of these, 19 were approved, 2 were declined and 1 was withdrawn. Of the 19 approvals, seven councils also had an increase to the minimum amount of rate approved under section 548(3).

"Two applications for special variation were submitted for consideration under section 508A for 2008–09. One was approved and one was withdrawn. A further 2 applications were submitted for consideration under section 508A in 2007. These were approved under section 508(2) for 2008–09."

Important Department of Local Government guidance for applying for Special Variations is given in Circular 09/07:

Applications for Ministerial Approval for a Special Variation to General Income at *www.dlg.nsw.gov.au/Files/Circulars/09-07.pdf*

Guidelines for the Preparation of an Application for a Special Variation to General Income 2009/2010 at *www.dlg.nsw.gov.au/dlg/dlghome/documents/Information/09-07%20-%20Special%20Variation%20Guidelines%202009_2010.pdf*

Each year the Department of Local Government publishes in their Annual Report a list of applications and approvals for Special Variations.

This table comes from the DLG Annual Report 2007-2008, covers approvals given for 08-09, and is available for download on the DLG website at *www.dlg.nsw.gov.au/dlg/dlghome/documents/reports/DLG%20Annual%20Report.pdf*

NRM Levies approved by the Department of Local Government for 2008-09:

Council	Purpose	Amount sought	Amount approved
s508(2)			
Kempsey Shire Council	Extension of an Environmental Levy approved for a five year period commencing 03–04	7.70	7.70
Lake Macquarie City Council	Lake improvement project	6.04	6.04
Willoughby City Council	Environmental programs and to expand sustainability	17.6	17.6
s508(3)(A)			
Wingecarribee Shire Council	Improvements in the enhancement and maintenance of the environmental assets	2008-09 – 13.24% 2009-10 – 9.50% 2010-11 – 9.50% 2011-12 – 9.50%	2008-09 – 13.24% 2009-10 – 9.50% 2010-11 – 9.50% 2011-12 – 9.50%
Richmond Valley Council (application submitted in 2006–07)	To fund urban stormwater drainage program, improvements to sporting grounds/ parks and gardens and road maintenance	2008-09 – 7.50% 2009-10 – 7.50% 2010-11 – 7.50% 2011-12 – 7.50%	2008-09 – 7.50% Remaining years not approved

Environmental Levy: Eurobodalla Council

The Environment Levy was established in 1996/97 following increasing concern by the community for the protection of the environment and the consequent need to raise additional funding for the environmental protection studies, works and services needed. With the application of rate pegging increases each year the amount budgeted to be raised by the levy in 2008/09 totals some $740,000.

Levied as a separate rate, the funds collected are assigned to weed control, estuary management, landcare, creekcare and environment education and assessment. Water quality monitoring and catchment management issues will be financed by contributions from the Water Cycle Fund, which includes a separate stormwater management charge and water usage fees.

The rates are used to directly finance monitoring or control works (such as weed or sediment control); to match grants for studies or works (such as estuary management); or to sponsor volunteer activities or education programs (such as landcare and creekcare).

The Environment Fund is 'ring-fenced' to account for all expenses and revenues. It is still subsidised by the General Fund, there is also a reliance on sponsorship and volunteers to add value to the environmental investment. The General Fund 'subsidy' is expected to reduce once water catchment related costs are financed by the proposed Water Cycle Fund from 2009/10.

Council has developed a mechanism using a TBL matrix to prioritise estuary works or projects based on best ecological or economic benefit across all estuaries once the Estuary Management Plans are adopted.

(Source: www.esc.nsw.gov.au/)

Levying this as a **separate rate** means that ratepayers can see the environmental levy separated out on their rates bill.

The council has collected this rate for nearly ten years, and therefore has had access to **significant ongoing funding** for environmental works and NRM. The funding can be used "**dollar for dollar**" to attract matching grant funding. By "**ring-fencing**" the funding, it is publicly reported and unavailable for other uses.

A TBL matrix facilitates **good decisions, consideration of NRM**, and **accountability** to the community in preparing a works program.

User Charges

Charges for domestic (and other) waste management, stormwater, water supply, sewerage and drainage can be collected by Councils in order to cover the cost of providing these services. The use of these provisions is an important contributor to the financing of some NRM issues in an ongoing way. The cost of NRM associated with providing the services can be built into calculating the amount of the charge, which is collected alongside ordinary rates.

Information about how to collect **stormwater charges** is available from the DLG website in Circulars 06-65, 06-47 and 06-24.

Circular 03-11 relates to consumption-based pricing for **water supply and sewerage** services and special variation guidelines.

Water Charges: Harden Council

Council introduced a "user pays" system for billing last financial year that has resulted in a noticeable reduction in water use. Council is currently reviewing their pricing structure to ensure the user pays appropriate charges which reflect the real cost of providing the service and the costs of maintaining the system, including capital works requirements over the next 20 years.

(Source: www.harden.nsw.gov.au/)

5. Resource Planning for NRM

S94 Developer Contributions Plans

S94 of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* allows councils to collect contributions from development for the provision of local infrastructure to support the resulting new population. This process is tightly regulated and restricted, however can provide a valuable source of funding towards NRM initiatives such as stormwater management, pollution management and, to a lesser extent, biodiversity conservation.

There have been recent changes to the maximum amount of s94 funds which restrict Councils to collecting only $20,000 per average residential lots. Information about these new reforms is contained within Planning Circular 08-017. The circular states the following:

"*Under the reforms councils will be limited to charging a maximum of $20,000 for a typical residential dwelling unless they have received the approval of the Minister for Planning following a detailed evaluation of the contribution and council's broader infrastructure and asset management strategy*."

The Department of Planning is currently amending the s94 manual for councils, and some clarification with regards to allowable provisions within s94 plans is expected. For example some councils have been levying s94 funds for the acquisition of riparian land, and the DoP is expected to promote the rezoning of this land as an alternative to using s94 plans for that purpose.

Case Study

S94 Contributions Plan: Ku-ring-gai Council

The Ku-ring-gai Town Centres Development Contributions Plan 2008 outlines the demand for additional public facilities which are anticipated from the development of housing and retail/business services at urban densities. The plan outlines Council's intention to provide high quality public spaces and street environments for residents living in the urban areas which are expected to increase in levels of density. The streetscape and public domain objectives and classes of improvement include the following:

- Enlarge existing parks with high quality embellishments; and
- Features in the design and operation of public spaces that protect and enhance biodiversity values and result in sustainable energy and water use.

The plan states that Council will collect contributions from Ku-ring-gai town centre development and apply those contributions to biodiversity and water management design in the public domain.

(Source: www.kmc.nsw.gov.au/)

Case Study

Dubbo s94 Contributions for Stormwater Infrastructure

In April 2008 the Urban Stormwater Function Plan for Dubbo City Council states that the stormwater function for Dubbo City Council is a $2.22M a year operation, of which approximately $1.143M of assets each year is contributed from Developer infrastructure construction.

The council has a s94 plan for Urban Stormwater Drainage Headworks, which collects funds from new development for the purpose of:

- The cost of preparing major trunk drainage studies;
- Acquisition of land for drainage purposes;
- Construction of drainage facilities, pipelines, culverts and the like; and
- Formation of detention and retention basins plus all ancillary works.

5. Resource Planning for NRM

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Funds derived from the developer contributions plans are supplemented with other funding sources such as the Stormwater Management Charge, external loan funds, and external grant funding is also sought. This mix of funding has enabled the construction of 15 gross pollutant traps since 1999, resulting in the removal of 225 tonnes of litter from stormwater. Council plans in the future to prepare a contributions plan which enables collections regarding water quality as well as quantity.

5.2 Workforce Planning

There are over 40,000 people working in NSW local government. The practice of workforce planning is intended to anticipate the future issues and trends associated with this workforce, and to equip councils to ensure these issues are met in the future. Some advantages of undertaking workforce planning within local government can be:

- Planning for the fact that the average age of staff is increasing;
- Preparing staff to progress into more senior positions through succession planning;
- Ensuring that systems are in place to capture and pass on corporate knowledge;
- Addressing labour shortages in specific professions;
- Identifying ways to attract staff to more remote councils;
- Identifying incentives to offer staff; and
- Examining ways to improve trust levels within the organisation.

Staff and Councillor Skills and Training

If Council is undertaking a workforce planning process, then NRM considerations can be taken into account when preparing a longer term training plan. Specific training needs for NRM might include:

- Councillors
  - Training regarding council's roles and responsibilities in NRM
  - Attendance at conferences and further professional development
  - Council briefings and reports on specific issues

- Senior Staff
  - Participation in conferences and professional networks
  - Examination of approaches in other councils and case studies
  - Membership of professional associations
  - Attendance at specific training courses
  - Journal subscriptions

- Management and Professional Staff
  - Attendance at specific courses and conferences
  - Participation in professional networks
  - Achievement of specific competencies in NRM
  - Software purchase and training

- Operational and Outdoor Staff
  - Achievement of specific competencies in NRM
  - Induction procedures for all new staff
  - Internally designed training and workshops regarding new procedures

The LGSA has recently developed a **training program for councillors in NRM**. Councillors can find out about Council's roles and responsibilities in relation to NRM; why NRM makes sense; a councillor's role in NRM, and useful tools & resources.

Contact: NRM Policy Staff at LGSA on 9242 4000

This training was based on a **capacity-building approach**, and combined a **planning and problem-solving phase** prior to the delivery of training.

The trainers worked with **senior managers, managers** and **outdoor staff**.

The aim was not only to educate staff but also to **improve work processes**.

Case Study

Armidale Dumaresq City Council: Stormwater Management Training

Armidale Dumaresq City Council developed a program to raise the capacity of council staff to design and implement more sustainable stormwater management practices. To meet its needs for implementing change in the way stormwater is managed, a move away from traditional training and education approaches was required. Capacity Building unlike most training provides a process by which individuals, groups, organisations, institutions and societies increase their abilities to perform core functions, solve problems, and define and achieve objectives.

The consultants initially met with senior managers within council to discuss the key issues of concern relating to council's approach to work practices with the potential to impact on the local stormwater system. As a result of discussions, the consultants developed targeted stormwater management training courses for council managers and outdoor staff. The aim of the course for outdoor staff was to assist participants increase their knowledge of stormwater issues and legislation and to identify barriers to cleaner work practices within their areas of responsibility.
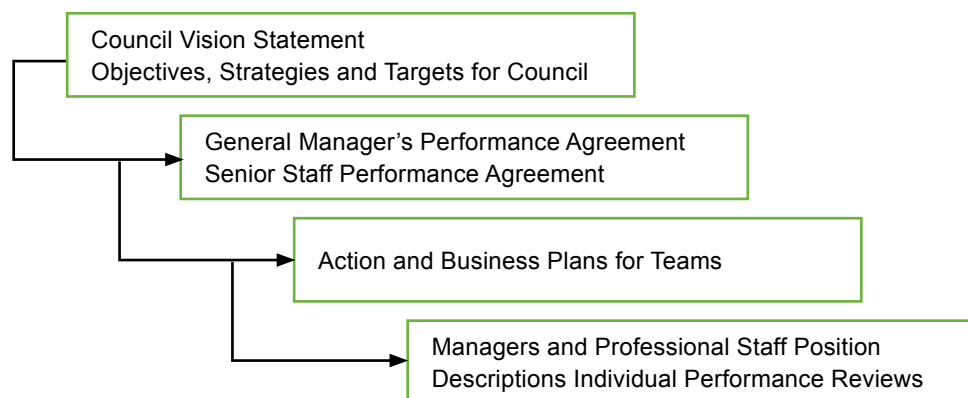
Managers were also trained in stormwater legislative requirements and looked more specifically at operational systems to prevent stormwater pollution from work practices. They too identified barriers to better work practices.

The outcomes of the two training workshops were then assessed and a planning workshop held with a mix of indoor and outdoor staff to develop solutions to barriers (real and perceived). The program was successful in helping council move towards a more inclusive and integrated approach to developing work method statements and reducing pollution risks from council work practices.

(Source: http://www.sdenviro.com.au/casestudies/stormwater_armidale.html)

Performance Management

The use of corporate performance management systems can assist in driving the organisation's vision through to implementation at an individual level. To ensure that the Council's vision is implemented there needs to be specific and measurable actions and targets which individuals and teams are striving to achieve. It is important for the implementation of the Council vision and key objectives that detailed strategies and measures are cascaded down through operational plans and into the actual performance contracts and job descriptions of council employees. Council staff also need and are entitled to know in as much detail as possible how their work and personal goals are going to contribute to a whole-of-council effort. An integrated hierarchy of NRM measures might look something like this:

Council Vision Statement
Objectives, Strategies and Targets for Council

General Manager's Performance Agreement
Senior Staff Performance Agreement

Action and Business Plans for Teams

Managers and Professional Staff Position
Descriptions Individual Performance Reviews

The cascading of vision through to operational planning and the importance of ensuring that the objectives were measurable and realistic in that they may become attached to the performance management requirements of an employee.

Skills Shortages

There are quite significant difficulties for rural and regional councils in attracting and recruiting skilled professionals in a range of areas such as planning, engineering and accountancy. The LGMA have developed a National Skills Shortage Strategy, and they list the following as good practice ideas that councils are using to attract and retain staff:

- **Moree Plains Shire** offers school-based training and work placement for year 11 and year 12 students;
- **Riverina East ROC** has a "build a bridge" initiative in place to encourage school students to study engineering with a view to a career in local government;
- **Hunter Councils** are registered as a skilled migration destination for Skilled Independent Regional Visas for a range of occupations which includes engineers, planners and building surveyors; and
- A strategic alliance between shires of **Wellington**, **Blayney** and **Cabonne** has formed to provide tertiary scholarships for HSC students, with recipients committed to working at the councils in their holiday period and the council providing employment on completion.

Working with Volunteers

The use of volunteers is traditionally an important resource for councils in implementing NRM. Volunteers often offset the skills and capacity shortage within council, offering hundreds of hours of in-kind contribution. This contribution can also benefit councils in grant funded projects to offset funding from other agencies.

Planning to manage and maximise the use of volunteers can be an important component of workforce planning, including the management of issues such as recruitment, co-ordination, training and insurance. Volunteers can also be a source of future employees.

Case Study

Hornsby Bushcare Program

There are currently over 850 registered volunteers in the Hornsby Bushcare Program. These community volunteers work on over 130 different sites across the Shire. From Brooklyn in the north, Glenorie in the west, and Epping in the south, Bushcare groups are helping protect and rehabilitate natural bushland areas for the whole community.

Bushcare volunteers range from 15 to 90 years, and come from all walks of life. After attending an introductory training workshop, all registered volunteers are able to work on site with a professional Bushcare Trainer. These Trainers help volunteers learn new skills in plant identification and weed control techniques.

(Source: www.hornsby.nsw.gov.au/)

The LGMA National Skills Shortage Strategy can be downloaded on the LGMA website at *www.lgma.org. au/national/resources/ skillsshortage/steering/Skills_ Strategy_Full_150508_ LG0071_2.pdf*

The **Volunteer Coordinators Network Manual** is a best practice guide for not-for-profit organisations, to assist them in managing their long term environmental volunteer programs.

The Manual has been developed by the VCN (Natural Areas). The VCN is an information-sharing network of staff from government and non-government organisations throughout Australia who coordinate volunteer programs.

This Manual has 16 sections covering all aspects of managing environmental volunteer programs. Most sections contain detailed information, case studies and links to other sites, and is available at *www.aabr.org.au/ vcn/index.htm.*

Hornsby has an enormous volunteer program, **tightly co-ordinated and managed** with staff resources, training programs, ongoing communication and adopted policies.

Shoalhaven Rabbit Control Program During 2008

During the last 6 months of 2007, Council's Parks Operations Section has been developing and implementing a 'whole of village' rabbit control program. It has been designed to meet Councils obligations for Risk Management, especially on sporting fields and recreational areas, respond to widespread community demands for action on the rabbit problem and support actions to protect endangered species and coastal revegetation.

The approach uses a combination of volunteers and Council staff to undertake a monitoring and poisoning program on all lands within the village where these operations can be legally and safely employed. In most cases, the program involves an initial night time spotlight survey, a training session for volunteers in free feeding carrots, a week of free feeding and monitoring and two weeknight applications of poisoned carrots.

Shoalhaven is using committed volunteers to conduct a program that would otherwise be **difficult to resource**. A **partnership approach** between council and residents facilitates a solution to **mutual problems**.

5.3 Natural Asset Management

Councils are major custodians of public assets, and are increasingly required to better plan for and manage these assets for which they are responsible. The process of asset management within a council traditionally covers the built assets such as roads, water and sewerage assets, drains, bridges, footpaths, public buildings etc. However, natural assets are also important to council and the community. These might include creeks, wetlands, ponds, bushland, public trees (in streets parks and other public places), coasts and estuaries. Systems used by councils to manage built assets can also be used to manage these important natural assets. Key components of an asset management system within a council typically include:

- Asset registers
- Asset condition assessments
- Deterioration modelling and life cycle costing
- Risk assessment
- Asset management policies and plans

Under the DLG's proposals for Integrated Planning and Reporting all councils will be required to account and plan for all existing assets for a minimum of 10 years. An Asset Management Policy, Strategy and Plans are to be prepared. They should be linked to the Community Strategic Plan and Delivery Program and should cover all those assets of high value to the local community.

A key step in asset planning and management is setting 'service levels' – the standards at which assets are to be provided or maintained. Setting service levels has major financial implications for councils, and involves answering questions such as:

- Should we plan drainage systems to cope with floods that occur on average every 100 years or 20 years or 5 years?
- How many street trees do we want?
- Should we maintain our sports fields at competition standards?
- How often should we mow the grass in parks? Are there any biodiversity objectives for our park which may benefit from a lower mowing frequency?
- To what level do we want to protect and manage remnant bushland?
- How wide should our roads be? What are the financial implications?
- Should we build and maintain roads for heavy vehicles or light traffic?
- Will we build a 25 metre pool or a 50 metre pool, and how many lanes should it have?

..and many others.

The Department of Local Government put the following recommendations forward in a position paper in 2006:

1. Strategic **long term asset management and financial plans** be included as **essential** components of an integrated planning and reporting framework across NSW local government.

2. **Legislative amendments** requiring **long-term strategic asset management planning** be introduced into the *Local Government Act 1993*.

3. Councils adopt asset management planning systems and practices that are consistent with the Local Government Financial Sustainability Frameworks, and where applicable and practical, the **International Infrastructure Management Manual**.

4. A **basic (core) approach** to asset management planning be the agreed minimum level for all NSW councils.

5. An **asset management improvement program** be implemented to progressively raise asset management planning to a level appropriate for each council.

6. **Legislative amendments** requiring **ten year financial planning** be introduced into the *Local Government Act 1993*.

Because councils' financial resources are limited and most already face a substantial backlog of infrastructure maintenance, maintaining and replacing existing assets at current service levels may prove impossible. For example, many suburban streets have been built wider than is really necessary for the traffic they carry, and regularly resealing the whole surface of those streets may be too expensive. Similarly, providing a creek crossing that is above the 1 in 100 year flood level is usually many times more expensive than providing a 1 in 20 year crossing.

If councils are to find the resources required to make a reasonable attempt at maintaining a significant number of natural assets, it is likely that compromises will have to be made in terms of service levels. Some existing standards may have to be reduced, and new assets built to a lower standard than in the past. These decisions need to be taken on the basis of:

- Thorough assessment of the condition of existing assets (infrastructure *and* natural), and the need for new or replacement assets;
- The best available information about costs and benefits of alternative levels of maintenance and renewal;
- Likely availability of funding (including the possibility that the community may be willing to pay higher rates or special levies) and other resources (skilled staff, equipment, local contractors, volunteers etc); and
- Consultation with both users (who normally press for a higher quality asset) *and the broader community*, which may raise issues that would otherwise not be considered.

7. An **industry wide capacity building program** including a range of training, tools, templates and guidelines be introduced.

"Asset Management Planning for NSW Local Government" at *www.dlg.nsw.gov.au/dlg/ dlghome/documents/ information/Asset%20 Management%20 Planning%20for%20 NSW%20LG%20 Position%20Paper.pdf*

5. Resource Planning for NRM

Case Study

Newcastle City Council Natural Asset Management Strategy

The Newcastle City Council Natural Asset Management Strategy aims to integrate natural assets into Council's mainstream asset management system. The process includes processes for mapping assets, conducting an asset condition rating, preparation of a service level program, identifying funding sources, and implementing an asset maintenance program which is both routine and reactive. Traditional assets include the roads, footpaths, bridges, buildings, structures, stormwater drainage and cultural assets. To these have been added the natural assets:

- Creeks – 68km
- Public trees – 130,000
- Wetlands – 5
- Ponds – 28
- Bushland – 23 designated (35 parks)
- Coastline – 4km
- (Estuary = 10,000 ha+)
- 5 major catchments

Significant gains have been achieved in the areas of Tree mapping, high resolution terrain mapping for the assessment of climate change impacts, and Creek condition assessments. Council's natural resource atlas is a 'one-stop-shop' for natural resource information using Council's Novomaps program. The objectives of the system are to:

- make it easier for all staff to incorporate natural resource information in their decision making, project development and management
- improve access to current, map-based natural resource information
- identify and begin to fill gaps in Council's natural resource information base
- create a system that meets the diverse needs of Council staff
- look at single maps e.g. soil types, SEPP 14 wetland boundaries, native vegetation mapping, threatened species, creek locations, contours etc
- overlay multiple maps e.g. location of community groups, our threatened species & significant vegetation areas
- view information linked to the maps. e.g. what condition is that creek in, or what does that local community group do?
- access a natural resource catalogue that lists the hard-copy natural resource information Council holds, by clicking on the area in which you are interested.

(Source: UTS Centre for Local Government – Sustainability Course, presentation by Karenne Jurd – Newcastle City Council 2008)

6. Action Planning and Delivery

What is in this section?

1. An overview of current provisions for Management Planning

2. Examples of objectives, strategies, means and measures for NRM

3. Benefits and vehicles for working collaboratively across council

4. Across organisation structures; and

5. Between NRM and other Council plans

6. Closing the loop – how planning can lead to better NRM programs and activities

7. Case Study – Great Lakes Council

The current vehicle for detailed corporate planning is the 3+ year Management Plan, which is proposed to become four year Delivery and one year Operating Plans. The Management Plan and its potential benefit for NRM is described in the following passage by Kelly (2007):

> *If there is sufficient commitment to (NRM), the management plan has enormous potential. It provides an opportunity for councils to integrate conservation principles across the entire spectrum of their actions by incorporating them into their adopted "objectives" and "performance targets" for every principal activity.*
>
> *In terms of (NRM), this will be more effective than the occasional one-off project to help protect a special place. It should also help minimise inconsistent actions between different departments of a council.*
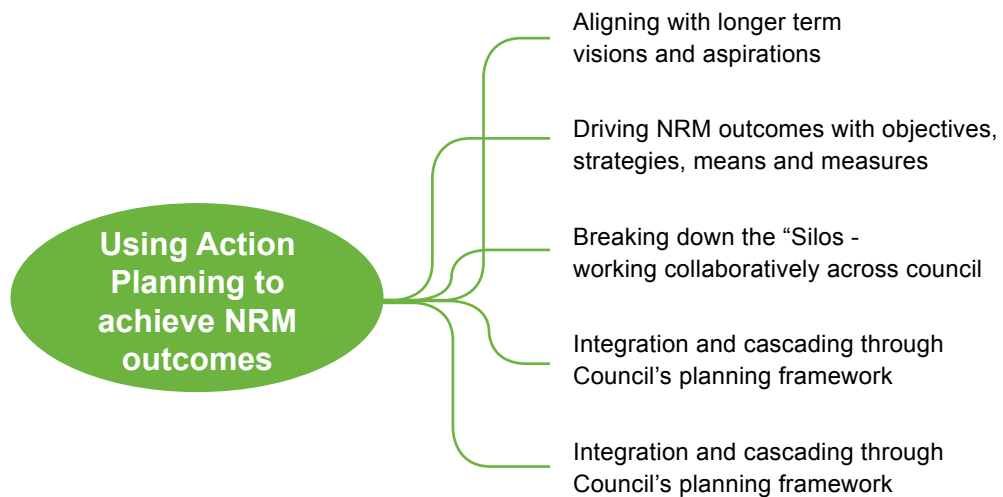>
> *A commitment to desired environmental objectives must permeate council activities in order to achieve an integrated approach. The problem is that many celebrated local environmental projects tended to work in isolation away from other spheres of council activity.*

In the proposed new Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework, the Management Plan would be replaced with a four year Delivery Plan and a one year Operational Plan. This guideline will focus more fully on the Management Plan as at the time of writing the DLG has not yet released a description of the Delivery and Operational Plan.

According to the **Local Government Act 1993** a Management Plan **must** include the **principal activities** that the council proposes to conduct, including:

- activities to manage, develop, protect, restore, enhance and conserve the **environment**, consistent with the principles of **ecologically sustainable development**;
- activities resulting from the council's current comprehensive **state of the environment report**;
- the **objectives and performance targets** for each of the principal activities;
- the **means** by which the council proposes to achieve these targets;
- the manner in which the council proposes to **assess its performance** in respect of each of its principal activities; and
- the management of **stormwater** and **coasts and estuaries**

www.dlg.nsw.gov.au/Files/ Information/mplan.pdf

Using Action Planning to achieve NRM outcomes

- Aligning with longer term visions and aspirations
- Driving NRM outcomes with objectives, strategies, means and measures
- Breaking down the "Silos - working collaboratively across council
- Integration and cascading through Council's planning framework
- Integration and cascading through Council's planning framework

6.1 Turning Visions into Outcomes

The purpose of action planning is to ensure that the aspirations of the community, councillors and management are translated into specific actions and resources in order to achieve outcomes:
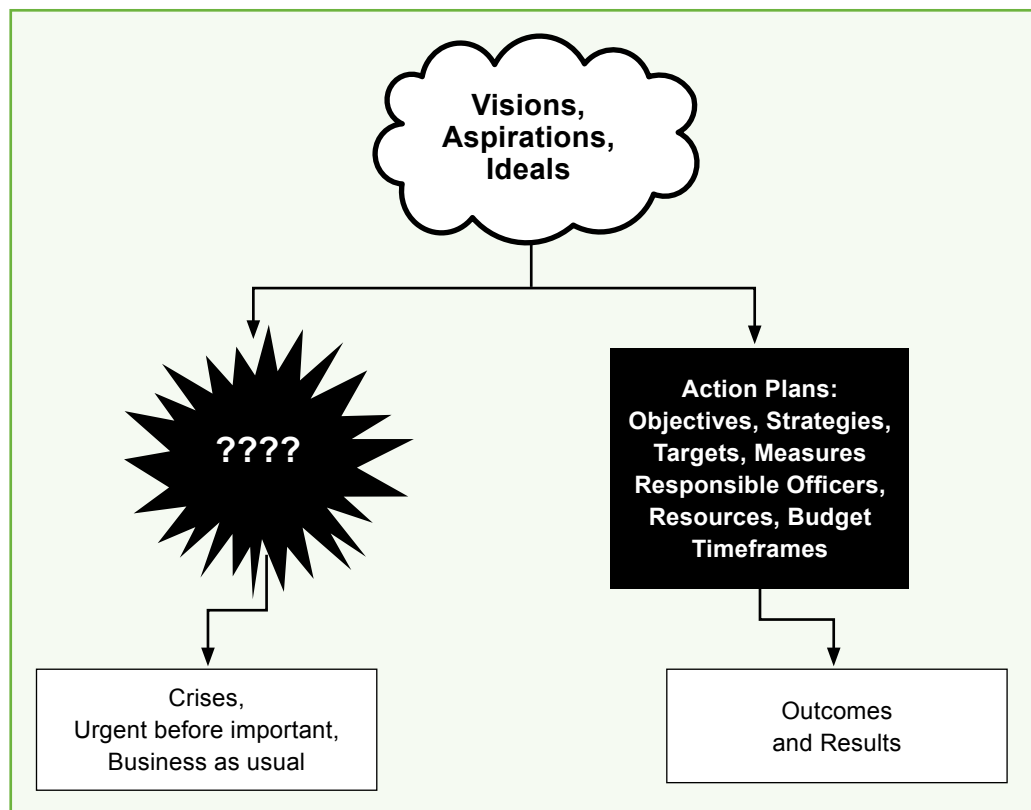

Figure 7: The purpose of action planning

The task of action planning is about making sure that the overarching visions and aspirations are organised and resourced for implementation. Selecting the right actions and resources to achieve the vision is the art of management, and is the difference between 'waffle' and real achievements.

Many action plans contain detail regarding inputs and outputs, but it is more difficult to have confidence in the connection between these and actual outcomes. NRM plans need to ensure that there is a clear link between inputs, outputs and outcomes. This link is based on assumptions which also need to be tested periodically in order to ensure that the right strategy is employed.

6.2 Objectives, means and measures for NRM

The provisions within the *Local Government Act 1993* require Councils to include into their Management Plans specific descriptions of their activities which enable more detailed commitment to be given to the community. These are:
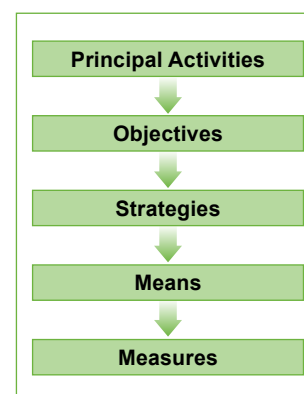
Objectives – General direction statements naming the issues
Strategies – Types of operational activities which will be undertaken
Means – Giving specifics about resourcing such as timeframe, staff or budget
Measures – Standards against which council will report their performance

The following statements have been selected from a range of Management Plans because of their mix of aspirational with specific language and level of detailed information:

Terminology used in the LG Act	Other terms commonly in use by Councils	Examples
Objectives	sometimes called **goals, directions** or **aims**	**Wagga Wagga Shire Council – Management Plan 2008-2012** • *An integrated approach to water resource management* • *A sustainable built and natural environment* • *Sustainable management of natural resources* • *Promote environmental sustainability*
Strategies	sometimes called **actions**	**Hornsby Shire Council – Management Plan 2008-2012** • *Monitor estuary and waterways to ensure relevant standards* • *Finalise the Hawkesbury Estuary Management Plan* • *Trial off-setting policies for biodiversity replacement* • *Implement ten actions from the Biodiversity Conservation Strategy*
Means	sometimes called **budget, timeframe** or **targets**	**Tweed Shire Council – Management Plan 2008-2012** • *Kingscliff Foreshore Protection EIS – June 2009 – $250,000* • *Coastal vegetation management – Ongoing – $8,400* • *Pest plant and animal control targeting vine weed and Indian mynahs – Ongoing – $200,000* • *Community retrofit program for energy and water efficiency – 40% by December 2008*
Measures	sometimes called **performance indicators**	**Port Stephens – Management Plan 2008-2012** • *Water quality meets Australian and New Zealand Environment and Conservation Council guidelines* • *Hectares of land subject to regeneration activities meets targets* • *Number of aquatic weed treatments per annum increases* • *Population of Koalas in Port Stephens LGA remains at sustainable levels.*

Principal Activities → Objectives → Strategies → Means → Measures

6.3 Breaking down the "Silos"

Another challenge with NRM action planning is that council organisation structures rarely group all NRM functions together. Communication or accountability issues can become a barrier to achieving a whole-of-council approach to NRM planning and reporting. Ensuring communication across council, between "silos" and across functions and professions is an essential component of effective corporate planning and reporting for NRM. Positive interpersonal relationships and cross-functional networks are vital for achieving an integrated approach. In particular, the following individual behaviours are suggested for ensuring that NRM plans cross council functions:

- Use and improve on existing plans, programs and processes where possible;
- Build shared understanding and awareness before promoting solutions;
- Creatively use every available opportunity to promote NRM pressures and programs;
- Be clear about where and when decisions are made, and by whom; and
- Maximise opportunities for communication and shared decision-making between community representatives, councillors, managers and professional staff.

The following diagram (Figure 8) shows some of the functions and staff positions within a council which have an influence on the way councils undertake NRM:
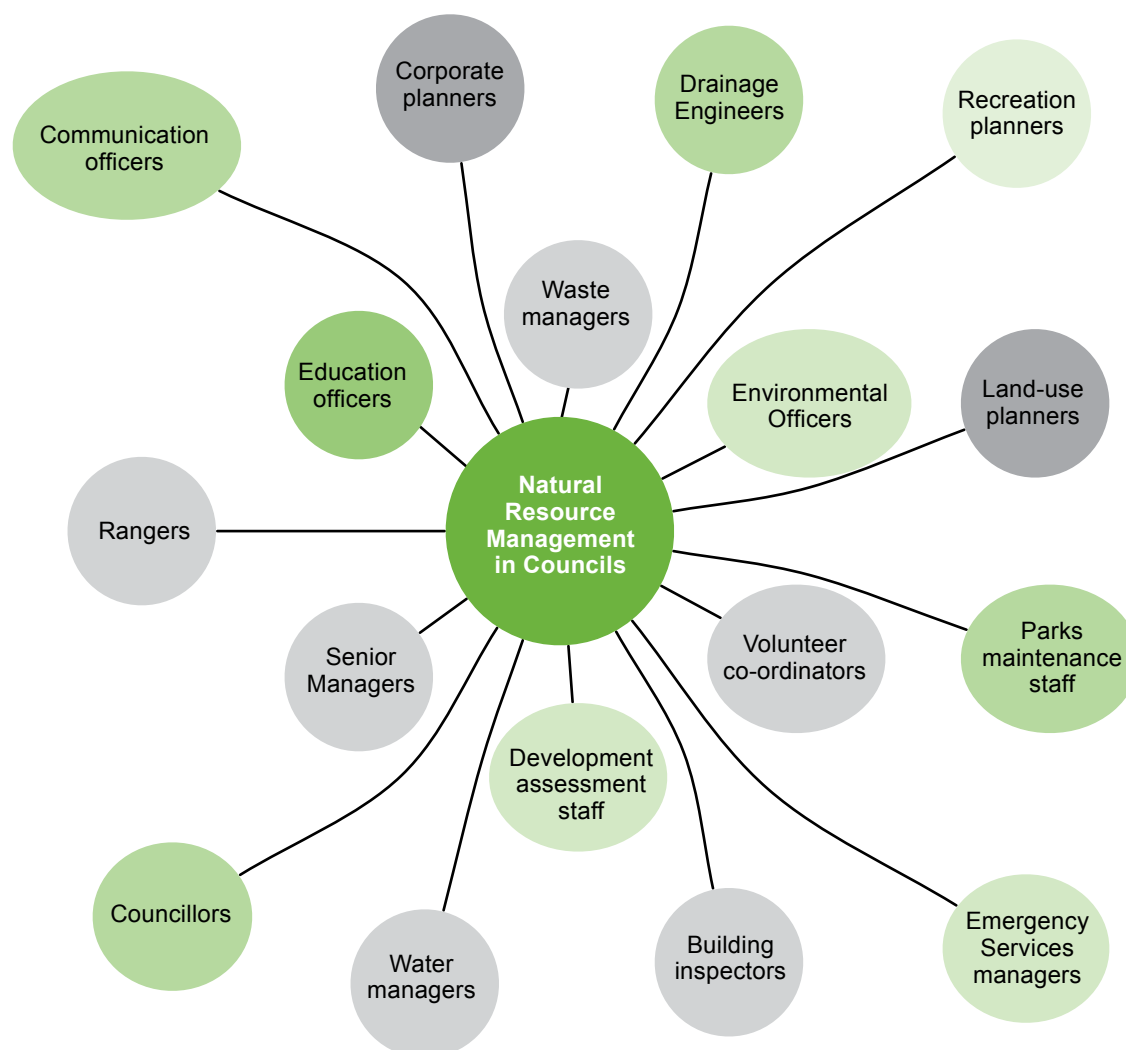

Figure 8: *Functions and staff positions within a council related to NRM*

Consultation of the above professional staff may be required to ensure that NRM is effectively integrated into the action plans of the Council, that the plans are realistic, agreed upon, and implemented. This may take the form of

• Communicating the location and content of existing plans;
• Mutual agreement on planning and reporting templates and processes;
• Shared responsibility for reporting;
• Co-operative processes for plan preparation and sign-off;
• Including the content of plans into individual job descriptions; or
• Working groups or multi-disciplinary teams to review plans or reports.

6.4 Planning Frameworks and NRM

Councils are diverse, multifunctional organisations responding to many community issues and delivering many services. Ensuring that a council's vision is deployed and consistent throughout the organisation is a challenge, and often councils adopt many different plans and strategies which may not necessarily align with or drive day-to-day operations.

Corporate planning frameworks need to show how different plans fit together and are linked to available resources for implementation. The Management Plan (alternatively called the Delivery Program under DLG's proposed reform structure) should sit at the centre of that framework and provide a common point of reference for other, more specialised plans, including those for NRM. It should specify precisely which goals and objectives are to be given priority and the resources to be allocated to achieving desired outcomes.

Case Study

Broken Hill Planning Framework
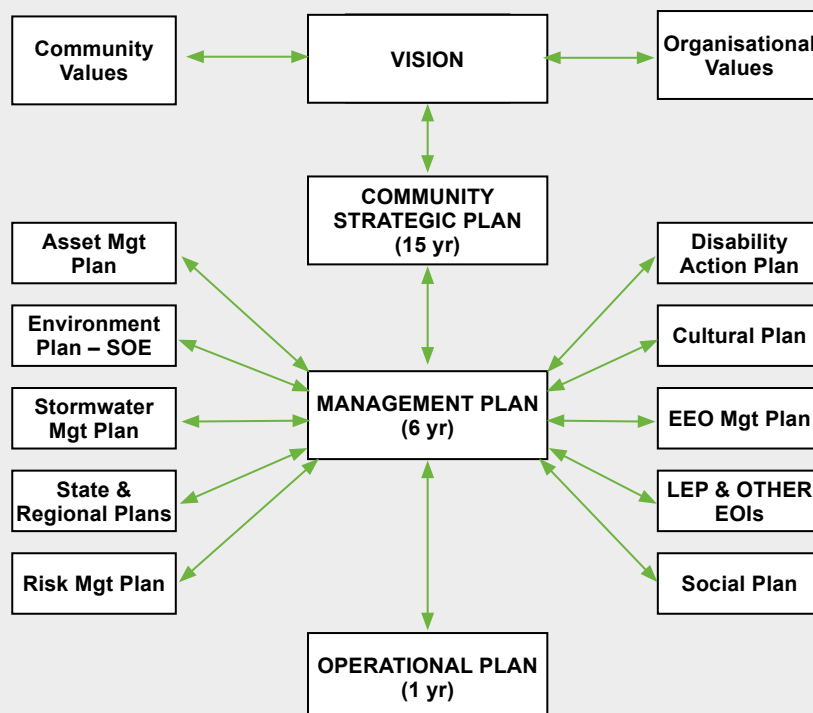
Source: www.brokenhill.nsw.gov.au

This is quite a **simple** diagram which clearly outlines to **staff and the community** which plans **exist**, and the way that they fit **together**.

The following organisational plans are listed in the **Sutherland Shire Council Management Plan 2008-2012** as relevant to the "Nature" section of the operational plan:

- **Air Quality** Management Plan
- Bate Bay **Coastline** Management Plan
- **Biodiversity** Strategy
- **Catchment Management** Plans
- **Energy** Savings Action Plan
- **Estuary Management** Plans
- **Feral Animals** Policy
- **Flood** Risk Management Development Control Plan
- **Floodplain Management** Plans
- Greenweb Strategy
- Hacking River **Stormwater Management** Plan
- Local **Waste Management** Plan
- Lower Georges River **Stormwater** Management Plan
- Port Hacking **Plan of Management**
- **Stormwater Management** and Stormwater Specification Development Control Plan
- Sutherland Shire **Disaster Management** Plan
- Sutherland Shire **Urban Bushland** Plan of Management 1990
- **Water Savings** Action Plan
- **Wetlands** Development Control Plan
- Woronora River **Stormwater Management** Plan

Other NRM Action Plans

There are a multitude of pieces of legislation which outline Councils' obligation to prepare other NRM Management Plans. The Corporate Planning and Reporting process needs to inform and be informed by each of these plans, to a varying level of detail depending on the needs and scale of each plan.

One example of the NRM plans which councils must prepare is a plan of management for Community Land. As outlined in the *Local Government Act 1993*, a council must prepare a draft plan of management for community land as described in Chapter 6 Division 2 of the Act.

The range of NRM plans which may be included or referred to in the Management Plan (or Delivery Program) include:

- Plans of Management for Community Land
- Development Control Plans and Policies
- Stormwater Management Plans
- Catchment Management Plans
- Estuary Management Plans
- Floodplain Management Plans
- Waste Management Plans
- Noxious Weed Plans

The action planning component of the corporate planning and reporting process can complement the work of these plans by committing Council to completion deadlines, funding, implementation targets or resource condition targets.

6.5 NRM Program Improvements

The action planning process within councils should be an opportunity to evaluate and redesign activities which will be undertaken in the future. If the conditions described in the remainder of this chapter are in place – alignment with the "whole-of-council" vision, collaboration between different sections of council, and reference to internal and external NRM plans – then deciding and describing the actions to be undertaken should be the window of opportunity to shape and redesign the activities of the council. For plan writers the following questions could be considered:

- What results did the last plan achieve?
- How are current actions improving the condition of the natural environment?
- Is there scope for doing things better?
- Could resources be better spent over the next planning period?
- Is there an opportunity to work with other parts of council to achieve more?
- How can the results of the SoE Report be worked into the new plan?
- Would Councillors and Senior Managers support a change in activities?

The following diagram explains a concept called "program logic" which describes how the planning and reporting process is like a continuous improvement loop which can be tailored to achieved short, medium and longer term targets:
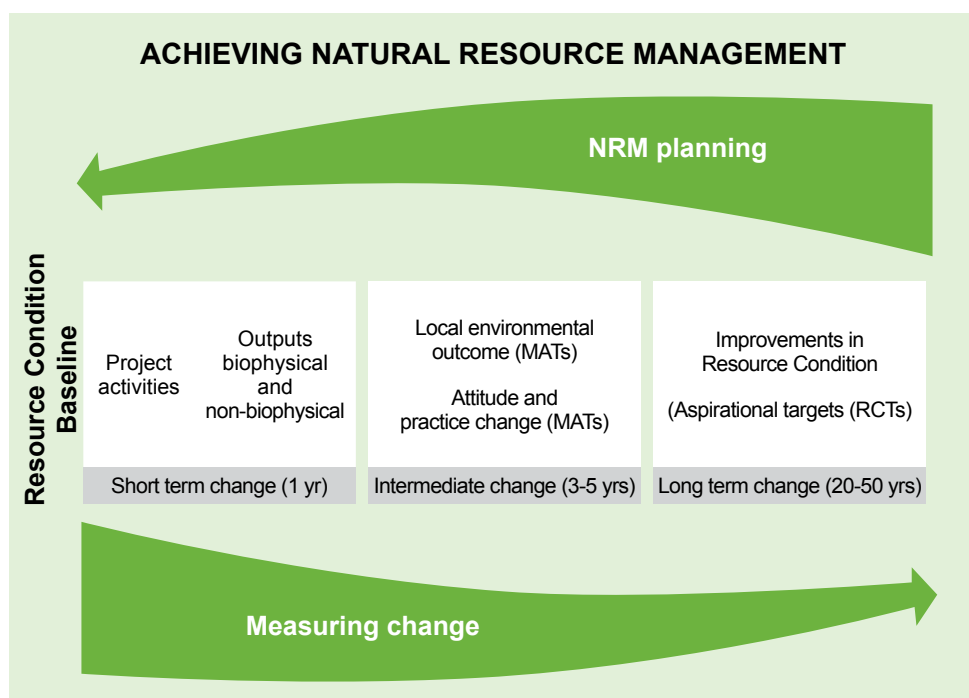
ACHIEVING NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

NRM planning

Resource Condition Baseline

Project activities	Outputs biophysical and non-biophysical	Local environmental outcome (MATs) Attitude and practice change (MATs)	Improvements in Resource Condition (Aspirational targets (RCTs)
Short term change (1 yr)		Intermediate change (3-5 yrs)	Long term change (20-50 yrs)

Measuring change

Figure 9: Program Logic Concept

By defining and describing desired improvements in (natural) resource condition, the planning process defines short term activities and outputs, then medium term environmental and practice changes.

The reporting process measures the change, then results are used in the planning process.

MAT – Management Action Target

RCT – Resource Condition Target

Case Study

Great Lakes Council

The following case study provides an example of a detailed treatment of an NRM issue within a Management Plan prepared under the current system, including a vision statement, reference to existing internal and external policies and strategies, and careful preparation of objectives, strategies and measures. The following information relating to NRM has been derived from the Great Lakes Council Management Plan 2008-2012. The Great Lakes Council vision statement is:

Great Lakes – A leader in the provision of infrastructure and services which sustain and enhance the natural environment and achieve a quality lifestyle for residents and visitors.

Strategic Objective number one is:

To plan for future growth while ensuring a healthy well managed natural environment.

The "Built and Natural Environment" section of the plan relates to the following functions of council:

• *Natural Systems*
• *Strategic Planning*
• *Development Assessment*
• *Environmental Health*
• *Waste Management*

The strategic policy direction within the plan relates to the following external and internal policy directions:

• *Wallis Lake Catchment Plan.*
• *Wallis Lake Estuary Management Plan.*
• *Smiths Lake Estuary Management Plan.*
• *Port Stephens Estuary Management Plan.*
• *Lower Wallamba Rivercare Plan.*

Vision statement describes a "**whole-of-council**" commitment to the "natural environment"

A **separate section** of the plan relates to "natural systems"

Integration exists within the objectives and indicators with **other NRM plans** and the **SoE Report**.

- *Great Lakes Stormwater Quality Management Plans.*
- *Darawakh Creek and Frogalla Swamp Wetland Management Plan.*
- *Healthy Lakes Program.*
- *Hunter Central Rivers Catchment Action Plan.*
- *Draft Water Quality Improvement Plans for Wallis, Myall and Smiths Lakes.*
- *Myall River Rivercare Plan.*
- *Draft Great Lakes Vegetation Management Plan.*
- *Healthy Rivers Commission, Coastal Lakes, Independent Inquiry into Coastal Lakes 2002.*
- *Healthy Rivers Commission, Oysters – independent review of the relationship between healthy oysters and healthy rivers – Final Report 2003.*

The following table lists the key objectives and measures listed in the plan's "Built and Natural Environment" section:

Key Objectives	Performance Indicators
1. 1. To continue to implement measures for the management of Wallis Lake on an ecologically sustainable basis.	1.1 External funding sourced to progress priority projects. 1.2 Progress toward achievement of Estuary and Catchment Plan milestones. 1.3 Active Wallis Lake Estuary Committee and Wallis Lake Catchment Committee.
2. To promote the ecologically sustainable development of Great Lakes.	2.1 Develop strategic response to local natural resource issues. 2.2 Progress toward achieving milestones with natural resource plans
3. To monitor the state of the Great Lakes environment and ensure Council's programs and activities are responsive to identified environmental issues.	3.1 Annual completion of State of the Environment Report. 3.2 Link key State of Environment Report findings to Management Plan and work program.

The key projects listed for the year 2008-2009 are as follows:

- Development of a Sustainability Action Plan for Great Lakes Council and commence implementation of the Sustainability Strategy.
- Preparation of an Environmental management system for Council.
- Implementation of water quality improvement measures in Pipers Creek/Pipers Bay Catchment (subject to stormwater levy).
- Completion of the Water Quality improvement Plans for Wallis, Myall and Smiths Lakes.
- Review of the Smiths Lake Estuary management Plan.
- Further work on rehabilitation of the Darawakh/Frogalla Wetland Rehabilitation Project.
- Construction of rock fillet bank protection measures on the Wallamba River at Elliots Road.
- Complete development of the Wallis Lake Wetland Management Strategy.
- Compile and implement vegetation strategy

Specific projects relate to a number of different sections of Council. Actions combine **engineering projects** and **specific timeframes** for other NRM plans.

6. Action Planning and Delivery

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7. NRM Monitoring and Reporting

What is in this section?

1. An overview of provisions for Corporate Performance Reporting

2. An overview of SoE Reporting, reflecting on benefits and constraints

3. Resource Condition Monitoring and Council capacity

4. Working with Other Agencies and Sourcing External Data

5. Useful Reporting Frameworks – MERI, NRC Standard, GRI etc

6. Case Study – Sutherland Shire Council

Council has an obligation to report on the achievement of NRM activities within its corporate Quarterly and Annual Reports, and for the past fifteen years has been required to meet this requirement through the preparation of a separate State of the Environment (SoE) report. Despite gradual improvement in the quality of SoE reporting, data collection and presentation, councils still struggle in using the SOE report to effectively inform their corporate planning processes. The proposed new framework for integrated planning and reporting aims to grant councils the flexibility to prepare SOE reports in an integrated way, monitoring and reporting on environmental issues that are of concern to their local community and are within council's influence.

Monitoring and reporting remains an essential part of ensuring that Council is accountable to its community for delivering on its planned commitments, and also that Council continues to make informed strategic management decisions. In order to ensure the usefulness of SoE and Annual reports this guideline is suggesting that councils should:
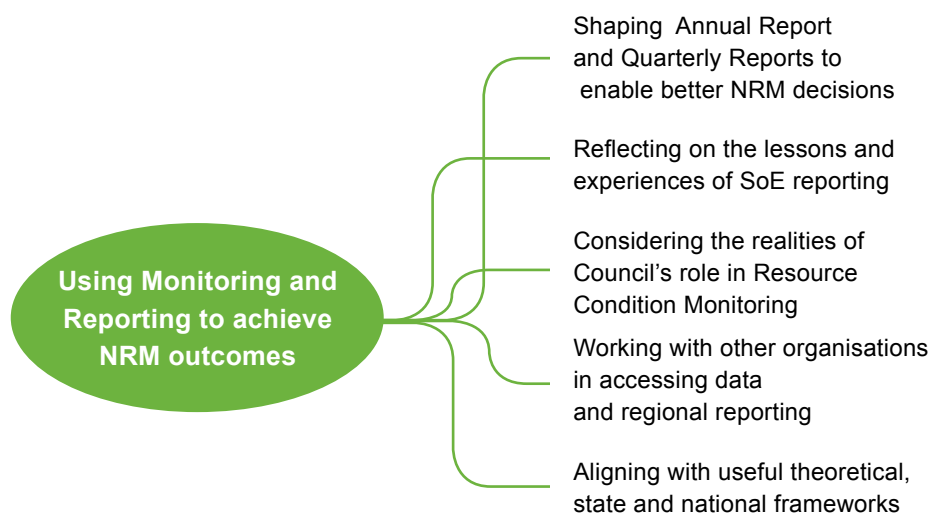
- Align Council reports to the maximum possible extent with national, statewide and regional monitoring and reporting frameworks as well as other council processes;
- Learn from other examples of good practice – other councils, other states, other industries, all of which are often readily available on the internet;
- Recognise that the most appropriate scale of management for many NRM issues is at the catchment level, therefore where possible share resources, expertise, data protocols and collection with other councils;
- Recognise council's limitations in collecting scientifically rigorous NRM data, ensuring that data accuracy and limitations are qualified. Ensure that any information collected directly informs Council's corporate planning and management objectives or targets.
- Improve the level of analysis, data summaries and recommendations; and
- Consider carefully the characteristics of planning and decision-making processes, and tailor reporting information to best inform and guide these.

Monitoring

Collecting and publicising data and information about the changing condition of various environmental factors

Reporting

Publicising the outcomes of a plan, and providing information about council's performance against agreed criteria

Shaping Annual Report
and Quarterly Reports to
enable better NRM decisions

Reflecting on the lessons and
experiences of SoE reporting

Considering the realities of
Council's role in Resource
Condition Monitoring

**Using Monitoring and
Reporting to achieve
NRM outcomes**

Working with other organisations
in accessing data
and regional reporting

Aligning with useful theoretical,
state and national frameworks

7.1 Corporate Performance Reporting

There are currently two requirements for corporate performance reporting in the
Local Government Act 1993:

> **S427** – The General Manager must report **quarterly** to the Council on the
> achievement of the Management Plan; and

> **S428** – Council must prepare an **Annual** Report on Council's achievements with
> respect to objectives and performance targets in management plan.

The Annual Report is an accountability mechanism which requires Council to
publicly report on whether they achieved their commitments. In order for the Annual
Report to provide a good opportunity to promote NRM outcomes, the following
steps are necessary:

- **Accountability** – the *Local Government Act 1993* actually requires Councils to
  report on the outcomes that they did not achieve as well as those that they did,
  and to give reasons for any non-performance;
- **Completeness** – all of the strategies, means and measures within the
  Management Plan should be reported against. This can be a problem if the
  Management Plan itself is too complex, or the measures are unrealistic or
  difficult to collect data on;
- **Summaries** – while there is often a large amount of information, the report
  needs to "cut to the chase" for decision makers. The report needs to show
  whether targets were met or not, and what implications this has for the next
  plan;
- **Activities and Results** – the report format needs to present both Council
  activities and the outcomes of those activities. The targets therefore need to
  relate to management actions and also resource conditions; and
- **Presentation** – the report needs to be easy to read and access. In addition,
  it is also desirable when the report is completed to allow time for Councillors
  and managers to discuss the results and outcomes of the report through
  presentations or briefings.

7. NRM Monitoring and Reporting

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7.2 State of the Environment Reporting

One of the key vehicles within the current Corporate Planning and Reporting framework for NRM is the State of the Environment Report. Since the 1990's councils have been required by the *Local Government Act 1993* to prepare State of the Environment Reports. Within the Act this is a part of the Annual Report, however in practice they are often separate documents.

The content and timing of the reports has historically been prescribed in the legislation, with the intent that the assessment of environmental resource conditions and a profile of the council responses to these conditions would inform the preparation of council's annual management plan and lead to specific environmental initiatives.
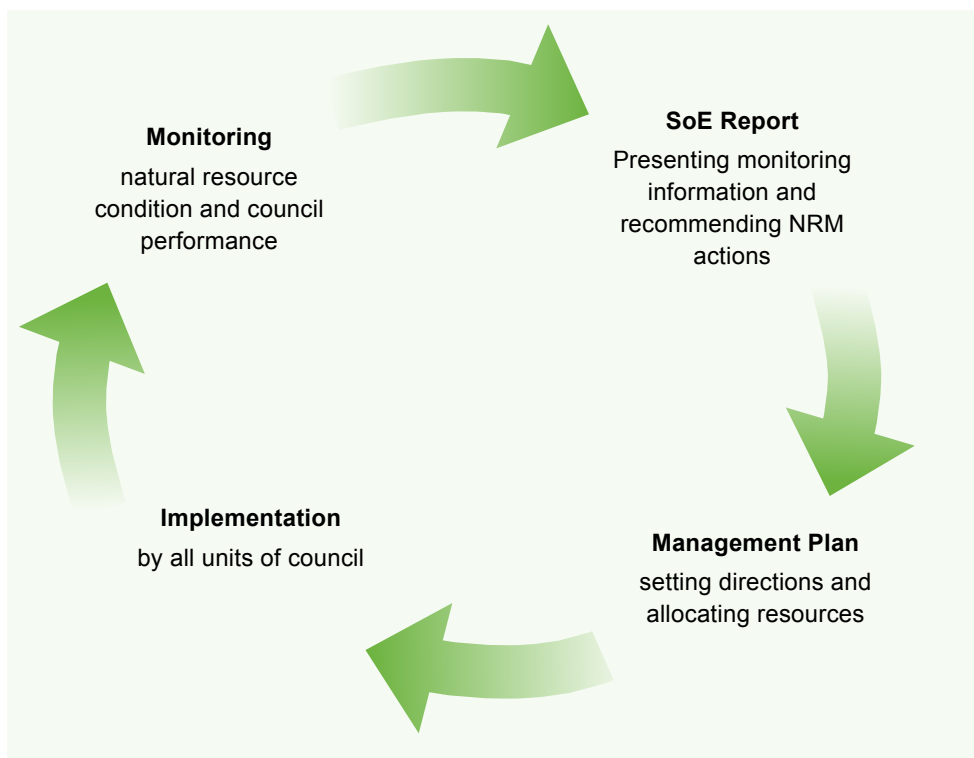

Figure 10: Role of SoE reporting

In 1998 a guide for State of the Environment Reporting was released by the Department of Local Government, which suggested that local SoEs can:

- Provide the public, government and other decision-makers with regular, scientifically sound information about the condition of the environment;
- Report on the effectiveness of policies and programs developed in response to environmental change, including highlighting the cumulative effects of individual project and environmental pressures across catchments or the local area;
- Assess progress towards achieving environmental standards and targets and ecological sustainability;
- Provide input into the development of long-term, ecologically sustainable economic and social policies by all levels of government, through integrating environmental information with social and economic information;
- Identify current and emerging environmental issues and important gaps in knowledge and data collection; and
- Raise community awareness and understanding of their local environment and the contribution individuals make to environmental problems through their use of resources such as energy, water and production of waste.

However there have been some real reasons why these reports have been difficult to prepare in practice:

- Councils have not been given substantial support or assistance in collecting good information, and state government data has been largely unavailable at a local government level. The quality and consistency of information is therefore often inadequate.
- SoE reports might be prepared in the environmental section of a council with little corporate attention being given, and information not seen as relevant to the action planning or budgeting process. This situation has commonly led to the reports being perceived as of little benefit, and merely something to be completed because of legislation rather than as something useful to the council.
- SoE reports often do not have clear recommendations, or provide obvious input into council's management planning process. The issues involved may be too diverse and complex to lead to clear resourcing decisions within short timeframes.
- The reports are often complex and therefore receive little community attention, which then reduces the likelihood of any political response.
- Councils have the freedom to select their own indicators – for good reason because NRM issues are locally quite diverse. However this means that reports often lack regional or statewide alignment and makes it more difficult to assist councils with data collection and analysis.

Under the proposed integrated planning and reporting reforms councils will be encouraged to strengthen their annual reporting arrangements through the ability to prepare their SOE report in an integrated way and inline with the environmental objectives of the Community Strategic Plan (eg. focusing on the environmental issues of concern to their local community and issues within council's influence).

7.3 Resource Condition Monitoring

In July 2008 the Sydney Metropolitan CMA conducted a study into the alignment of local NRM data. The objectives of the project were to identify the range of NRM monitoring which was occurring, assess the data quality, review the value of the data and to identify strategic opportunities. The study covered 39 councils, and the data was categorised as follows:

- Performance monitoring information
  – Projects, programs and policies
  – Management targets
  – Performance information

- Resource condition monitoring
  – Benchmarks
  – Status, pressures or stressors
  – Trends – monitored or modelled
  – Catchment targets

The study found that although there is a lot of NRM data being collected, that it is patchy and lacks continuity. The actual parameters of resources such as water quality or vegetation condition were variable, and generally the data quality was poor. The scales and formats were variable, and therefore on a regional scale the information was difficult or impossible to aggregate. It was even more difficult to evaluate the information, or to actually determine what the results might mean in terms of management implications. The data was therefore found to have little value for catchment-wide resource condition, but to have some value for performance monitoring (Sydney Metropolitan CMA, July 2008 – Initial Findings).

Resource condition monitoring is **complex and expensive**.

To obtain scientifically valid information that can be used over time is **beyond the resources** of many councils.

In deciding whether or not to undertake the collection of NRM information, Councils should carefully assess the **benefits vs costs**.

Good resource condition monitoring is **scientifically valid**, useful in **decision-making**, and provides **trend information over time**.

7.4 Working with Other Agencies

Councils, under the proposed integrated planning and reporting reforms, will be strongly encouraged to develop their SOE report in partnership with other councils and CMAs.

Regional Reporting

Reporting on a regional, rather than an individual council basis, can be beneficial because:

- Many environmental issues are regional in nature;
- Regional co-operation can reduce the time and resources involved in preparing an SoE Report; and
- Environmental information is often collected and held by government authorities and other bodies on a regional rather than on a local government basis.

Case Study

Hunter Councils Regional State of the Environment Reporting Network

The Hunter Councils State of the Environment Reporting Group provides a forum to review and share information on the experiences, processes, and resources utilised when preparing State of the Environment Reports. Priorities identified by the working group include the following:

- Data availability, sharing, suitability and timing
- Review of the 1996/98 Department of Local Government SoE Reporting Guidelines
- Making SoE Recommendations and linking these to Management Planning & Reporting
- Staff capacity building in regard to:
    - Use of the HCCREMS Regional SoE Reporting Template
    - Sustainability Reporting.

(Source: www.huntercouncils.com.au/environment/networks/)

Catchment Management Authorities

The CMA's face many of the same pressures and challenges as councils in accessing and utilising good natural resource condition information. The new State of the Catchment Reports (developed by the NSW Government) are expected to deliver another level of NRM information, which may be able to be used by councils in preparing their local State of Environment and Annual Reports.

Councils may enter into Memorandum of Understandings with CMAs for a range of reasons, including the sharing of information and data. The negotiation process between councils and CMAs may result in a pooling of available intelligence, however there is also the potential that different boundaries, reporting requirements, timeframes or political emphasis will come between the pooling of resources to collect mutually beneficial information.

State of the Catchment Reports

The NSW MER Strategy provides the context for State of the Catchment (SoC) reports.

SoC reports are to provide a preliminary assessment of the **condition of natural resources in each catchment**; inform CMA investment decisions and those of other NRM managers in the region; and assess progress towards catchment targets.

SoC reports are likely to be produced every 3 years starting in 2009 and will also be available online.

SoE Direct

Many State Government agencies offer professional support and expertise to councils in the NRM field. An example includes the NSW Environmental Protection Authority (now part of the NSW Department of Environment and Climate Change) who hosts a service on the Natural Resource Atlas website at www.nratlas.nsw.gov.au called "SoE Direct" (a screen shot of the website is pictured below). This site allows SoE Report writers in Councils to select their local government area, and then choose from the following indicators:

• Waste disposal and recycling;

• Environmental Grants;

• Environmental Protection licensing;

• Public calls to pollution line;

• Regional pollution index;

• Contamination of land;

• River health; and

• Coastal Recreational Water Quality.

Figure 11: SoE Direct

7.5 Useful External Frameworks

While it is important for councils to establish their own priorities for monitoring and reporting on NRM, there are a number of frameworks available which can avoid councils having to "re-invent the wheel". Obviously resources are limited and good data collection is expensive, so to maximise the available resources councils can learn from other councils, levels of government and reporting frameworks.

National NRM MERI Framework

The NRM Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Improvement framework (MERI Framework) was developed by the Federal Department for the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts, and provides a generic framework for managing natural assets.

The framework contains key asset classes which include human, social, natural, physical and financial assets. The framework defines indicative asset classes, assets and indicators, and some indicators also have protocols for their measurement and reporting. The National indicators for asset condition have been designed to assist with setting targets in program plans, and also to provide standard approaches to measurement. Indicator selection is recommended according to the following principles:

These asset classes and associated indicators may assist councils in defining and measuring their **resource condition targets** for SoE and Annual Reports.

- Cost
- Simplicity
- Consistency
- Practicality
- Capacity to deliver information

Specific indicators are recommended within the following asset classes:

Asset Class	Asset	Indicator Heading
Land	Soil	• Area of land threatened by shallow or rising water tables • Soil Condition
	Native Vegetation	• Native vegetation extent and distribution • Native vegetation condition
Biodiversity	Selected significant native species and ecological communities	• Selected significant native species and ecological communities extent and conservation status • Selected ecologically significant invasive species extent and impact • Selected ecologically significant invasive vegetation species extent and impact
Inland and Marine Waters	Inland aquatic ecosystems	• River condition • Wetland ecosystem condition • Estuarine, coastal and marine habitat extent and distribution
	Estuarine, coastal and marine habitat	• Estuarine, coastal and marine habitat condition

	Aquatic environments	• Nutrients in Aquatic Environments • Turbidity/suspended particulate matter in aquatic environments • Salinity in freshwater aquatic environments
Resource Managers	NRM capacity in individuals and communities	• Capacity of individuals and communities to change and adopt sustainable management practices
NRM Organisations and Institutions	NRM capacity in institutions and organisations	• NRM capacity in institutions and organisations to change and adopt sustainable management practices
Industry Contribution	Sustainable industries	• Industry awareness of NRM issues and sustainable practices • Extent of adoption of sustainable NRM practices • Level of productivity of resource industries

NSW Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting Strategy

NSW MER Strategy

The MER system is making progress towards the creation of **open-access, integrated databases** which will provide **NRM data** to other potential users. This data will assist decision-makers, including councils to access key NRM information useful to NRM planning processes.

Councils and their planning efforts may benefit in the future from a **more co-ordinated approach** to statewide NRM information collection, including the development of a number of statewide indices.

Reporting Strategy was developed in 2006, and lists proposed statewide monitoring programs to be implemented, and additional monitoring programs that may be implemented if funding becomes available. The purpose of the MER Strategy is to refocus the resources of NSW natural resource and environment agencies and coordinate their efforts with CMAs, local governments, landholders and other natural resource managers to establish a system of monitoring, evaluation and reporting on natural resource condition. It identifies lead agencies for each monitoring program. Agency and CMA monitoring programs were to be coordinated to gain maximum use of data sets and to minimise costs.

Over time, the strategy expresses the intention to increase the number of indicators monitored statewide to gain a more complete understanding of changes in natural resource condition. It also plans to develop indices that describe in simple terms the overall health of natural resources. Indices combine the monitoring results for a number of indicators into a single measure that summarises whether or not the condition of the resource is improving. The key indices to be developed (with lead agencies shown in brackets) are:

• Biodiversity index (DECC)

• Riverine condition index (DECC)

• Groundwater index (DECC)

• Near-shore marine condition index (DECC)

• Wetland condition index (DECC)

• Estuary condition index (DPI)

• Land and soil capability assessment index (incorporating soil condition) (DECC)

• Index of contributions to socio-economic outcomes (DECC)

• Index of community capacity (DECC).

*(Source:www.environment.nsw.gov.au/soe/soe2006/chapter8/chp_*
NaturalresourcemanagementinNSW.htm)

NRC Standard for Quality NRM

The NSW Natural Resources Commission published in December 2007 a *Standard for Quality Natural Resource Management*. In NSW each CMA is legally obliged to meet the Standard, however other agencies including councils are also encouraged to implement it. This standard is a set of seven inter-related components that define the characteristics of quality NRM practice. These characteristics are expressed as *Required Outcomes* that managers are expected to meet, and are listed below:

• **Collection and use of knowledge**: Use of the best available knowledge to inform decisions in a structured and transparent manner;

• **Determination of scale**: Management of natural resource issues at the optimal spatial, temporal and institutional scale to maximise effective contribution to broader goals, deliver integrated outcomes and prevent or minimise adverse consequences;

• **Opportunities for collaboration**: Collaboration with other parties to maximise gains, share or minimse costs, or deliver multiple benefits is explored and pursued wherever possible;

• **Community engagement**: Implementation of strategies sufficient to meaningfully engage the participation of the community in the planning, implementation and review of natural resource management strategies and the achievement of identified goals and targets;

• **Risk management**: Consideration and management of all identifiable risks and impacts to maximse efficiency and effectiveness, ensure success and avoid, minimise and control adverse impacts;

• **Monitoring and evaluation:** Quantification and demonstration of progress towards goals and targets by means of regular monitoring, measuring, evaluation and reporting of organisational and project performance and the use of results to guide improved practice; and

• **Information Management:** Management of information in a manner that meets user needs and satisfies formal security, accountability and transparency requirements.

The NRC 2007 states that these seven components of the Standard can inform and promote the adaptive management cycle, and their interaction with the planning, implementation, audit and response cycle shown in the following diagram:
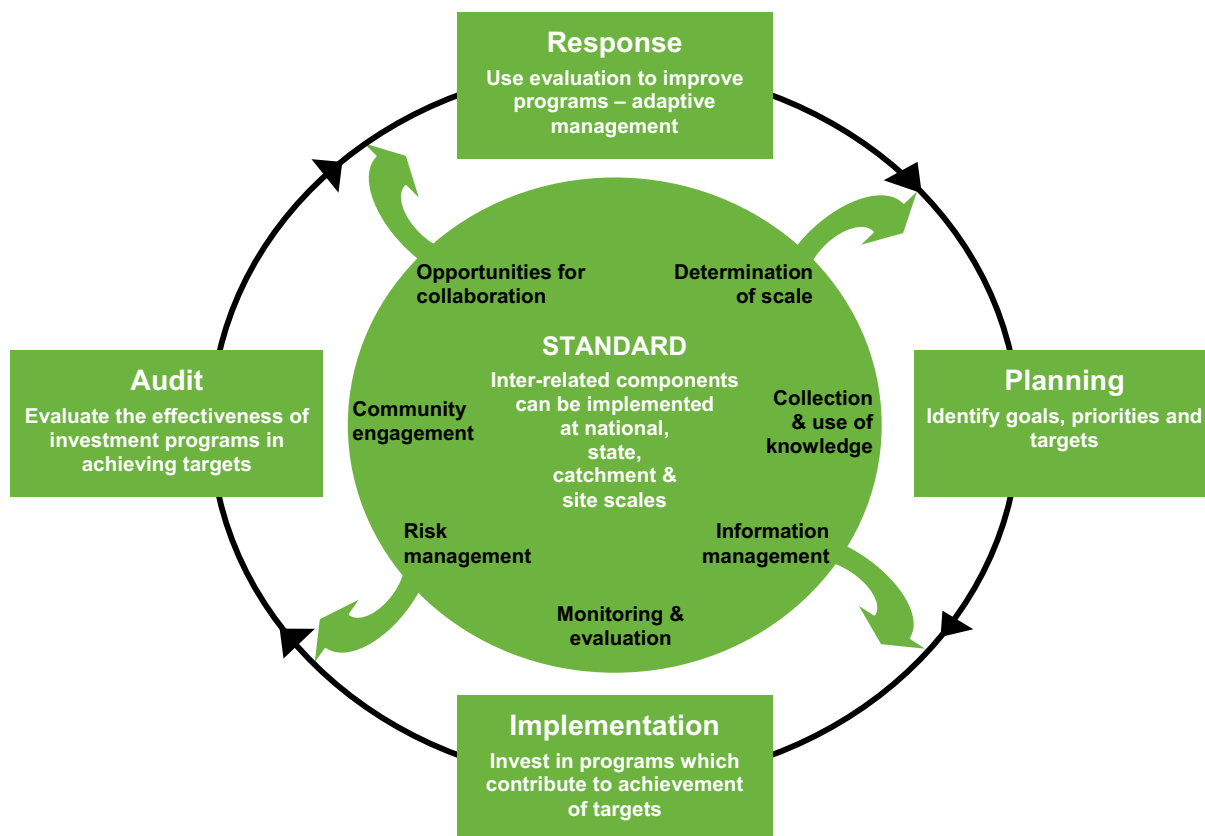

Figure 12: An Introduction to the Standard for Quality NRM

(Source :Natural Resources Commission 2007)

Global Reporting Initiative

The Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) is a large, multi-stakeholder network of experts in many countries worldwide who use the GRI guidelines to report, access information or to further develop the reporting framework. Supported by a secretariat based in Amsterdam, the GRI's mission is

"to create conditions for the transparent and reliable exchange of sustainability information through the development and continuous improvement of the GRI Sustainability Reporting Framework".

The Public Sector Supplement is a sustainability reporting reference written for use by all types of public agencies. It includes:

• Reporting principles; and
• Information about report content including:
    – Vision and strategy
    – Profile
    – Governance structure and management systems
    – Public policies and implementation measures
    – Performance Indicators – economic, environment, social

(Source: www.globalreporting.org)

Case Study

Hornsby Council Sustainability Reporting

Hornsby Shire Council has endorsed an approach to sustainability reporting aligned to the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) and its Principles because it provides a balanced view of internal performance management, promotes quality governance, strengthens stakeholder engagement, and demonstrates higher levels of performance.

GRI indicators focus on the performance of the organisation and are aligned to one of five areas:

• GRI EC = Economic indicators – economic value adding, wealth distribution and indirect economic impacts
• GRI EN = Environmental indicators – biodiversity and environmental health
• GRI LA = Labour indicators – skills development and gender equity
• GRI HR = Human rights indicators – social justice and equity
• GRI SO = Society and product responsibility

(Source: Hornsby Shire Council Management Plan 2008-2012 www.hornsby.nsw.gov.au/yourcouncil/index.cfm?NavigationID=766)

UNEP Melbourne Principles

The United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) and the Environment Protection Authority of Victoria held an international charette in April 2002 in Melbourne, which was instrumental in developing the Melbourne Principles for Sustainable Cities, now known as the Melbourne Principles. The Melbourne Principles for Sustainable Cities, as endorsed by the participants of the charette, are intended to guide thinking and help build a vision of environmentally healthy and sustainable cities (www.unep.or.jp/ietc/).

The 10 Melbourne Principles are:

1. Provide a long term vision for cities based on sustainability;
2. Empower people and foster participation and inter-generational equity;
3. Recognise and build on the characteristics of cities including their human, cultural, historic and natural systems;
4. Build on the characteristics of ecosystems;
5. Achieve long-term economic and social security;
6. Expand and enable cooperative networks to work towards a common sustainable future;
7. Enable communities to minimize their ecological footprint;
8. Enable continual improvement, accountability and transparency;
9. Require effective demand management and appropriate use of environmentally sound technologies for cities; and,
10. Recognise the intrinsic value of biodiversity and natural ecosystems and their protection and restoration.

Case Study

Penrith Sustainability Principles

Penrith City Council adopted the UNEP Principles for Sustainable Cities in 2003, and has now developed its own objectives within the Management Plan under each principle. Throughout the Management Plan 2008-2009, the adopted Strategic Program has been aligned to the new Sustainability Framework, with the framework hierarchy as shown below:

UNEP Sustainability Principle

- Objective (Penrith City response to this Principle)

Strategic Program 2005-2009

- Issue/Longer Term Goal (unlimited horizon)
    - Term Achievement (outcome over 4 years)
        - Critical Action (to deliver the Term Achievement)
        - Services (principal links to the Operational Plan)

Annual Management Plan Content (within 62 Services)

- Strategic Tasks
- Projects / Works Programs
- Service Improvements/Initiatives
- KPIs

(Source: www.penrithcity.nsw.gov.au)

7.6 Case Study: Sutherland Shire Council

Case Study

Sutherland Shire Council currently has three corporate reports on its public website – the State of the Shire Report 2004, the State of the Environment Report 2006-07, and the Annual Report 2007-08. This case study gives an overview of the NRM content of the Annual Report, which is the most recent report.

The Annual Report includes comprehensive information about the achievement of the Council's Management Plan, and in particular against three Principal Activities. The third Principal Activity is called "Nature – Environmental Strategy".

The front of the report includes a table which includes a summary of key outcomes for each of the Principal Activities, and the following are listed for the "Nature" component for 2007/08:

Minimise impacts of disasters

- Financial assistance was provided to the local emergency services
- Council was a major contributor to the Sydney Coastal Council Report "A Systems Approach to Regional Climate Change Adaptation in Metropolises"

Low waste future

- Enviro-Works courses resulted in 36% of participants saying they have subsequently reduced their waste production
- The Shire's waste-to-landfill totalled 1,204 kg per household, recycled goods (co-mingled) 726 kg per household; and greenwaste recycled and reused was 591 kg per household

Native flora and fauna

- Pest species captured or controlled by water catchment (area) included birds, deer, foxes and rabbits
- Three hundred and fifty people participants in an Indian Myna bird trap program resulting in control of 1,200 birds

Waterways, beaches and wetlands

- A total of 971 tonnes of organics and 402 tonnes of litter was removed from council's stormwater quality improvement devices

Better air quality

- Council has reduced its own CO_2 emissions by 1.6%

Conserve natural resources

- Council's overall water consumption was 367,917kL, a 17% reduction to date since 2003/04
- Computerised data logger units were purchased to allow 24/7 monitoring of water usage at several council sites
- Back-to-base monitoring has been installed to control irrigation of council's playing fields, allow far better control of watering of ovals

A summary at the beginning of the report summarises performance outcomes for the year

The structure of the body of the report is as follows:

• **Principal Activities** – there are three of these key areas, and they cross organisational functions and boundaries;

• **Key Directions** – these are repeated from the Management Plan, and for the third Principal Activity they include:
  – Minimisation of the environmental, economic and social impacts of disasters;
  – A low waste future – avoid, reduce, reuse, recycle – with best practice disposal;
  – Abundant and healthy native flora and fauna;
  – Cleaner, healthier waterways, beaches and wetlands, with healthy marine life and cleaner stormwater run-off;
  – Reduced greenhouse gas emissions and better air quality; and
  – Conservation of our natural resources.

• **Results Snapshot** – on the front page of each key direction report, each of the targets and performance indicators from the Management Plan are listed. Each of these includes an outcome for the reporting period represented by an arrow – either "achieved" or "not achieved", for example:
  – Amount of litter and organics removed from stormwater quality improvement devices Þ Outcome Achieved
  – Level of contaminants identified through Strategic Water Monitoring Program Ü Outcome Not Achieved

• **What we did** – Each of the performance measures is reported against in detail, including an explanation of the Council activities and initiatives which occurred throughout the reporting period, as well as concrete data to support any NRM outcomes. For example the following text reports against the performance target relating to stormwater quality –

Council's stormwater levy assists with construction of new and maintenance of existing gross pollutant traps, implementing stormwater harvesting, creek restorations and drainage upgrades. Works may include rehabilitation of riparian vegetation in creeks and other habitats, construction of devices and general environmental restoration.

2007/08 tonnes removed:
• *Organics: 1,025*
• *Litter: 402*

Key Directions statements are **strategic** but clear, specific and **realistic**

Report states clearly whether goals are **met or not met**

Reports on Council **activities** and also provides data on concrete **outcomes** which were achieved

7. NRM Monitoring and Reporting

8. Concluding Remarks

All local councils in NSW, irrespective of their size or location, either make or are in a position to make, a significant contribution to the management and protection of natural resources.

Although, a number of local councils are advanced in incorporating NRM into land use and corporate planning processes, many are looking to build their capacity to be more effectively involved in local and regional NRM planning.

These Guidelines have been designed to assist in strengthening councils' capacity, confidence and competence to participate effectively in NRM activities, and to promote adoption of best practice management and policies for Councils in achieving sustainable NRM.

The guide nominates good practice examples from councils and agencies which have been set in place to respond to key challenges facing NRM in the various stages of the corporate planning and reporting system.

It is emphasised that there are most certainly other good practice examples available, however we are confident that the circulation of the work will promote further discussion and exchange of information among players all of which should assist in improving our capacities.

8.1 Holistic Approach

The final point to be made in the guideline is that effective practice is more than implementing change in the discrete elements of the corporate planning system. Rather it is about the development of a holistic approach across the council which is focused on optimising NRM outcomes.

This guideline is concerned with corporate planning functions, and the driver for this attitudinal change may originate within the corporate planning unit. Volume 2 of the guideline package looks at councils land use planning activities. A drive to improved organisational NRM performance could also be led from other areas of the council.

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