Shoalhaven
City Council

Community Wellbeing Strategy

2022

Work

Learning

Housing

Nature

Health

Community

Acknowledgement
of Country

We acknowledge the traditional owners and custodians of this country and their continuing connection to the land through culture and community. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and future.

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Executive
Summary

The Shoalhaven Community Wellbeing Plan is a framework to guide Shoalhaven City Council in making business-planning decisions to improve community wellbeing.

The Shoalhaven Community Wellbeing Plan will comprise:

- This document, the **Shoalhaven Community Wellbeing Strategy**, which identifies the strategic priorities for Council to improve community wellbeing. It will provide the strategic direction to guide development of the Action Plan and Evaluation Framework.
- The **Action Plan** will identify specific actions that will be used to achieve the outcomes identified for each strategic priority in the Strategy.
- The **Evaluation Framework** will allow Council to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of our work in terms of impact on wellbeing indicators.

The Plan will provide a tool that will support Council to evaluate the importance and effectiveness of our investments, programs and assets in achieving wellbeing outcomes and to plan evidence-informed work in response.

Approach

Wellbeing is the ability to thrive, to which all should have equitable access. Community wellbeing is a shared responsibility that requires all community stakeholders to work collaboratively to achieve shared goals and aspirations for wellbeing.

This Strategy identifies the foundations needed to create community wellbeing – the broad range of key things that the community needs to thrive, including both the places and the people that make up communities that support wellbeing.

Methodology

To develop the Strategy, a comprehensive literature review was undertaken to consider current research and ensure a contemporary understanding of community wellbeing. In addition, we heard from over 460 people in the Shoalhaven community, using surveys and community and stakeholder workshops and interviews. The Strategy is also informed by the perspectives of a broad range of experienced Council teams.

Council's role

Council is a key player in creating the conditions for wellbeing but cannot achieve community wellbeing alone. Recognising this, the Strategy supports Council to work more strategically and collaboratively to improve community wellbeing, considering how our efforts work alongside those of other stakeholders and valuing the important contribution that people in our community make to community wellbeing.

To create the conditions for individuals and communities to thrive, eight Foundations have been identified as integral for wellbeing. The key aspects of each Foundation form the Wellbeing Domains, which are summarised over the page.

The Strategy outlines Council's existing work contributing to each Domain, as well as opportunities for future work and the key partners who make each Domain happen in the Shoalhaven.

Foundations for **Wellbeing**

Foundation 1
Vibrant communities where everyone can participate and connect

Access to opportunities to participate and connect in the community and with culture

Domains:

1.1 Community life
People do things in their community and feel connected, included, community pride and belonging

1.2 Civic engagement and community agency
People actively participate in shaping their community and have a sense of shared responsibility

1.3 Creativity and culture
People value and celebrate creative and cultural expression (Participation in the arts, engagement with cultural events/activities that represent and reflect the community's stories, heritage and character)

Foundation 2
Lifelong learning and helping each other

Access to opportunities throughout life to learn, help others and be supported

Domains:

2.1 Training for employment
People have access to education to improve their employment opportunities

2.2 Learning opportunities for all ages
People have access to learning opportunities to build skills for enjoyment and to build capacity; Children and their families/carers have support for early childhood development

2.3 Local community supports
People have access to well-resourced local support services; People volunteer to help others in the community

Foundation 3
Safe and prepared communities

Safety in relationships, in the community and during emergencies

Domains:

3.1 Safe built environment
People experience safety in community spaces; People are safe using buildings and development that meets legislative standards

3.2 Safe behaviour and healthy relationships
People feel safe with others and are supported by healthy, respectful relationships

3.3 Prepared for disasters and emergencies
People are prepared for disasters; Emergency Managers are ready to keep people safe during disasters and emergencies

Foundation 4
Healthy and active communities

Access to opportunities to live healthy and active lifestyles

Domains:

4.1 Health services and support
People have good access to health services and supports

4.2 Places and programs for active lifestyles
People have access to green space and facilities for active recreation, play and walking; People have access to sports and active recreational activities

4.3 Healthy and equitable food systems
People have equitable access to healthy food

Foundation 5
Transport connections to access our community's opportunities

Access to transport infrastructure and services so we can participate in life

Domains:

5.1 Active transport
People access places and services in their community by walking or cycling; People with additional access needs can get around

5.2 Transport facilities and services
People can get around with public transport and other transport services; People have good facilities when using public transport

5.3 Road access
People can get around by road

Foundation 6
Sustainable natural and built environments

Sustainable access to natural resources by managing our impact on them

Domains:

6.1 Sustainable management of natural resources
People can access our natural resources in a way that supports the long-term sustainability of them.

6.2 Sustainable access to natural environments
People can enjoy our natural environment in a way that is sustainable for future generations (Natural environments are sustainably managed so people will have access in the future)

6.3 Sustainable built environment
People are supported to understand sustainable building and to build sustainably

Foundation 7
Housing that meets the community's needs

Access to secure and affordable housing that meets our households' needs

Domains:

7.1 Housing security for people of all income levels and tenure types
People can live without housing stress; People can access social and Affordable dwellings

7.2 Housing for people with access and support needs
People can access adaptable and accessible dwellings; People can live in supported accommodation

7.3 Housing for residents
People can live where resident communities live (the majority of housing is available for residents)

Foundation 8
Resilient local economies and inclusive economic opportunities

Access to secure employment opportunities and income to provide for our households

Domains:

8.1 Economic opportunity
People have secure employment; People have income to meet their household's needs; People have equitable access to material and social resources

8.2 Economic diversity
People have local employment opportunities in diverse and resilient industries

Message from the Mayor

This is the first Shoalhaven Community Wellbeing Strategy, an important step that helps us all focus on what people here need to flourish, be healthy and improve overall wellbeing.

Thank you to those individuals, services and community groups who spoke with us about what people in the Shoalhaven need to thrive and to those that gave up their time to complete surveys, attend community workshops or provide feedback on the draft Strategy. I hope you all can recognise your valued contributions within this strategy.

We all have a role to play in making our community one that values wellbeing and fosters the approach that wellbeing isn't just about physical health, but includes the simple things that bring us joy and happiness, connect us to one another, and give us the opportunity to participate.

The Strategy recognises that everyone has a role in creating community wellbeing. People in the community, service providers and organisations, businesses , all levels of government – every day, each of us as stakeholders play a part in ensuring that people in the Shoalhaven can thrive. Thank you for making the time to contribute, large or small your time has been valued.

We are on this journey together and I look forward to using this Strategy to improve our lives and thrive together in this place we call home- the beautiful Shoalhaven.

Amanda Findley
Mayor

Message from the CEO

I am delighted to introduce Shoalhaven City Council's first Community Wellbeing Strategy. Shoalhaven City Council is committed to ensuring that all of its residents have the opportunity to live healthy, rewarding and socially connected lives. This strategy is a great step forward in helping Council and other stakeholders across the Shoalhaven achieve this goal.

Community wellbeing is reflected and incorporated across our suite of strategic documents but this is Council's first strategic document solely focused on community wellbeing. This Strategy supports our other plans and strategies and has been created with input from across all levels of Shoalhaven City Council as well as with input from State and Federal Departments, Community Service providers and the community. The Strategy is part of Council's Wellbeing Plan which is formed by three key documents, this Strategy, an Action Plan and a Wellbeing Framework to guide Council's decision making.

The Strategy recognises that Council is a key player in creating the conditions that the community needs to thrive. At the same time, it identifies that community wellbeing cannot be achieved without a range of stakeholders working together effectively. With the recent natural disaster challenges that have impacted the Shoalhaven, it is increasingly important to work strategically and collaboratively. As well as ensuring Council's work is efficient and impactful, this approach supports the work of all stakeholders to improve outcomes for the community.

The Strategy highlights the diverse work that Council does each week to improve community wellbeing, in collaboration with a range of stakeholders. Council teams are experienced in delivering diverse services to meet the needs of the community, and their expertise has been a valuable input for developing the Strategy.

As the Strategy is implemented and informs our work, I look forward to developing and strengthening collaboration with stakeholders and community, and ultimately improving community wellbeing in the Shoalhaven.

Stephen Dunshea
Chief Executive Officer

"Everything we value in life

(such as health, fairness, freedom, the economy, the environment or anything else)

matters because it contributes to the wellbeing of current and future generations"

- Action for Happiness

"The purpose of public policy and community action is to improve people's lives."

– What Works Centre for Wellbeing

Introduction

Purpose of document

The purpose of the Shoalhaven Community Wellbeing Plan is to create a framework to guide Shoalhaven City Council in making business-planning decisions to improve community wellbeing. The Plan will provide a tool that will support Council to evaluate the importance and effectiveness of our investments, programs and assets in achieving wellbeing outcomes and to plan evidence-informed work in response. The Shoalhaven Community Wellbeing Plan has three components:

- This document, the **Shoalhaven Community Wellbeing Strategy**, identifies the strategic priorities for Council to improve community wellbeing. Guided by the strategic direction of this document, the two components below will be developed.
- The **Action Plan** will identify specific actions that will be used to achieve the outcomes identified for each strategic priority in the Strategy.
- The **Evaluation Framework** will allow Council to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of our work in terms of impact on wellbeing indicators.

The Shoalhaven Community Wellbeing Strategy is informed by international, national, state and regional strategies and legislation, as well as by *Shoalhaven 2032 – Community Strategic Plan*. As a strategic document created to guide decision-making, the Strategy will inform the development of future plans and policies used by Council to implement work-planning decisions.

Defining Wellbeing

The Shoalhaven Community Wellbeing Plan uses the following definition of wellbeing, which is based on the literature review and community engagement described in the 'Methodology for Understanding Wellbeing' section.

> *Wellbeing is not the absence of problems but the ability to thrive, to which all should have equitable access. To thrive is to flourish and do well, to develop or grow vigorously, be healthy and strong.*
>
> *The wellbeing of individuals and communities is shaped by where and how we live. Since the foundations for wellbeing are largely social in nature, creating the conditions for wellbeing requires a whole-of-community focus.*

Approach to Community Wellbeing

The Shoalhaven Community Wellbeing Strategy has been developed based on the principle that community wellbeing is a shared responsibility that requires all community stakeholders to work collaboratively to achieve shared goals and aspirations for wellbeing.

In response, this Strategy identifies the foundations needed to create community wellbeing – the broad range of key things that the community needs to thrive. Wellbeing requires both healthy built environments and healthy social environments: the places AND the people that make up communities that support wellbeing.

This approach recognises that Council is a key player in creating the conditions for wellbeing but cannot achieve community wellbeing alone. The approach supports Council to work more strategically and collaboratively to improve community wellbeing, considering how our efforts work alongside those of other stakeholders and valuing the important contribution that people in our community make to community wellbeing.

Vision for Community Wellbeing

The Shoalhaven is a place where everyone can thrive. It is a place where people and communities have equitable access to the foundations for wellbeing, which are the conditions and opportunities they need to improve their quality of life and to thrive.

Shoalhaven City Council works together with the community to facilitate wellbeing in the Shoalhaven. Since community wellbeing is a shared responsibility that requires all community stakeholders to work collaboratively, we work strategically to align our work with the work that residents, community groups, government and the private sector do to improve community wellbeing.

Methodology for understanding wellbeing

To develop the Foundations and Domains that underpin the Strategy, a comprehensive literature review was undertaken to consider current research and ensure a contemporary understanding of community wellbeing. In addition, we asked the Shoalhaven community about their experiences and ideas, hearing from over 460 people using surveys, community and stakeholder workshops and interviews. The Strategy is also informed by the perspectives of a broad range of experienced Council teams.

Literature and statistics review

Research covered a literature and data review from academic and practice-levels, at the international level, Australian federal and state levels and local government publications and policies. Population and health statistics for the Shoalhaven and its sub-regions were drawn from a range of sources (details of the demographic and health studies consulted are provided at Appendix 2). Literature and data sources included:

- World Health Organisation and the international health sector
- Australian federal and state health, planning and infrastructure sectors
- Australian university sector and non-government organisations
- Local government in NSW and other Australian states
- Australian Bureau of Statistics' Census of Population and Housing
- NSW agencies including Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District and Illawarra Shoalhaven Regional Plan
- Council surveys including Community Satisfaction Survey and Housing Affordability Strategy

When considering the factors that contribute to individual health and wellbeing, the literature identifies that the nature and scope of individual action is influenced by our individual makeup, life circumstances such as where you have spent your time, family circumstances, education and employment opportunities. One significant model building on the WHO definition is the 'Social Determinants of Health', summarised in Figure 1. This model recognises the breadth of factors influencing individual health and wellbeing, ranging from individual genetics to broader society-based determinants such as lifestyle and social networks and, more broadly, to social and cultural context. A detailed discussion of the concept of individual and community wellbeing, and references consulted, is provided at Appendix 1.

Local and international literature emphasises the role of all levels of government in contributing to wellbeing. Local government, including in the Shoalhaven, has a long-standing involvement in supporting individual and community wellbeing, particularly through activities like providing parks and recreational facilities. In Victoria, all councils must have a Social Plan addressing wellbeing, with resources available to guide the process and content. The literature review also considered similar documents for other Australian states, New Zealand and further afield internationally. Aspects of wellbeing highlighted in the literature included active living and 'liveability', with numerous research papers, advice and initiatives focused on local government.

The Shoalhaven is a unique series of places with a diverse population. It covers over 4,500km² of beautiful coastline and forest, with 49 settlements ranging from tight-knit villages to small regional towns. With 74% of the land area designated as National Park, there are 275 threatened species and 16 threatened ecological communities. The estimated population in 2021 was 108,892, of which 6.5% identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (compared to 3.4% for NSW). Census 2021 data also shows we have an ageing population, with 69.7% over 30 years old (63.1% for NSW) and 28.0% over 65 years old (17.6% for NSW). Of the LGA's 38,909-strong labour force, 77.5% (30,153) also work in the area and are part of producing an $11.4 billion in annual economic output (2016 Census). More information on population characteristics is provided at Appendix 2.

At the time this Strategy was developed, data from the 2021 Census was available for some population characteristics but was not yet available for all characteristics. As the Strategy was researched and drafted, statistics and trends resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic were emerging, including impacts on health, housing prices and the local economy. Monitoring of trends will continue and will be addressed as future versions of the Strategy are produced.

Community engagement

In developing the Shoalhaven Community Wellbeing Strategy, we heard from over 460 people in the community using surveys, workshops and interviews with residents, service providers, community organisations and Council teams. This approach allowed us to hear from people across the Shoalhaven, including engagement targeted to hear from young people and seniors, and to also learn from the insights of experienced Council staff.

The research was used to inform community engagement, and the results of the community surveys, workshops and interviews refined the Strategy's priority areas and objectives. Initial interviews with key Council staff crystallised the information from literature and initial engagement into four focus areas that were the basis of the detailed survey work. The results of the survey informed further development and identification of the Foundations and Domains.

Insights from the community and stakeholder engagement specific to each Foundation are presented throughout this Strategy. A summary of the outcomes of community and stakeholder engagement is detailed in Engagement Outcomes report accompanying the Strategy. Feedback on the draft Strategy will also be sought from the community through public exhibition and a follow-up workshop with external stakeholders.

The Community and Stakeholder Engagement Strategy conducted for this Strategy consisted of the following elements:

A. Community surveys. A preliminary online survey asked initial questions and sought community interest in participating in the community workshops. The preliminary survey and workshops informed the development and delivery of the detailed community survey.

B. Community workshops. This consisted of two online workshops open to the whole community (with participants drawn from the preliminary survey) and targeted workshops with seniors and young people. A proposed workshop with the Aboriginal community was replaced by three targeted interviews. Community engagement undertaken as part of the Disability Inclusion Action Plan review was also used to inform the Strategy.

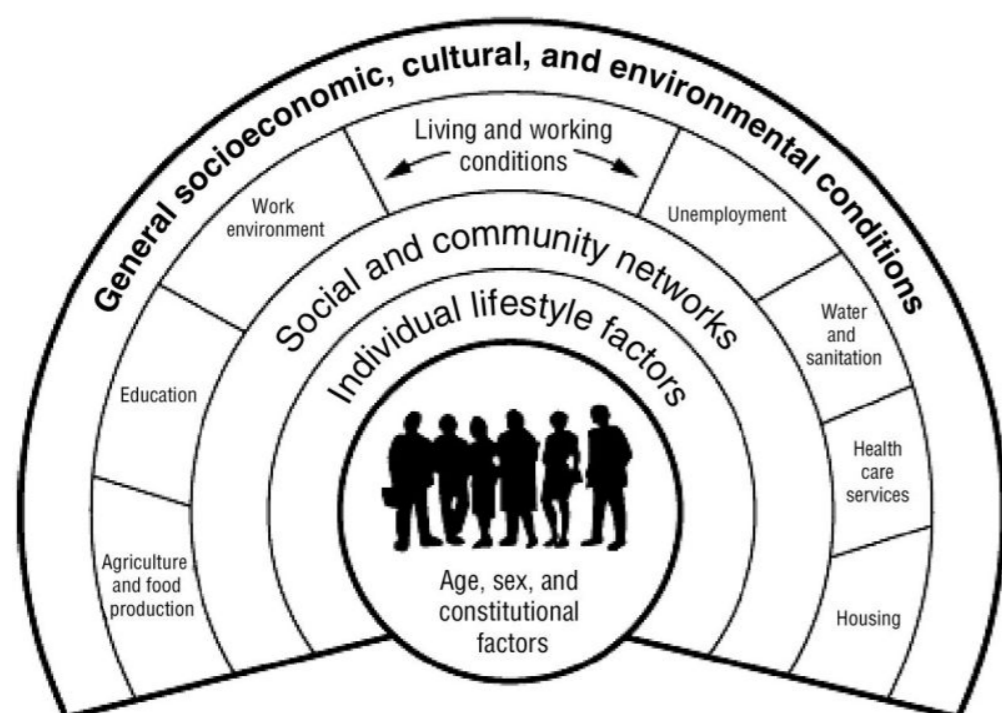C. Detailed interviews with service providers, Councillors and Council teams

Figure 1. Social Determinants of Health

SOURCE: Dahlgren and Whitehead (1991) Dahlgren G, Whitehead M. 1991.
Policies and Strategies to Promote Social Equity in Health. Stockholm, Sweden: Institute for Futures Studies.

D. Workshops with service providers and Council teams

The engagement showed that residents are feeling the impacts of a rapidly changing world, and that some groups are particularly hard-hit. The community place high importance on neighbourhood connections and local public places, as well as access to the natural environment and support services as sources of wellbeing. The challenges of climate change and natural disasters, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, growing financial stress, and increased risks of mental illness and social isolation are being felt by everyone in Shoalhaven (indeed the world), but may be affecting people in different ways.

While the community rated their overall wellbeing as slightly better than neutral, significant, and longer-term challenges are mounting and have a direct impact on wellbeing. Growing financial stress and the pressures of maintaining a roof over their family's head was nominated as the number one factor that was impacting on the community's health. This stress was also identified as the cause of several other key health concerns, with participants nominating cost as the number one barrier to improving health, and work-life balance being another major stress in people's lives.

Assets identified in the Shoalhaven were the natural environment, strong neighbourhoods and a community-mindedness, expressed through concern for looking after people affected by the current pressures of living. The key priorities identified by the community were access to health services, greater transport connectivity, improved access to open space, resilient and connected neighbourhoods, and addressing financial stress. Other key issues raised were physical activity, healthy and safe built environments, access to healthy food, housing, employment and education.

Interviews with the Aboriginal community highlighted the need to raise awareness of Aboriginal culture and its importance to Aboriginal people, the significance of contact with the land and ensuring a voice in Council decisions, including appropriate engagement and awareness of cultural protocol.

Staff guidance

From commencement, the project was managed by Council staff, including continued input throughout from a Project Control Group. Initial interviews with key Council staff crystallised the information from literature, interviews, workshops and surveys into four focus areas that were the basis of the detailed survey work. The staff workshops added detail to the Strategy on current activities and future directions. Feedback on the draft Strategy was received from a broad section of Council staff, acknowledging the cross-sectional relevance of Council activities and wellbeing outcomes.

Council's role

Community wellbeing is a shared responsibility to which everyone needs to contribute. Community wellbeing requires all levels of community stakeholders to work collaboratively to achieve shared goals and aspirations for wellbeing. Key partners in achieving community wellbeing include:

• Government organisations at all levels
• Non-profit organisations and institutions
• Local businesses and other private sector entities
• Community groups and local residents

Local government is a key player in creating the conditions for community wellbeing. As well as working in partnership with other stakeholders, Council directly delivers services and activities that influence community wellbeing. A wide range of facilities and activities are provided by Shoalhaven City Council with the purpose of improving wellbeing – creating the conditions in the Shoalhaven that allow people here to thrive.

Local government is uniquely placed to have strategic oversight and give strategic guidance to the way the local community changes and develops over time. This unique position can be used to encourage changes that improve community wellbeing. Local government can influence change in the community through the provision of diverse services including infrastructure planning and management, provision of activities and programs, strategic planning of land-use development, delivery of a range of regulatory functions, as well as advocacy and working in partnership.

Recognising the need for a collaborative approach to community wellbeing, this Strategy supports Council to work more strategically by considering how our efforts work alongside those of other stakeholders and valuing the important contribution that people in our community make to community wellbeing. As well as working in partnership with residents, community groups, other levels of government and the private sector, Council can perform a connective function in co-ordinating and facilitating networks that improve local collaboration.

The work of local government is resourced through the collection of rates, funding from other levels of government and grant-making entities, and by charging fees for the services they provide. This Strategy identifies the priorities for improving community wellbeing, but specific actions to address the priorities and resourcing to be used will be identified in the Action Plan.

Legislation, planning framework and policy context

The Shoalhaven Community Wellbeing Strategy is informed by the themes and priorities of *Shoalhaven 2032 – Community Strategic Plan* as well as Council's Core Values of **Collaboration, Adaptability, Integrity and Respect**. It is informed by international, national, state and regional strategies and legislation. As a strategic document created to guide decision-
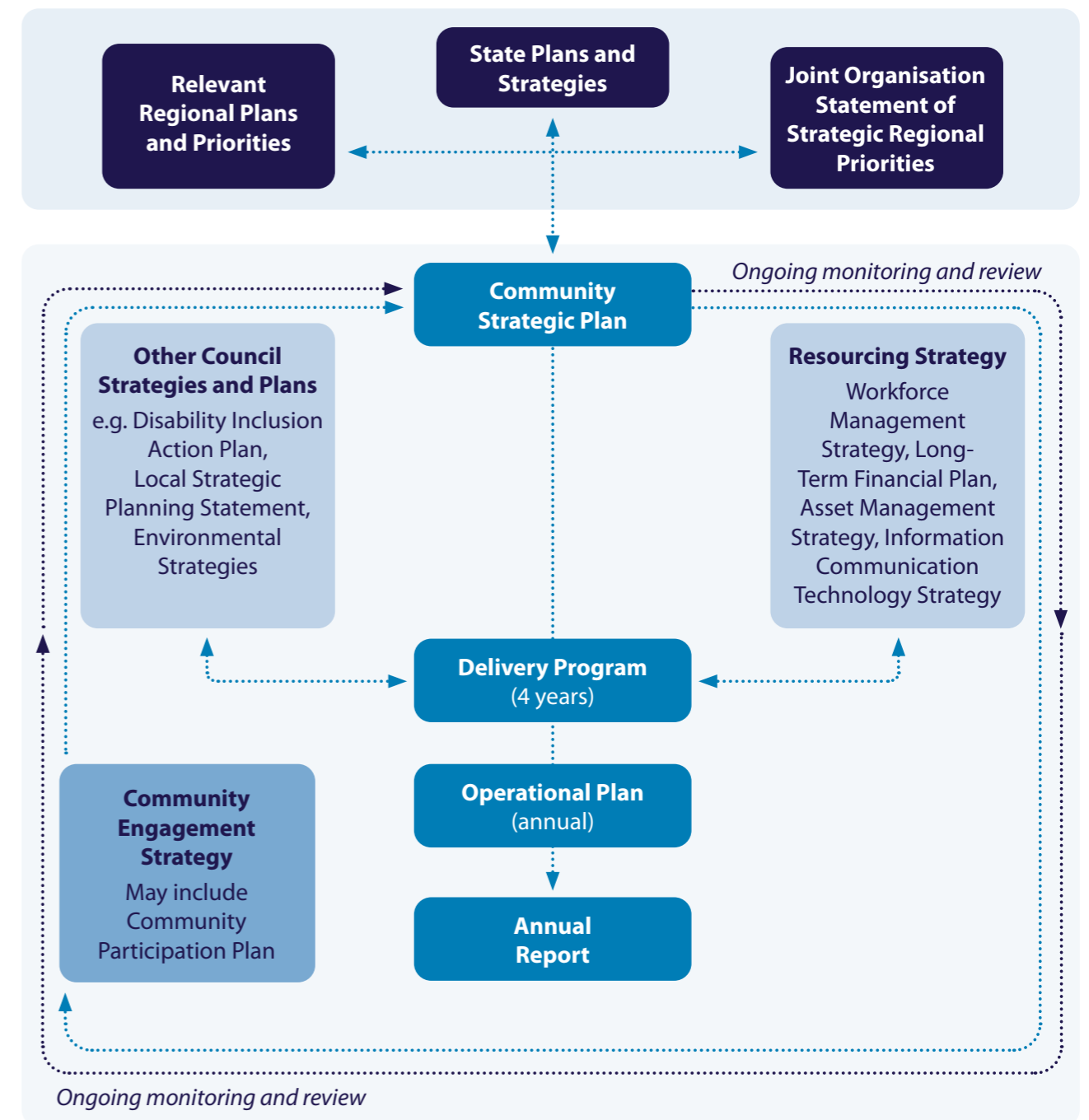
(Figure 2): Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework

making, the Strategy will inform the development of future plans and policies used by Council to implement work-planning decisions.

The activities of councils in NSW are primarily guided by the Local Government Act 1993, which sets out the responsibilities and powers of councils. The Act sets out principles that provide guidance to enable councils to carry out their functions in a way that facilitates local communities that are strong, healthy and prosperous. These principles include that councils should:

- Provide strong and effective representation, leadership, planning and decision-making.
- Plan strategically, using the integrated planning and reporting framework, for the provision of effective and efficient services and regulation to meet the diverse needs of the local community.
- Work with others to secure appropriate services for local community needs.
- Work co-operatively with other councils and the State government to achieve desired outcomes for the local community.
- Make decisions in a way that is transparent and accountable, recognising diverse local needs and considering social justice principles

The Local Government Act 1993 requires all NSW councils to use an Integrated Planning and Reporting (IP&R) Framework that begins with talking with the community to identify the community's aspirations for the next 10 or more years. Using a suite of integrated plans, councils are required to set out the community's vision, as well as goals and strategic actions to achieve them. The documents that make up the IP&R Framework are outlined in Figure 2. The primary strategic document for Shoalhaven City Council is Shoalhaven 2032 – Community Strategic Plan (CSP), the long-term plan guiding Council's action over the next 10 years. Alignment between the CSP Priorities and the Foundations for Wellbeing from the Shoalhaven Community Wellbeing Strategy is addressed in the following section on 'Council's Strategic Outcomes'.

This Strategy has been created to guide decision-making. It will inform the development of future plans and policies that Council uses to implement work-planning decisions. As the Shoalhaven Community Wellbeing Strategy is used, it will influence decisions about the work included in future Delivery Programs and Operational Plans – the documents detailing Council's strategies and actions that will be undertaken.

Another key piece of legislation influencing Council's work is the Environmental Planning & Assessment Act 1979, which requires local government to carry out land-use planning roles in a way that promotes the social and economic welfare of the community by the proper management, development and conservation of the State's natural and other resources.

Council performs a broad range of functions, and this diverse work is guided by state and federal legislation requirements, regional plans, as well as Council's own policies and strategies. In addition to having a range of responsibilities and powers under both state and federal laws, local governments can also use local laws to respond to issues and community needs within a municipality. The legislative responsibilities and guiding strategic documents relevant to each Domain are listed throughout the Strategy, including those related to the Local Government Act 1993 and Environmental Planning & Assessment Act 1979. Beyond the minimum legislative requirements, there are a range of initiatives councils can consider to improve amenity and wellbeing within their communities. All work needs to be carried out in a way that meets the requirements of any relevant legislation, though this is not within the scope of this document.

Council's strategic outcomes

Shoalhaven 2032 – Community Strategic Plan (CSP) is Shoalhaven City Council's long-term plan that outlines the key priorities and aspirations identified by the Shoalhaven community for the future. It guides Council's action over the next 10 years. Below is a table identifying the alignment between the CSP Priorities and the Foundations for Wellbeing from the Shoalhaven Community Wellbeing Strategy. The priorities listed are from the exhibited draft CSP 2032 and will be updated following adoption of the final CSP 2032 by Council.

Shoalhaven Community Wellbeing Foundation	Shoalhaven 2032 – Community Strategic Plan Priority
1. Vibrant communities where everyone can participate and connect	1.1 Support inclusive, safe and connected communities 1.2 Preserve, support and develop cultural and creative vitality across our communities 3.2 Deliver safe, vibrant & attractive public spaces 4.3 Inform and engage with the community about the decisions that affect their lives
2. Lifelong learning and helping each other	1.1 Support inclusive, safe and connected communities 1.3 Support community wellbeing through fostering active and healthy communities 2.1 Manage our infrastructure and assets for long term sustainability to meet community need
3. Safe and prepared communities	1.1 Support inclusive, safe and connected communities 2.1 Manage our infrastructure and assets for long term sustainability to meet community need 3.2 Deliver safe, vibrant & attractive public spaces
4. Healthy and active communities	1.1 Support inclusive, safe and connected communities 1.3 Support community wellbeing through fostering active and healthy communities 2.1 Manage our infrastructure and assets for long term sustainability to meet community need
5. Transport connections to access our community's opportunities	1.1 Support inclusive, safe and connected communities 2.1 Manage our infrastructure and assets for long term sustainability to meet community need 2.2 Manage growth and development with respect for environmental & community values
6. Sustainable natural and built environments	2.2 Manage growth and development with respect for environmental & community values 2.3 Protect the natural environment and enhance sustainability 4.1 Deliver reliable, high-quality services
7. Housing that meets the community's needs	1.1 Support inclusive, safe and connected communities 1.3 Support community wellbeing through fostering active and healthy communities 2.2 Manage growth and development with respect for environmental & community values
8. Resilient local economies and inclusive economic opportunities	2.2 Manage growth and development with respect for environmental & community values 3.1 Strengthen and diversify the economy 3.2 Deliver safe, vibrant & attractive public spaces

Foundations for
Wellbeing

To create the conditions for individuals and communities to thrive, eight Foundations have been identified as integral for wellbeing. The key aspects of each Foundation have been identified and form the Domains of the Shoalhaven Community Wellbeing Strategy

Council's existing work contributing to each Domain has been outlined. This includes work carried out as part of legislative responsibilities, in addition to initiatives beyond legislative requirements. It should be noted that this is not a comprehensive listing of Council's work for each Domain. Also outlined are opportunities for future work that could be considered, and the key partners in community wellbeing who make each Domain happen in the Shoalhaven.

Each individual Foundation and Domain is needed for community wellbeing in the Shoalhaven. Due to the inter-related nature of the aspects of wellbeing, it should be noted that one action can contribute to multiple Foundations and Domains. Impact across multiple Foundations can be an indicator of integrated, socially sustainable and well-designed actions.

1

Vibrant communities where everyone can participate and connect

Access to opportunities to participate and connect in the community and with culture

1.1
Community Life

People do things in their community and feel connected, included, community pride and belonging.

Participation in local activities is vital for forming social connections that develop a sense of belonging and connection to the community. When people come together as a community, they feel community pride and develop community identity. This contributes to a vibrant community life that supports individual wellbeing and resilience. Public health and epidemiology literature shows that social connectedness protects and promotes mental health, 2018 research found that social connectedness can act as a 'social cure' for psychological ill-health[1]. Research in 2021 found that the influence of social relationships extends beyond emotional well-being to influence long-term physical-health outcomes, including mortality risk[2].

For the community to come together, they need inclusive community gathering spaces. Traditional community halls are used for diverse range of group gathering, including resident meetings and family celebrations. Church buildings can provide multipurpose community gathering spaces, or people can gather for spiritual activities and practices by making use of community halls. Outdoor community spaces allow organised community events and informal gatherings and, when these spaces are in local centres, contribute to more vibrant places. Contemporary practice for community facilities is moving towards providing spaces that can support a range of community uses, such as outdoor "community loungerooms" which can be used for a full range of community activities, from regular group meetings to informal gatherings and community events. Libraries are increasingly multi-purpose, used for community gatherings ranging from informal

knitting groups and parents' groups to community events like talks by local guest speakers.

Streets are important community spaces, most physical activity occurs in streets, at the neighbourhood level and in towns and villages, supporting incidental interactions with neighbours and people from our broader community. Council can design and manage streets to promote community activity and amenity level, including through public domain works like traffic calming measures, maintenance of roadside parks and tree planting programs. 2002 research in Perth suggests that perceived quality of public open space and shops is strongly associated with sense of community, irrespective of whether those spaces were used frequently. Considering this research, policies and plans to support high quality public spaces, particularly shops and open space, could be focused on vibrant town centres[3].

Activities and programs can't happen without a suitable space, but facilitators of programs and activities are also needed for community spaces to be filled with community life. Whilst Council delivers activities and programs, the diverse range of community groups across the Shoalhaven are essential partners in providing people with access to opportunities for local participation in community events and activities. The capacity of community partners can be improved through supports such as community grant programs and opportunities to build and share skills, which may be targeted to disadvantaged or diverse groups to improve inclusion.

What the community told us

A lack of places to come together in the Shoalhaven, as reported by Community Wellbeing Survey participants, highlights a desire for social infrastructure (sporting facilities, libraries, community centres, etc) that leverages the region's natural landscape and embrace residents' desire to come together in an outdoor setting. However, the *Community Infrastructure Strategic Plan 2017-2036* identifies a surplus of community infrastructure for the needs of the current and future populations, highlighting the challenges of meeting community expectations with available resources.

Young people emphasised their need for recreational spaces, highlighting that across the entire LGA there were not many spaces where they felt welcome and safe. More recreational/social facilities and more festivals and events were the most popular ways for Council to better support young people, as named by Youth Workshop participants.

Participants from both the workshops and community survey acknowledged the importance of organised events to foster community spirit and create a broader sense of connection across the entire Shoalhaven. Opportunities identified by the community ranged from revitalising town centres and multipurpose community centres to smaller-scale meeting points linked to environmental attractions.

> *"Empower villages - communities to lead their own inclusion and diversity events and programs to build cohesion and breakdown racial barriers"* – Online survey participant

> *"Town centres are the heart of any community and as such need to be thriving and vibrant to provide a secure sense of community."* – Online survey participant

> *"People living in Nowra (like in the beach suburbs…) want to feel proud of their surroundings"* – Online survey participant

Council's work

Legislative responsibilities include:

- Plan actions to address identified local community needs and priorities, using a strategic plan and by working with others. Councils should make decisions in a way that is transparent, recognising diverse local needs and considering social justice principles of equity, access, participation and rights (*Local Government Act 1993*).
- Carry out land-use planning in a way that promotes the social and economic welfare of the community by the proper management, development and conservation of the State's natural and other resources (*Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*). This includes acting as the determining authority for relevant development applications and identifying the basis for the land-use planning strategy and planning priorities for the Shoalhaven.

Other current and planned work includes:

- Provide strategic guidance for land use development across the region, guided by *Shoalhaven 2040 – Our Strategic Land-use Planning Statement*.
- Plan, design and manage public space and community spaces that facilitate community connection and community gathering, including community facilities, outdoor community spaces, streets and roadside verges. Community facilities providing low-cost community space include halls, recreation centres and libraries.
- Facilitate community activities, by providing activities (for example, at Shoalhaven Libraries) and supporting community partners with grant programs, training opportunities and networks. Council also provides financial support for events though the Council Donations Policy, Fee Waivers for community groups and the Shoalhaven Tourism Event Support Program.

Future directions

Opportunities for future work require further investigation of resourcing requirements to assess feasibility. Opportunities that could be considered include:

- Explore opportunities to work with or support community partners to:
  - Create more vibrant town and village centres with a strong sense of place and community, with community, business and other stakeholders delivering activation strategies that foster community connections and enhance spaces providing informal opportunities for people to interact. Also listed under 8.2 Economic diversity.
  - Create a co-ordinated program of diverse community events across the Shoalhaven for all residents (including younger and older people) and visitors, and considering how transport connections can be improved.
  - Build capacity of community partners to collaborate and be well-informed, to provide outreach services (including via transport), to recognise and celebrate volunteers, and to build local neighbourhood connections. Also listed under 2.3 Local community supports, 4.1 Health services and support.
  - Develop the role of Shoalhaven Libraries as the curator of a program of opportunities for local participation, facilitated by community partners such as parents' groups, knitting groups and community event organisers.
  - Accommodate service providers and community groups in Council buildings in exchange for provision of programs that meet community needs and activate community spaces. Also listed under 2.3 Local community supports.
  - Better understand the needs and challenges of young people in relation to participating in community life.

- Explore opportunities to adapt processes and policies to better support:
  - Implementation of the provision strategy for open space, recreational equipment, community facilities and youth spaces to equitably meet the needs of community members of all ages across the Shoalhaven, identifying resourcing needed for delivery and informed by engagement on contemporary community use of community infrastructure. This could consider ways to support activation of town and village centres, climate resilience and adaption, flexible and multipurpose infrastructure, the needs of young people and older people, and small interventions to provide meeting points in key environmental sites. Also listed under 4.2 Places and programs for active lifestyles.
  - Easy booking of facilities, parks and civic spaces by community partners that deliver events and programs that activate community places.
- Good practice examples that could inform Council's future work:
  - Wollongong's Comic Gong is an annual pop culture festival that celebrates comics, graphic novels, gaming and cosplay. It demonstrates fun, inclusive and effective engagement of people of all ages, attracting more than 10,000 people each year.

Key partners

Stakeholders who play a role in creating this Domain:

- People in the community: local community groups including youth groups, seniors' groups, parents' groups, spiritual groups, Community Consultative Bodies and more – everyone who lives, works and studies in the Shoalhaven.
- Non-profit organisations and service providers delivering local activities and programs. For example, Shoalhaven Neighbourhood Services provides social support activities in neighbourhood centres to help people participate more in their community.
- Local businesses providing social gathering spaces, managing privately-owned public space and interfacing with public space.
- Federal and NSW State Government agencies and land-use planning authorities that support Council to carry out land-use planning in a way that promotes the social and economic welfare of the community, including NSW Department of Planning and Environment, NSW Movement and Place Community of Practice and Government Architect NSW.
- Federal and State Government grant providers.

1.2
Civic engagement and community agency

People actively participate in shaping their community and have a sense of shared responsibility.

People thrive when they feel empowered to create change and they actively participate in community action to shape their community as a place where they want to live. Research in 2018 found promising quantitative and qualitative evidence that wellbeing was improved by community development projects that meaningfully involved community members in decisions that could change the material and/or social conditions they live in[4].

This domain is about empowering communities to work together on local initiatives independently and in partnership with other stakeholders. Civic engagement and community agency require people to have the capacity to contribute, empowered with the knowledge, skills and confidence to participate in community-shaping processes. It also requires access to inclusive opportunities to get involved and influence decisions affecting their lives. Council can support meaningful participation in local decisions and resident-led initiatives through improving capacity and inclusive opportunities to participate.

What the community told us

Survey participants identified the impact of "community led programs – for community by community" in creating local change, recognising that this empowers villages and improves inclusion at a grassroots level. Community-led programs also reflect the unique characteristics and needs of the diverse local communities they are led by.

Interviews with Aboriginal community members raised the need to improve engagement with Aboriginal communities, to improve their ability to participate in Council decisions. This requires an awareness of cultural protocols and how they impact on engagement and implementation of programs.

"Empower more community led projects, enable communities to lead decision making that improves communities for community." – Online survey participant

"An external agency can't do much for the community. Got to come from the community. We need to foster 'champions', with technical assistance from staff and state agencies" – Councillor interview

"The community associations are a great forum for improving the local area but it is difficult to get young people there (i.e. under 55) to give their opinions" – Online survey participant

"After the year that was, I feel that our community are very keen to reconnect - socialise and support improvements to our park assets, natural areas and footpaths to improve our infrastructure whilst protecting our beautiful natural environment. Maybe consider a "make it happen" in your village campaign to educate community on how easy it could be to mobilise communities to work together and improve our villages... just a thought following the success of our committee." – Online survey participant

Future directions

Legislative responsibilities include:

- Actively engage with local communities and collaborate with others to maximise achievement of strategic goals. Councils should make decisions in a way that is transparent, recognising diverse local needs and considering social justice principles of equity, access, participation and rights (*Local Government Act 1993*).
- Produce and implement a Community Engagement Strategy (*Local Government Act 1993*) and a Community Participation Plan (Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979) setting out how community members can participate in Council's strategic planning and development assessment processes.
- Produce and implement a Disability Inclusion Action Plan (*NSW Disability Inclusion Act 2014*) setting out the actions Council will undertake to improve the access to participation for people with disability. The actions identified in this plan impact delivery of services related to all domains of the Shoalhaven Community Wellbeing Plan.

Other current and planned work includes:

- Provide inclusive community engagement opportunities for a diverse range of Council projects across the Shoalhaven, using both face-to-face activities and online platforms.
- Facilitate advisory committees covering a diverse range of perspectives and groups in the community
- Work with community and resident groups to support communities across the Shoalhaven to be informed and participate in local decisions.

Future directions

Opportunities for future work require further investigation of resourcing requirements to assess feasibility. Opportunities that could be considered include:

- Explore opportunities to work with or support community partners to:
  - Help the community understand and participate in local decision-making processes.
  - Improve the way engagement opportunities consider the cultural needs and barriers of Aboriginal people, working with the local Aboriginal community.
  - Improve the way community-led strategic plans are developed and used to support community wellbeing.
- Explore opportunities to adapt processes and policies to better support:
  - Participation in processes and decisions by disengaged and vulnerable people in the community who experience barriers to participation.

Key partners

Stakeholders who play a role in creating this Domain:

- People in the community: local community groups including youth groups, seniors' groups, parent groups, Community Consultative Bodies, advisory committee members and more – everyone who lives, works and studies in the Shoalhaven.
- Service providers and non-profit organisations delivering local programs to improve participation in community leadership and local decision-making. For example, Southern Cross Community Housing facilitates a Tenant Advisory Group for their tenants to be involved with planning and decisions related to their homes.
- Office of Local Government providing advice on implementing the IP&R process (including the CSP process).
- Federal and NSW State Government agencies and land-use planning authorities that support Council to carry out land-use planning in a way that promotes the social and economic welfare of the community, including NSW Department of Planning and Environment and Government Architect NSW.
- Federal and State Government grant-providers.

1.3
Creativity and culture

People value and celebrate creative and cultural expression (Participation in the arts, engagement with cultural events/ activities that represent and reflect the community's stories, heritage and character).

Create NSW defines 'culture' as the production, distribution and participation in creativity and the reflection and expression of the community's customs, traditions, heritage and social character. It includes visual arts and crafts, media and digital arts, film, performing arts, literature and archival preservation[5].

Cultural vitality is developed through participation in the arts, access to opportunities for creative expression, and engagement with cultural events that represent and reflect the distinctive characteristics of the community. When we value and celebrate creative and cultural expression as a community, we share and reflect on our experiences and build understanding and connection in the community, improving tolerance, inclusion and resilience. Visitor surveys conducted by the Shoalhaven Regional Gallery in 2021 showed that 91% of respondents agreed that their visit helped them enjoy a greater quality of life, with 85% agreeing that their visit helped them feel like part of the community.

Cultural facilities are places provided to facilitate cultural expression, including arts centres, galleries,

and heritage facilities such as museums and heritage walks. Public art creates places of cultural expression that are publicly-accessible and make for more vibrant community places. Whilst Council delivers cultural activities and programs, access to opportunities for celebration of culture across the Shoalhaven relies on community partners including cultural groups, arts groups, historical societies and owners of items of heritage significance. The capacity of community partners can be improved through supports such as grant programs and training or networking opportunities.

Shoalhaven Council recognises Aboriginal people as the first people of Australia and is committed to building mutually respectful and collaborative relationships with Aboriginal communities of the Shoalhaven. Recognising the unique connection Aboriginal people have with Country, it is important that local Aboriginal communities have control and ownership of initiatives to celebrate local Aboriginal culture and foster understanding in the broader community.

What the community told us

Survey participants were asked to identify priorities for strengthening community connections, with arts and cultural events named by 71 of 192 people, just after community events. Recognising the diverse impacts of arts and cultural programs, they were also named by 40 people as being a priority area for improving individual health. Survey participants highlighted the impact of COVID-19 on arts and cultural activities, and the importance of revitalising these activities to rebuild social connections.

Interviews with Aboriginal community members highlighted the need to raise awareness of Aboriginal culture and its importance to Aboriginal people. These interviews emphasised that collaboration with the Aboriginal community was vital to find ways to appropriately recognise Aboriginal culture and ensure community places and activities were inclusive and welcoming. The need for greater consultation with the Aboriginal community was identified as a top priority for members of the Aboriginal community, who highlighted that understanding of cultural protocols was needed to overcome challenges to implementing actions.

"We need more arts and culturally engaging spaces, these include cultural places, infrastructure and community events to maintain connectiveness, particularly Aboriginal connections" – Online survey participant

"Events and arts/cultural activities foster a sense of place, and encourage community connection" – Online survey participant

"Opportunities for connection (arts and cultural activities) have a significant impact on general wellbeing" – Online survey participant

"Connecting with our diverse Aboriginal culture through programs or tours is also huge in a feeling of well-being and connectedness" – Online survey participant

Council's work

Legislative responsibilities include:

- Protect, manage and conserve heritage, both in land-use planning roles (*Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*) and as a property owner and developer (*Heritage Act 1977*).
- Carry out land-use planning in a way that promotes the social and economic welfare of the community by the proper management, development and conservation of the State's natural and other resources (*Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*). This includes acting as the determining authority for relevant development applications and identifying the basis for the land-use planning strategy and planning priorities for the Shoalhaven.

Other current and planned work includes:

- Plan, design and manage cultural facilities and cultural activities including:
  - Provide Shoalhaven Entertainment Centre and programming, guided by -- Shoalhaven Entertainment Centre Business Plan.
  - Provide Shoalhaven Regional Gallery and programming, guided by Arts Centre Strategic Plan.
  - Provide Shoalhaven Libraries facilities and activities, guided by Shoalhaven Libraries Strategic Management Plan and the Heritage Shoalhaven – Local Heritage Strategic Plan. This includes helping people connect with heritage through access to onsite historical resources, digital resources, local history groups, volunteer talks on the local area, and recording and transcribing oral histories.
  - Encourage, provide and maintain public art, supported by the Public Art Policy. This includes street art initiatives in Nowra in partnership with the Nowra Revitalization Committee.
- Provide and maintain heritage facilities including heritage walks.
- Support cultural activity providers and partners:
  - Provide community facilities that are used by cultural activity providers.
  - Provide small heritage grants to owners of heritage items .
  - Provide ongoing mentoring and support for Aboriginal cultural businesses providing services like cultural talks and tours.
- Provide signage at town entrances with known Aboriginal language translations to town names across the Shoalhaven (e.g. Nowra – Black Cockatoo).
- Formally acknowledge Aboriginal Culture though corporate internal protocols.
- Provide strategic guidance for land use development across the region, guided by *Shoalhaven 2040 – Our Strategic Land-use Planning Statement*.

Future directions

Opportunities for future work require further investigation of resourcing requirements to assess feasibility. Opportunities that could be considered include:

- Explore opportunities to work with or support community partners to:
  - Develop the role of Shoalhaven Libraries as the curator of a program of opportunities for local expression, facilitated by community partners such as writers' festivals, poetry slams and Aboriginal cultural activities throughout the year. This could include expanding the collaboration between Shoalhaven Libraries and Millhouse Art Gallery that is generating positive community response and increased reach.
  - Improve understanding of Aboriginal cultural meaning of Shoalhaven places (both natural and developed areas), which could include activities, talks, tours or signage.
- Explore opportunities to adapt processes and policies to better support:
  - Cultural expression through community buildings and spaces, including with public art, building naming and architectural designs that improve inclusion and promote connection with local culture and heritage. Celebration of Aboriginal culture in public buildings and spaces could be used to improve understanding in the community and improve the feeling of welcome for Aboriginal people.
  - Celebration of and connection to heritage in ways that reflect contemporary cultural expression and emerging media.
  - Delivery of public art initiatives that celebrate local culture and build community identity and pride.

Key partners

Stakeholders who play a role in creating this Domain:

- Community partners (both non-profit groups and businesses) delivering local cultural activities and programs, including arts groups, historical societies and owners of items of heritage significance.
- Local Aboriginal communities, as it is important they have control and ownership of any initiatives improving understanding of local Aboriginal culture.
- Library network, including South Coast Cooperative Libraries partners and NSW Libraries.
- Federal and NSW State Government agencies and land-use planning authorities that support Council to carry out land-use planning in a way that promotes the social and economic welfare of the community, including NSW Department of Planning and Environment, NSW Movement and Place Community of Practice and Government Architect NSW.
- Federal and State Government grant-providers, including Create NSW, Destination NSW, Regional NSW.

Foundation
2

Lifelong learning and helping each other

Access to opportunities throughout life to learn, help others and be supported

2.1
Training for employment

People have access to education to improve their employment opportunities

Access to education and training is recognised as an important factor in improving future employment opportunities. Research in the UK in 2016 found that higher levels of education are associated with a wide range of positive outcomes - including better health and wellbeing, higher social trust, greater political interest, lower political cynicism, and less hostile attitudes towards immigrants[6].

Primary and secondary education is provided by the NSW Government Department of Education, though small, isolated communities sometimes experiencing challenges related to low student numbers and travel distances to the nearest school. Non-government schools (independently provided but subsidised by NSW Government) also play a role in meeting community needs for primary and secondary education, mostly located in larger urban centres. Further employment-related training includes formal tertiary education, as well as work-based training programs like apprenticeships/traineeships and volunteering programs. Access to these training opportunities relies on providers including universities, colleges and technical institutes, businesses, community groups and service providers. University of Wollongong provides a campus in Nowra, and the recent opening of a

Country University Centre in Ulladulla is working to improve access for south of the region. Businesses provide consistent feedback that access to relevant trades education for the wide range of skills and jobs in the region is critical, with many students needing to travel to Sydney or Newcastle to access apprenticeship education. Provision of training opportunities can be improved by developing the capacity of providers, such as helping community groups develop volunteering roles or helping small businesses offer traineeship programs. Ongoing collaboration between education providers and businesses is critical for access in this regional area.

Whilst increased online provision can improve access to digital-suitable training, face-to-face training opportunities are often available only in the larger urban centres, meaning that access for communities across the Shoalhaven is limited by lack of affordable transport connections, with public transport being a key challenge throughout the region (see 5.2 Transport facilities and services). Access to training depends on people having the knowledge, skills and confidence to access opportunities for themselves or their dependent children. In addition, notably for tertiary study, students need to be in a financial position to devote time to studying.

What the community told us

Across all engagement methods, participants perceived that there were limited work and training opportunities within the Shoalhaven, particularly for young people looking to start their careers. Participants felt that retaining and nurturing young people was more important than ever, with the region's aging population, and they perceived that there were limited career prospects for young people, despite the wide range of employment sectors in the Shoalhaven with job opportunities. Participants of the Youth Workshop acknowledged the impact this has on their wellbeing, with 37 of the 38 participants indicating that school and work prospects are something they care and worry about. Overall, there is a gap in understanding about the broad economic value of the region and large range of sector opportunities for young people from the community.

"In these ever changing times people need to access educational opportunities to up-skill or re-skill in an area where there are employment opportunities" – Online survey participant

"Having access to more educational opportunities is always a must however again I'm unsure how to meet this objective other than more promotion of online learning and ways to access that (in terms of tools and equipment and financial support)" – Online survey participant

"With regard to educational opportunities, we have a wonderful TAFE here in Bomaderry who often offer great stage 1 courses but follow up courses are often not available unless you want to travel to Shellharbour and beyond" – Online survey participant

"Daughter goes to a large public high school with over 1200 students. We need another secondary school to service the area as there is no room left for expansion. We also need more tertiary education and apprenticeship options in the southern Shoalhaven" – Online survey participant

Council's work

Legislative responsibilities include:

- Plan actions to meet identified local community needs and priorities, and collaborate with others to maximise achievement of strategic goals. Councils should make decisions in a way that recognises diverse local needs and considers social justice principles of equity, access, participation and rights (*Local Government Act 1993*).
- Carry out land-use planning in a way that promotes the social and economic welfare of the community by the proper management, development and conservation of the State's natural and other resources (*Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*). This includes acting as the determining authority for relevant development applications and identifying the basis for the land-use planning strategy and planning priorities for the Shoalhaven.

Other current and planned work includes:

- Provide Shoalhaven Libraries facilities in 4 locations across the Shoalhaven (and a mobile library), including use of computers, meeting rooms, printing, copying, scanning and tech help. Resources that can be borrowed include books, magazines, DVDs, CDs and audiobooks, including many reference materials to support studying.
- Provide student placement, cadetship, traineeship and work experience opportunities, in a way that provides pathways to permanent employment. High school students can also gain skills through involvement with Council's Youth Advisory Committee.
- Support school and employment collaboration through formal and informal school career advisor networks and partnerships with business sectors.
- Provide strategic guidance to economic development across the region, with education identified as a key sector in the Shoalhaven Employment, Advocacy and Growth Advisory Group (SEGA) in recognition of the critical role education plays in employment.
- Provide strategic guidance for land use development across the region, guided by *Shoalhaven 2040 – Our Strategic Land-use Planning Statement*.

Future directions

Opportunities for future work require further investigation of resourcing requirements to assess feasibility. Opportunities that could be considered include:

- Explore opportunities to work with or support community partners to:
  - Provide employment support for individuals or groups, such as industry training or job-ready courses on resume-writing and interview skills. This could make use of recreation facilities or library spaces and resources.
  - Provide volunteer programs that improve employment skills, for example through swim squad coaching or other local sporting groups.
  - Improve access to tertiary education with tertiary institution outposts or using co-working spaces for distance education.
  - Improve awareness of existing tertiary education and opportunities and providers including UOW and Country Universities to ensure our community know what is available in our region and how they can access education.
  - Increase community awareness of the broad opportunities available in our diverse local economy including jobs in manufacturing, health care, defence industries, government, farming, tourism and more.
  - Advocate for a greater range of trade education available in our region.
  - Advocate for greater access to public transport to support student access to education.
- Explore opportunities to demonstrate leadership as a large employer that:
  - Provides employment development opportunities through traineeship and work experience programs that the community has good awareness of, that offers opportunities across a broad range of professional skill areas (particularly for hard to-fill skill shortages) and that has good consistency and performance evaluation across the organisation.
  - Supports employees to access professional development opportunities through good awareness of study leave entitlements and supportive working conditions.

Key partners

Stakeholders who play a role in creating this Domain:

- People of all ages participating in training to improve their employment opportunities .
- NSW Government Department of Education providing and subsiding primary and secondary schools
- Independent schools providing primary and secondary schools.
- Tertiary education providers – universities, colleges and technical institutes. For example, UOW's Industry 4.0 Hub in the Shoalhaven supports learning and innovation focused on automation and data exchange in manufacturing technologies.
- Businesses, community groups and service organisations – providing apprenticeships, traineeships and volunteering programs.
- The Flagstaff Group provides the Life Choices Hub to support people living disability to access vocational and skills development training and improve opportunities for employment.
- Managers of spaces that are suitable for outreach training, such as community halls hosting outreach TAFE courses, training spaces hosting face-to-face courses, or digital-ready spaces hosting hybrid (online and face-to-face) training courses.
- Federal and NSW State Government agencies and land-use planning authorities that support Council to carry out land-use planning in a way that promotes the social and economic welfare of the community, including NSW Department of Planning and Environment.

2.2
Learning opportunities for all ages

People have access to learning opportunities to build skills for enjoyment and to build capacity; Children and their families/carers have support for early childhood development.

People of all ages can enjoy the sense of achievement and growth that comes with learning something new, whether it comes from learning how to do a new craft, how to budget, how to cook something delicious and healthy, how to find inner calm, or how to use new technology.

Learning opportunities mean that we can improve our life skills or just learn how to do something we enjoy. There is clear evidence that learning impacts positively on wellbeing, with health benefits including reduction in mental health issues, loneliness and dementia[7].

Whilst Council delivers lifelong learning activities, community groups, service providers and businesses across the Shoalhaven are essential partners in providing people with access to opportunities for learning for all ages. The capacity of community partners can be improved through supports such as community grant programs and skills development opportunities for providers, which may be targeted to improve inclusion of disadvantaged or diverse groups. Access to learning opportunities can also be improved by building the awareness and confidence of people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds to participate. With the move towards online provision of learning opportunities, digital inclusion (skills and resources) is increasingly impacting on access to learning opportunities.

Early childhood is a crucial time for children to develop social competence, emotional maturity, communication and cognitive skills. Supporting children and their families/carers during the first five years gives children's brains the best foundations for the years ahead. Whilst Council's family day care services and library activities for children provide early childhood development support for children and their families/carers, service providers, local businesses and community groups play an important role in supporting early childhood development across the Shoalhaven. Small and isolated communities with few young families may find limited opportunities for children to socialise with others of a similar age (and for parent/carer networks to form). Education and outreach initiatives can be used to improve community awareness of the available supports and capacity to access them.

What the community told us

Survey responses revealed the many community clubs and groups that people of all ages in the community learn and share skills through, often strengthening social connections at the same time. Men's sheds, community craft groups, book clubs, robotics clubs, seniors computers clubs, the University of the Third Age, writers groups, scout groups, citizen science programs and more – all these community activities support lifelong learning.

Participants of the Seniors Workshop nominated low digital literacy as a key barrier to improving their wellbeing. While this was a challenge not highlighted by other demographic groups in the engagement, the older people participating in the session acknowledged the transition to online health education resources as a key risk to their individual health and wellbeing.

"Educational opportunities such as clubs for arts/ robotics etc can be limited in the area for kids and only available in Wollongong. This limits children's exposure to cultural activities and educational opportunities" – Online survey participant

Council's work

Legislative responsibilities include:

- Plan actions to meet identified local community needs and priorities, and collaborate with others to maximise achievement of strategic goals. Councils should make decisions in a way that recognises diverse local needs and considers social justice principles of equity, access, participation and rights (*Local Government Act 1993*).
- Carry out land-use planning in a way that promotes the social and economic welfare of the community by the proper management, development and conservation of the State's natural and other resources (*Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*). This includes acting as the determining authority for relevant development applications and identifying the basis for the land-use planning strategy and planning priorities for the Shoalhaven.

Other current and planned work includes:

- Provide strategic guidance for land use development across the region, guided by *Shoalhaven 2040 – Our Strategic Land-use Planning Statement*.
- Providing free and low-cost learning opportunities for all ages through Library Services, including:
  - Storytime and Rhymetime for pre-school kids, school holiday and coding club for school kids.
  - Sessions and support to help the community improve their tech skills.
  - Author talks, book launches, book clubs, and adult craft sessions.
- Provide care and education for over 240 children annually through a network of Family Day Care educators. Our educators offer babies, toddlers, pre-schoolers and school aged children a loving, fun, safe and educational small group environment, based in educators' homes across the Shoalhaven.
- Provide Shoalhaven Libraries facilities in 4 locations across the Shoalhaven (and a mobile library), including use of computers, meeting rooms, printing, copying, scanning and tech help.
- Resources that can be borrowed include books, magazines, DVDs, CDs and audiobooks, including many reference materials to support learning for all ages.

Future directions

Opportunities for future work require investigation of resourcing requirements. Opportunities that could be considered include:

- Explore opportunities to work with or support community partners to:
  - Develop the role of Shoalhaven Libraries as the curator of a program of diverse lifelong learning opportunities facilitated by community partners, such as workshops by mens' sheds or knitting groups.
  - Deliver intergenerational learning opportunities that bring people of different ages together to shares skills like community gardening or digital literacy.
  - Work with the Aboriginal community to reflect the cultural needs of Aboriginal people and their connection to Country in Council's Family Day Care facilities and services, with the aim of improving the sense of welcome for Aboriginal people and the utilisation of facilities.
  - Education workshops on sustainability and growing food in community gardens.
- Explore resourcing opportunities to:
  - Provide robotics clubs at Shoalhaven Libraries, which could make use of the new library makerspace.
  - Provide Shoalhaven Libraries' learning activities like craft, cooking and robotics groups in community outreach settings.

Good practice examples that could inform Council's future work:

- Inner West Council's Cyber Seniors facilitates intergenerational learning with volunteer students providing one-on-one tuition for seniors

Key partners

Stakeholders who play a role in creating this Domain:

- People of all ages participating in learning opportunities to build skills for enjoyment and to build capacity.
- Businesses, community groups and service organisations providing learning opportunities to build skills. Aboriginal community organisations are key partners providing opportunities to learn about local Aboriginal culture and heritage.
- Managers of spaces that are used for learning opportunities, such as community halls, training spaces hosting face-to-face courses, or digital-ready spaces hosting hybrid (online and face-to-face) training courses.
- Parents and carers of young children being committed to and accessing support for healthy early childhood development   Businesses, community groups and service organisations providing early childhood development supports including playgroups, storytime activities and early learning child care.
- Federal and NSW State Government agencies and land-use planning authorities that support Council to carry out land-use planning in a way that promotes the social and economic welfare of the community, including NSW Department of Planning and Environment, NSW Movement and Place Community of Practice and Government Architect NSW.

2.3
Local community supports

People have access to well-resourced local support services;
People volunteer to help others in the community.

When people in our community are struggling, local support services make a huge difference helping people through the difficulties they are experiencing and ensuring they have access to the essentials for living. Crisis accommodation, emergency food relief, support for people experiencing domestic violence, disaster recovery supports and more – local services providing vital supports like these are part of the social support network. Access to this help in the Shoalhaven depends on the activities of local services providers and community groups.

The capacity of service providers can be built by improving access to resources like information, funding opportunities and skills training. Local support networks are more effective when providers work together to meet community needs. Council plays a role in facilitating the capacity-building of service providers, and facilitating providers to work

more collaboratively in the local area. Improving community awareness of available supports means local people are better able to access help, and Council can also help facilitate community access to this information. Awareness-raising initiatives can also be used by services to improve community understanding and access to supports, such as improved awareness of mental health impacts and needs during disaster recovery.

Volunteers are a vital part of support services in the Shoalhaven. Whether it is volunteers helping community service organisations or resident-led groups in each village, it is about local people helping local people. Whilst Council co-ordinates some volunteering opportunities, service providers and community groups ranging from Red Cross to Meals on Wheels are important partners in offering local volunteering opportunities.

What the community told us

Survey participants talked about the importance of local community supports, from the perspective of both giving and receiving support. Community and service provider networks were considered a priority for strengthening community connection by 69 survey participants, and 20 participants identified that they volunteer in the community. As well as crisis support from domestic violence and homelessness services, the range of service providers and volunteer groups identified by survey participants was diverse, such as Blaze Aid, Red Cross, Legacy, UOW Medical School volunteers, an Aboriginal education advisory group, Shoalhaven Suicide Prevention & Awareness Network, and Police Citizens Youth Club.

In May 2022, Council facilitated a Community Workshop for Homelessness, bringing together service providers and community members, including people with lived experience of homelessness. Participants highlighted the need for ongoing, co-ordinated, holistic and easy to find supports for people at risk of homelessness.

"Service providers are a wonderful help but their resources are at times stretched" – Online survey participant

"Community and service provider networks are essential for ensuring that people are connected and don't fall through the cracks" – Online survey participant

"(There is a) lack of referrals or programs to specialised support services encompassing a holistic approach to housing and general health and wellbeing within the Shoalhaven, specifically for those with complex needs or disabilities." – Participant at the Community Workshop For Homelessness, May 2022

"Community & service provider networks are very important for our aging community"– Online survey participant

Council's work

Legislative responsibilities include:

- Plan actions to meet identified local community needs and priorities, and collaborate with others to maximise achievement of strategic goals. Councils should make decisions in a way that recognises diverse local needs and considers social justice principles of equity, access, participation and rights (*Local Government Act 1993*).

Other current and planned work includes:

- Co-ordinate regular meetings between Council staff and local specialised homelessness services, to support vulnerable people who present at Council facilities to link with local support services.
- Build the capacity of local support services and volunteer organisations, including through improving their skills, improving access to resources/information and facilitating collaboration. For example:
  - Provide Community Wellbeing Grants to support community groups to provide services for vulnerable community members.
  - Provide subsided facility hire and community buildings to accommodate services.
  - Oversight of monitoring and review of the Homelessness Community Strategic Plan, which aims to address homelessness through a range of collaborative actions that will be implemented by the homelessness and housing sector.
- Facilitate the community to access supports:
  - Partner with Escabags to provide overnight essentials packs at all Council facilities for people escaping domestic violence.
  - Provide an up-to-date online directory of local community services and printed information at Council library facilities.
  - Responding to community enquiries about local supports.
- Convene the Homelessness Taskforce, a strategic advisory committee to advocate for and inform Council decisions. It is made up of all levels of government, community organisations and service providers, and community members including people with lived experience of homelessness.
- Provide strategic guidance for land use development across the region, guided by *Shoalhaven 2040 – Our Strategic Land-use Planning Statement*.

Future directions

Opportunities for future work require investigation of resourcing requirements. Opportunities that could be considered include:

- Work with or support community partners to:
  - Build capacity of community partners to collaborate and be well-informed, to provide outreach services (including via transport), to recognise and celebrate volunteers, and to build local neighbourhood connections for informal support. Also listed under 1.1 Community life, 4.1 Health services and support.
  - Accommodate service providers and community groups in Council buildings in exchange for provision of programs that meet community needs and activate community spaces. Also listed under 1.1 Community life.
- Explore opportunities to adapt processes and policies to better support:
  - Frontline Council staff to identify resident needs and refer to support services.

Key partners

Stakeholders who play a role in creating this Domain:

- People in the community seeking information on supports and accessing them when needed, and supporting others to do the same.
- People in the community volunteering their time to help others in their local community.
- Community groups and service organisations providing local support services and volunteering opportunities. For example, Salt Care provides a meal program with transport support, co-ordinates 150 volunteers and provides volunteer training. Supported Accommodation and Homelessness Services Shoalhaven Illawarra (SAHSSI) provide support services to women (and their children) affected by homelessness or domestic and family violence.
- Federal and NSW State Government agencies and land-use planning authorities that support Council to carry out land-use planning in a way that promotes the social and economic welfare of the community, including NSW Department of Planning and Environment, NSW Movement and Place Community of Practice and Government Architect NSW.
- Federal and State Government grant-providers, including Department of Communities and Justice.

Foundation

3

Safe and prepared communities

Safety in relationships, in the community and during emergencies

3.1
Safe built environment

People experience safety in community spaces; People are safe using buildings and development that meets legislative standards.

People are more likely to use public spaces they feel safe in, and more likely to linger and spend time there. When people feel safe in community spaces, they can use them to live active lifestyles, make social connections, get around the local area and participate in the community. Spending time in community spaces creates opportunities for incidental interactions and encourages people's sense of community and connection to place. Visible community activity in public spaces makes our communities attractive and thriving places where we want to live, visit and spend time.

The cyclical relationship between sense of safety and use of public spaces means that increased use is seen as an indicator to others that people feel safe enough to use a place[8], and this generates further increases of use. This role of place activation as an indicator of safety is particularly important in places like the Shoalhaven, where significant economic activity is generated by visitors who may assess a place at first glance – this is particularly relevant in the Shoalhaven's main centres and gathering places.

The way we design, manage and use public spaces influences the level of safety that people experience there.

Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles, also called Safer by Design, are design and management principles that can be applied to improve the safety of the built environment by reducing the fear and incidence of crime. Other benefits of using CPTED principles include: improved perception of public places; reduced opportunities for anti-social behaviour; increased usage of public places in the daytime and evening; more liveable and sustainable environments;

improved quality of life. The four key CPTED strategies are territorial re-enforcement, surveillance, access control and space/activity management. All CPTED strategies aim to create the perception or reality of capable guardianship.

March 2022 data from BOCSAR shows that the majority of crime in Shoalhaven is happening in a residential setting rather than public places[9] . However, improving the sense of safety and activation of our residential streets improves surveillance and guardianship of our communities to benefit all residents. The Shoalhaven experienced rates of crime that were higher than the NSW average but 2 and 5 year trend data shows that many types of crime are happening less often. This includes break and enter of homes, theft from motor vehicles, arson, possession or use of amphetamines, offensive language, liquor offences and trespass[10].

Police play an important role in law enforcement and implementing crime prevention and reduction strategies across the Shoalhaven. As the largest manager of public space in the Shoalhaven, Council can design and manage Council-owned public spaces using CPTED principles to promote community safety. Safety in privately-owned public spaces like shopping centres depends on effective management by the space owner, but use of CPTED principles can be encouraged through land-use controls. Users of community spaces also have an important role to play – people using public places are the most effective surveillance system. Community ownership of public space sends positive signals to the community, and effective guardians of places are often ordinary people who are spatially 'connected' to a place and feel an association with, or responsibility for it.

In addition to crime risk, safety of people in the community depends on the built environment being designed, constructed and used in a way that considers the environment, safety risks to people using it, managing safety risks according to accepted standards. Council plays an important role in community safety through inspecting and ensuring land-use, building and development complies with legislative requirements. Council Ranger Services contributes to community safety by providing a community service in relation to environmental protection, animal management (including the animal shelter and nuisance animals) and vehicle parking to create a safer community. Responsible for investigating complaints and enforcing legislation throughout the Shoalhaven, Council's Rangers work to provide consistent law enforcement to protect the environment and preserve public amenities and assets.

Council's Building & Compliance Unit contributes to community safety by providing a community service to create a safer community. The Building & Compliance Unit consists of the Fire Safety Team, Development Assessment Team, Compliance Team & the Certification Team and as a unit are responsible for assessing development, complying development & construction certificate applications, investigating complaints and enforcing legislation throughout the Shoalhaven. Council's Building & Compliance Unit work to provide consistent application of the legislation to ensuring community members can continue to enjoy the local area and lifestyle.

What the community told us

The results of the community survey showed that 31.6% of respondents ranked "personal safety and security" as one of the top three priorities they feel impact on their individual health. In addition, there was very low incidental interaction in the community, with 62% of respondents speaking to people they don't know very well once a week or less. This would include bumping into a neighbour or speaking to strangers at the shops. Only 16% of respondents spoke to people they don't know very well at least daily. When survey comments on walkability were examined, the most-raised issue was safe walking facilities such as pathways and crossings. The equal second most-raised issue was safety in the community related to feeling safe and crime prevention.

In January 2021, Place Score conducted a site visit to Nowra that showed that "safe, well-maintained public spaces" was ranked as the second most valued place characteristic by people in Nowra. Five areas of the Nowra CBD were scored and "sense of safety" was highlighted as an Improvement Priority for four of those five areas. The Revitalising Nowra Action Plan 2020-23 identifies "poor perception of safety" and "unsafe pedestrian experience" as key challenges for the Nowra CBD.

"With regards to walkable suburbs - it's more of a safety issue. I don't feel safe walking alone and usually stick to the couple of houses around my home." – Online survey participant

"Safety and security is clearly an issue in the community that needs to be addressed" – Online survey participant

"Personal safety and security - currently don't feel safe exercising or going out at night" – Online survey participant

Council's work

Legislative responsibilities include:

- Plan actions to address identified local community needs and priorities, using a strategic plan and by working with others. Councils should make decisions in a way that is transparent, recognising diverse local needs and considering social justice principles of equity, access, participation and rights (*Local Government Act 1993*).
- Carry out land-use planning in a way that promotes the social and economic welfare of the community by the proper management, development and conservation of the State's natural and other resources (*Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*). This includes acting as the determining authority for relevant development applications and identifying the basis for the land-use planning strategy and planning priorities for the Shoalhaven.
- Act as the roads authority in the Shoalhaven, performing functions including opening and closing roads, approving use of roads for footpath dining and permitting road events, regulating traffic and giving consent for any work (including pedestrian facilities and public transport facilities) in the road reserve, as outlined in the Roads Act 1993 which recognises the rights of members of the public to pass along public roads (whether on foot, in a vehicle or otherwise).
- Act as the local authority in carrying out the provisions of the *Companion Animals Act 1998* which provides for the effective and responsible management of companion animals, including to protect native birds and animals. In addition, this requires Council to promote awareness of the responsibilities of dog and cat owners, including penalties for not complying.
- Act as the local authority in carrying out the provisions of the *Environmental Planning & Assessment Act 1979*, *Protection of the Environment Operations Act*, *Local Government Act, Swimming Pools Act*, to name a few, in the interest of ensuring community members can continue to enjoy the local area and lifestyle.

Other current and planned work includes:

- Provide strategic guidance for land use development across the region, guided by *Shoalhaven 2040 – Our Strategic Land-use Planning Statement*.
- Work in partnership with South Coast Police and community safety initiatives in public places, including convening the Safety Liaison Committee.
- Plan, design and manage public space and community spaces (including streets) to facilitate the community to experience safety by applying principles of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design to new and existing spaces. As Council is appointed as Crown lands manager, this also includes managing Crown lands.

Future directions

Opportunities for future work require investigation of resourcing requirements. Opportunities that could be considered include:

- Explore opportunities to work with or support community partners to:
  - Have accessible safe rooms in shopping centre developments to support people escaping from domestic violence or sexual assault, learning from the Macquarie Centre example.
- Explore resourcing opportunities to:
  - Have a Council officer with a dedicated community safety function.
- Explore opportunities to adapt processes and policies to better support:
  - Prioritisation of CPTED principles in Council-led developments from the design stage.

Key partners

Stakeholders who play a role in creating this Domain:

- People in the community, including businesses, who use public spaces in a way that encourages others to experience safety – being present to provide surveillance and create a sense of welcome and activation, lingering and spending time at community events or informal social gatherings, feeling a sense of ownership and speaking up as a community guardian of the space.
- Community groups and businesses that activate community spaces through their activities.
- Providers of public spaces managing their spaces effectively, including Transport for NSW, Health NSW and ISLHD, NSW Department of Education.
- Providers of privately-owned public spaces managing their spaces effectively.
- Developers of land that interfaces with public space, ensuring that their development contributes positively to the interface.
- South Coast Police enforce the law and implement crime reduction strategies across the Shoalhaven. They also deliver community engagement activities like 'Coffee with a cop' to help people feel comfortable seeking support.
- Australian Building Codes Board maintains the National Construction Code of Australia (previously called the Building Code of Australia), a national set of technical requirements for the design, construction and performance of buildings and other structures throughout Australia.

3.2

Safe behaviour and healthy relationships

People experience safety with others and are supported by healthy, respectful relationships.

Experiencing safety in our community is more than being safe in public spaces. The interactions we have in our homes and in our relationships are an important part of feeling safety and security. Respectful relationships are important for our wellbeing because they help us feel safe, encouraged, valued, understood and accepted.

Experiencing bullying or violence in our interactions and relationships with others is one indication of a lack of safety. March 2022 data from BOCSAR shows that the majority of crime in Shoalhaven is happening in a residential setting rather than public places. This data shows that the Shoalhaven experienced rates of crime that were higher than the NSW average for assault (61% in residential settings), sexual offences (75% in residential settings) and intimidation, talking and harassment (70% in residential settings)[11].

Safety from violence is only one aspect of healthy and respectful relationships. In a healthy relationship, both people experience and give respect, trust, good communication, honesty and support. People of all ages can benefit from learning more effective and healthy interpersonal and relationship skills. Learning opportunities are provided by community service providers and local businesses, such as anti-bullying

initiatives in schools, marriage and relationship counselling and courses to learn parenting skills. Local community supports (see 2.3 Local community supports) are available for people experiencing a crisis or needing immediate help.

When we understand what healthy, respectful relationships look like and what support is available, we are most able to take advantage of learning opportunities to improve our interpersonal and relationships skills. Awareness-raising initiatives and easy-to-find information resources can help with this. The capacity of service providers can be built by improving access to resources like information, funding opportunities and skills training. Council plays a role in facilitating the capacity-building of service providers, and facilitating providers to work more collaboratively in the local area. Improving community awareness of available supports means local people are better able to access help, and Council can also help facilitate community access to this information. Police play an important role in law enforcement and implementing crime reduction strategies across the Shoalhaven.

What the community told us

Results from the online Community Wellbeing survey paint a picture of a well-connected and open community in the Shoalhaven, with loneliness recorded at a very low level. Nearly 80% of the 192 survey participants recorded feeling lonely once a month or less (with 64% saying they hardly ever or never feel lonely). This picture is supported by the results of the Customer Satisfaction Survey conducted by Council in 2020 - personal relationships were the highest scoring attribute of the Personal Wellbeing Index score for the Shoalhaven community, and the Index score was above the national standard and increased between 2018 and 2020. This attribute scored 4.4 out of 5, with 91% of residents reporting they were satisfied with their personal relationships, followed by 85% of residents reporting being satisfied with how safe they feel. The same survey showed that 84% of residents speak to a neighbour or someone in their street weekly.

When people are not experiencing safety and respect in relationships, they may be reluctant to report or discuss this with others, making information on these experiences challenging to gather. While crime data can give insight into the number of people in relationships with an extreme lack of respect and safety, less information is available on relationships that are less-extreme but still unhealthy and disrespectful.

Council's work

Legislative responsibilities include:

- Plan actions to address identified local community needs and priorities, using a strategic plan and by working with others. Councils should make decisions in a way that is transparent, recognising diverse local needs and considering social justice principles of equity, access, participation and rights (*Local Government Act 1993*).
- Carry out land-use planning in a way that promotes the social and economic welfare of the community by the proper management, development and conservation of the State's natural and other resources (*Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*). This includes acting as the determining authority for relevant development applications and identifying the basis for the land-use planning strategy and planning priorities for the Shoalhaven.

Other current and planned work includes:

- Work in partnership with South Coast Police and community safety initiatives in public places, including convening the Safety Liaison Committee.

Future directions

Opportunities for future work require investigation of resourcing requirements. Opportunities that could be considered include:

- Explore opportunities to work with or support community partners to:
  - Expand provision of safe relationships training in high schools.
  - Update the Crime Prevention Plan using a collaborative approach to improve community understanding and civic engagement with building community safety, empowering local residents and businesses to play a positive role in contributing to community safety in partnership with other stakeholders.
- Explore resourcing opportunities to:
  - Have a Council officer with a dedicated community safety function.

Key partners

Stakeholders who play a role in creating this Domain:

- People in the community who have relationships and interact with people in a healthy and respectful way. This includes being committed to learning effective and healthy interpersonal and relationship skills.
- Providers of learning opportunities including schools providing anti-bullying initiatives, businesses providing relationship counselling, and community organisations providing parenting skills training. For example, South Coast Medical Service Aboriginal Corporation provides men's and women's groups to build relationship skills as well as mentoring programs in primary and high schools. National Association for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect train facilitators to provide the Love Bites respectful relationships education program from young people aged 15-17 years.
- South Coast Police enforce the law and implement crime reduction strategies across the Shoalhaven. They also deliver community engagement activities like 'Coffee with a cop' to help people feel comfortable seeking support.
- Department of Communities and Justice fund community services including Specialist Homelessness Services and domestic violence services, as well as overseeing the justice system

3.3
Prepared for disasters and emergencies

People are prepared for disasters; Emergency Managers are ready to keep people safe during disasters and emergencies.

Every year, communities are devastated by disasters like bushfires, floods and storms. The Shoalhaven is no stranger to the impacts of disasters – in 2019-20, the Currowan Fire resulted in three deaths and destroyed 312 homes, damaged a further 173 homes and burnt nearly half a million hectares in the southern Shoalhaven. By their nature, emergencies have the potential to damage our homes and community infrastructure, to impact our health and wellbeing, or even cause loss of life. The impacts of emergencies cannot be eliminated, but can be managed by taking action to reduce risks and manage hazards, and preparing plans for both immediate/short-term responses and longer-term recovery.

Preparedness and disaster risk reduction is a shared responsibility in which everyone in the community needs to be involved. This involves all levels of government, non-government organisations (NGOs) and businesses. Individuals, families and communities all play a role in determining how well they are prepared for and safeguarded from emergencies and their ability to recover from them.

Emergency Management Australia leads the Australian Government disaster and emergency management response. They work to build a disaster resilient Australia that prepares and responds to disasters and emergencies. Australia's emergency management arrangements bring together the efforts of all governments, and private and volunteer agencies to deliver coordinated emergency management across all hazards.

In NSW, Resilience NSW leads whole-of-government disaster and emergency efforts from prevention through to recovery. NSW has 11 emergency management regions made up of local government areas. The Illawarra South Coast Regional Emergency Management Plan provides a coordinated and comprehensive approach to emergency management in the Illawarra, including the Shoalhaven. It names the Combat Agency responsible for managing emergencies arising from different types of hazards.

Everyone in the community can be part of emergency preparedness by ensuring their own household has an emergency plan and understands important emergency information – knowing about local hazards, where to get emergency information and support, who to contact and how to manage stress in an emergency. Community members can also contribute by helping their friends and family be prepared, helping their neighbours during an emergency, and by joining community volunteering organisations that are part of preparing and implementing emergency response and recovery activities, such as NSW State Emergency Service and NSW Rural Fire Service.

What the community told us

In 2021, a survey was completed as part of the Council's Recovery into Resilience Project. Of the 260 community members that completed the survey, 93% had experienced extreme weather events in the last five years in the Shoalhaven, and 76% felt threatened by extreme weather events. The impacts they were most worried about included environmental damage, impacts to infrastructure, damage to property and loss of life. Most respondents (84%) thought that the Shoalhaven should have an adaptation and resilience strategy and that the community should be involved in the preparation of such a strategy.

"Our street floods so there is always the stress of possible flooding especially when the opening to the ocean is not open" – Online survey participant

"It's been hard the past year after the fires and through COVID-19 to feel connected to the local community" – Online survey participant

Council's work

Legislative responsibilities include:

- Plan actions to address identified local community needs and priorities, using a strategic plan and by working with others. Councils should make decisions in a way that is transparent, recognising diverse local needs and considering social justice principles of equity, access, participation and rights (*Local Government Act 1993*).
- Carry out land-use planning in a way that promotes the social and economic welfare of the community by the proper management, development and conservation of the State's natural and other resources (*Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*). This includes acting as the determining authority for relevant development applications and identifying the basis for the land-use planning strategy and planning priorities for the Shoalhaven.
- Act as the roads authority in the Shoalhaven, performing functions including opening and closing roads, regulating traffic and giving consent for any work in the road reserve, as outlined in the *Roads Act 1993*.

Other current and planned work includes:

- Provide strategic guidance for land use development across the region, guided by *Shoalhaven 2040 – Our Strategic Land-use Planning Statement*.
- Provide a Local Emergency Management Officer who co-ordinates and participates as a member of Shoalhaven Local Emergency Management Committee.
- Recovery into Resilience Project to improve community resilience, including community involvement and installation of equipment to create 23 Local Information Hubs across the Shoalhaven.
- Through the FORTIS House project, help residents save time and money by providing free buildings designs for highly resilient, sustainable, affordable and adaptable homes. This project is delivered in partnership with the Bushfire Building Council of Australia and NRMA Insurance.
- Implementing programs to make water infrastructure more resilient to disasters and climate change impacts.

Future directions

Opportunities for future work require investigation of resourcing requirements. Opportunities that could be considered include:

- Explore opportunities to work with or support community partners to:
  - Support people in the community to be part of resilience planning for their communities and households.
- Explore resourcing opportunities to:
  - Expand programs to make water infrastructure more resilient to disasters and climate change impacts, considering learning from bushfires and other natural disasters.
  - Have a Council officer with a dedicated community safety function.

Key partners

Stakeholders who play a role in creating this Domain:

- People in the community being committed to emergency preparedness for their household and helping friends, family and neighbours to be prepared or during an emergency. Volunteering as part of emergency response and recovery services.
- The Flagstaff Group have developed the EMBER app to improve preparedness of people living with disability and understanding of emergency services.
- Community Connect Southern Shoalhaven maintains a list community groups and works to co-ordinate volunteer efforts in disaster recovery.
- Australian Red Cross supports communities interested in community-led resilience planning.
- National Recovery and Resilience Agency (NRRA) supports communities impacted by disaster, with a strong on-the-ground presence and a guiding principle of locally-led recovery. They deliver initiatives to reduce risk and lessen the impacts of future shocks. Emergency Management Australia (EMA) leads the Australian Government disaster and emergency management response. The NRRA and EMA will soon merge to form the National Emergency Management, Resilience and Recovery Agency.
- Resilience NSW leads whole-of-government disaster and emergency efforts from prevention through to recovery.
- Shoalhaven Local Emergency Management Committee to provides a coordinated and comprehensive approach to emergency management in Shoalhaven. Combat agencies responsible for managing emergencies arising from different types of hazards include Police, NSW Rural Fire Service, Fire and Rescue NSW, NSW State Emergency Services, Surf Life Saving NSW and Marine Rescue.

Healthy and active communities

Access to opportunities to live healthy and active lifestyles

4.1
Health services and support

People have good access to health services and supports.

Throughout our lives, we maintain, improve or manage our physical and mental health by using services provided by health workers, including allied health and complimentary therapy providers. Doctors, nurses, dentists, chiropractors, optometrists, pharmacists, paramedics, physiotherapists, speech therapists, radiographers, psychologists, counsellors, herbalists, aromatherapists and more – we expect to have ready access to services and support to meet our health needs.

Availability of health services is impacted by the complex provision framework. NSW Health has service agreements with Local Health Districts (LHDs), assigning to them the responsibility of managing public hospitals and healthcare clinics in defined geographical areas, supported by the Australian Government's Medicare which covers public hospital services costs. Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District (ISLHD) is the LHD for the Shoalhaven and provides 3 hospitals, with Shoalhaven District Memorial Hospital being the main acute care hospital that is currently being redeveloped for expansion. Supporting the public hospital system are Nowra Private Hospital and private same-day hospital services at Ulladulla Endoscopy and Medical Centre. ISHLD collaborates with health and social service providers including General Practitioners (GPs), private health providers, Department of Communities and Justice, non-government organisations and Coordinare. As the Primary Health Network (PHN) covering the Shoalhaven, Coordinare is funded by the Australian Government to identify health needs in the region and support health service providers to improve patient care and improve coordination between providers. PHNs can commission external healthcare providers to meet the needs in the region, such as providing health promotion programs, mental health services or support for GPs.

Whilst many essential health services are subsidised by Medicare, the market provides most health services – this means that the government does not direct the location of health service providers like general practitioners or specialists (other than in public hospitals and clinics). The market-provision model means that regional areas like the Shoalhaven can struggle to attract health professionals into the region, particularly where living costs are high. Strategic land-use planning measures to support access to health services include the development of controls that encourage medical centres in village centres and health precincts in larger urban centres. Aged care facilities, carers and service providers are also important providers of support for people needing daily health support.

Where health services are available, having access to those services can present other challenges. The long distances and poor public transport connections between the dispersed villages of the Shoalhaven are significant barriers to our community accessing health services. Specialist services are generally located in the main urban centre of Nowra near Shoalhaven District Memorial Hospital, making access more difficult for people at the southern end of the Shoalhaven. Increasing use of telehealth programs offers opportunities for improving access for isolated communities, and eHealth is a key strategy in NSW State Health Plan Towards 2021. Telehealth and eHealth services are not suitable to replace all face-to-face health services, both for digital inclusion reasons and the need for physical examination or use of specialist equipment. Outreach services in under-serviced locations and transport services from these areas are other ways to address barriers related to travel.

Access to health services can also be improved by improving the provision of culturally appropriate health services and support, including alternative and complimentary health care. This should consider all cultures, but due to the significant differences in health outcomes experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, there is a need to undertake action to close this gap. Examples include building the capacity of Aboriginal Health Services, improving cultural understanding across the provider network and facilitating access to cultural practices like birthing on Country.

Community awareness programs and information resources can be used to improve health literacy, which is people understanding the health impacts of their choices, what their health needs are, what services are available to support their health and having the skills to navigate the system and access support. Health promotion initiatives can also be used to encourage people to choose behaviours that support better health, such as to increase vegetable intake or to quit smoking. Using the Social Determinants of Health framework, we also understand that the conditions of our life – where we live, work, grow and age – shape our individual and community health[12]. The Foundations for Community Wellbeing identified in this Plan aim to consider and address the full range of the Social Determinants of Health.

What the community told us

The community survey showed that people rated their mental health as poorer than their physical health – 11.4% of participants rating their physical health as 'poor' or 'not so good', compared with 17.1% for mental health. Only 67.8% of survey participants living in the Shoalhaven felt they could easily access the health services they need from where they live, with 27.3% saying they couldn't.

The following points about health outcomes and health services were noted in the community surveys:

- Difficulties accessing GPs in smaller settlements
- Need to address service gaps and barriers in access to hospital services
- Disability carers and local support services play a significant role
- The significance of companion animals, especially for older residents

Survey participants and community service providers both recognised the rise of mental illness in the Shoalhaven. Participants highlighted the growing pressures that were having a noticeable impact on their health, commonly identifying financial stress and the need to maintain job security as the number one factor impacting their mental health.

Seniors Workshop participants nominated low digital literacy as a key barrier to improving their wellbeing. While this was a challenge not highlighted by other demographic groups in the engagement, Seniors acknowledge the transition to online health education resources as a key risk to their individual health and wellbeing.

"Access to dental, GP and basic hospital services are fine but the higher level of medical care can be a bit hit and miss. Access to mental health care appears to be problematic." – Online survey participant

"There need to be more doctors and medical services in Nowra. We don't have enough specialists and the ones that are here have a waiting list of many months and even years. We also desperately need more Medicare funded services… I needed a colonoscopy and the waiting list at Nowra hospital on Medicare was 2 years... Many medical services are unavailable here and often one has to travel to Sydney for specialist services." – Online survey participant

"Access to health/mental health services in the area is limited, wait times can be long, costs are very high" – Online survey participant

Council's work

Legislative responsibilities include:

- Plan actions to address identified local community needs and priorities, using a strategic plan and by working with others. Councils should make decisions in a way that is transparent, recognising diverse local needs and considering social justice principles of equity, access, participation and rights (*Local Government Act 1993*).
- Carry out land-use planning in a way that promotes the social and economic welfare of the community by the proper management, development and conservation of the State's natural and other resources (*Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*). This includes acting as the determining authority for relevant development applications and identifying the basis for the land-use planning strategy and planning priorities for the Shoalhaven.
- Ensure compliance with *Public Health Act 2010* requirements for public health safety in settings including skin penetration establishments (tattooists and body piercers), cooling towers (legionella control) and public swimming pools.

Other current and planned work includes:

- Co-ordinate regular meetings between Council staff and local specialised homelessness services, to support vulnerable people who present at Council facilities to link with health and support services.
- The Local Emergency Management Officer co-ordinates identification of sites for health disaster responses (eg. testing locations).
- Provide strategic guidance for land use development across the region, guided by *Shoalhaven 2040 – Our Strategic Land-use Planning Statement*.
- Work with community partners to deliver health promotion campaigns and initiatives to promote healthy lifestyles, such as the Get in Step program with the Heart Foundation and the Health and Wellbeing Expo[13].
- Provide Community Wellbeing Grants to support community services which can be used to improve access to health and support services.

Future directions

Opportunities for future work require investigation of resourcing requirements. Opportunities that could be considered include:

- Explore opportunities to work with or support community partners to:
  - Build capacity of community partners to collaborate and be well-informed, to provide outreach services (including via transport), to recognise and celebrate volunteers, and to build local neighbourhood connections. Also listed under 1.1 Community life, 2.3 Local community supports.
  - Expand work with community partners to deliver health promotion campaigns and initiatives to promote healthy lifestyles. This could include initiatives to improve community awareness of local services or to collate health data on local need for services.
  - Address health service gaps including access to GPs, hospital services, and specialists, particularly for identified vulnerable groups such as older people. This could make use of advocacy, outreach and pilot programs, grant funding, research projects and needs identification / collection of evidence.

Good practice examples that could inform Council's future work:

- NSW Rural Doctors Network Bush Bursary attracts health professionals to regional areas by providing sponsored health student placements.

Key partners

Stakeholders who play a role in creating this Domain:

- People across the Shoalhaven being committed to health literacy for their household, seeking support and using available supports to meet their health needs. This also applies to people providing voluntary or unpaid care to family or other community members.
- Community service organisations providing free or low-cost mental health services, physical (including sexual) health services, and alcohol and other drug services. For example, Grand Pacific Health, Headspace, Flourish Australia, Lives Lived Well, Lifeline, One Door, Anglicare, Shoalhaven Women's Health Centre and Crossroads Youth Health Service. Local Area Coordination providers help NDIS recipients to access NDIS supports.
- South Coast Medical Service Aboriginal Corporation are an Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation providing health and health related services at 8 sites and working to improve the equity of access to mainstream services for the Aboriginal communities in the Shoalhaven.
- Community groups providing affordable transport services for people needing to attend medical appointments.
- Local businesses providing health and complimentary therapy services – medical centres, dentists, chiropractors, optometrists, pharmacists, physiotherapists, radiography and imaging centres, psychologists, counsellors, herbalists, aromatherapists and more. Private hospital services are also available at Nowra Private Hospital and private same-day hospital services at Ulladulla Endoscopy and Medical Centre. Aged and disability care-providers (aged care facilities, in-home care supports, etc) support people in their care to access health services.

- Healthy Cities Illawarra help design the infrastructure of a healthy community by developing, implementing and evaluating evidence-based and sustainable programs that address the underlying social, economic and environmental causes of health inequity. There has been limited expansion of activity into the Shoalhaven due to funding limitations.
- Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District has a service agreement with NSW Health and is responsible for managing 3 public hospitals, healthcare clinics and institutions in the Shoalhaven. They are also responsible for providing health services in the Shoalhaven and promoting, protecting and managing the community's health, including through the work of their Health Promotion Officers and by providing the Illawarra Shoalhaven Health Education Centre in Wollongong. They also provide Community Health Nurses to deliver nursing care to community health centres and at home.
- Coordinare is funded by the Australian Government as the southern Eastern NSW PHN to:
  - conduct assessments of the health needs of the region and identify groups who need more resources, programs and services
  - support GP's, nurses and allied health practitioners to improve patient care
  - improve coordination between different parts of the health system (eg. between hospital and GP when a patient is discharged)
  - PHNs can commission external healthcare providers to meet the needs in the region, such as funding or provide: health promotion programs, mental health services, support for primary care (GPs)
- Service NSW supports access to programs across NSW Government bodies, including online health resources, the organ donor registry, and rebates and assistance like EnableNSW. EnableNSW provides assistive technology and related services to help people live safely at home, which can include mobility aids and respiratory equipment.
- Federal and NSW State Government agencies and land-use planning authorities that support Council to carry out land-use planning in a way that promotes the social and economic welfare of the community, including NSW Department of Planning and Environment, NSW Movement and Place Community of Practice and Government Architect NSW.
- Medicare (Australian Government) pays some or all of the costs of necessary health care, including the costs of seeing a doctor, getting medicines and accessing mental health care, as well as covering public hospital services costs.

Places and programs for active lifestyles

People have access to green space and facilities for active recreation, play and walking; People have access to sports and active recreational activities.

People have active lifestyles when they are physically active in their life. Physical activity includes sports, unstructured outdoor play, exercise/fitness activities (dance, cross-fit, yoga, mountain-biking, swimming, etc), and many other forms of active recreation like bush-walking and kayaking. It also includes incidental physical activity, which is unstructured activity as part of daily living, such as walking to school and doing housework/gardening[14].

Regular physical activity that raises the heart rate has significant health benefits and can reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease, diabetes, colon and breast cancer, and depression. Adequate levels of physical activity, including through low intensity activity like walking, helps manage weight and also decreases the risk of falls and fractures in older age. Being physically active outdoors can provide additional physical and mental health benefits. Regularly visiting green spaces is linked to higher levels of physical activity and spending 30 minutes per day at a park can reduce the incidence of high blood pressure and depression. Physically active children tend to have better academic achievement, better attendance and fewer disciplinary problems.[15] Communities that participate in sport and recreation develop strong social bonds and are safer places, and the people who live in them are generally healthier and happier than places where physical activity isn't a priority[16].

Active living is supported by the places we live in – through the built environment such as pedestrian and cycle paths, sport and recreation facilities, public open space, parks and reserves[17]. Places that support active lifestyles are often places with walkable neighbourhoods (see 5.1 Active transport) and have good access to natural areas (see 6.2 Sustainable access to natural environments). Places that support active lifestyles also have sport and active recreation facilities, which are indoor and outdoor spaces assigned for sports, leisure and recreation purposes. These may include sports grounds, leisure parks, golf courses and spaces with recreational equipment for play and exercise. People in the community also make use of community places like halls, parks, beaches and streets to exercise. Virtual spaces are increasingly being used to meet online, including for exercise and active recreation. While Council provides many places in the community that are used for active lifestyles, local businesses also provide places like dance studios and gyms. The Office of Sport has identified that many young people in the Shoalhaven are more likely to undertake informal active recreation than formal 'group sports' programs, emphasising the need for infrastructure for informal active recreation like bushwalking, mountain bike riding and skateboarding.

As well as having places that support active lifestyles, we also need programs and activities happening in those places. 2002 research in Perth suggests that while a supportive physical environment is necessary for increasing community recreational activity levels, it was secondary to the influence of individual and social environmental factors such as being in the habit of exercising or having social support like clubs or exercise partners. This high level of influence of individual and social environmental factors indicates that education campaigns and organised activities could have more impact than additional facilities, where the physical environment is already supportive of recreational activities. The research also indicated that the most frequently used facilities were informal,

particularly the streets and public open space, and recommended greater emphasis on creating streetscapes that enhance walking for recreation and transport[18]. Active lifestyles are also supported by cultural and social factors and programs such as healthy lifestyle and travel behaviour change programs, campaigns, information, education, clubs, cost to participant, technology and a broad range of initiatives that encourage participation in active lifestyles.

While Council provides activities and programs to support people to live active lifestyles, access to opportunities to meet the community's needs relies on the work of community partners including both non-profit groups and businesses. Sporting clubs and teams, active recreation groups like bushwalking clubs, dance academies, martial arts schools, personal trainers, Pilates and yoga instructors, weights classes, cross-fit groups, swim schools – the range of active recreation activities is as diverse as people's interests.

Access to both places and programs that support active lifestyles can be improved by ensuring that opportunities are inclusive for all ages, cultures, locations and financial situations. We all have a right to live an active life, so supports to build the capacity of non-profit providers of low-cost activities like gentle exercise should focus on improving inclusion. Access can also be improved by initiatives that improve community awareness of available places and activities, as well as the health benefits of participation.

What the community told us

Survey participants acknowledged that the Shoalhaven region is well resourced to enable many residents to exercise and improve their physical and mental health for limited or no cost. Neighbourhood open space plays an important role with residents who frequently utilise local parks, facilities, and sidewalks to get active, foster connections, and seek respite from day-to-day stresses. When asked for ideas that would improve community wellbeing, survey participants suggested that better paths, more outdoor exercise equipment, expansion community-run exercise classes and more off-leash dog areas. Dog parks and off-leash areas are highly-valued recreational facilities in the Shoalhaven.

From the online survey, those who felt they were unable to easily access open space recorded a significantly lower health score. Nearly 80% of survey participants reported being able to easily walk to a park or natural surroundings. The 14% of participants who said they could not easily access open space recorded a significantly lower mental health rating of 2.7/5 and health rating of 3/5 (compared to the community average of 3.5 for mental health and 3.6 for physical health). All of this particular group also recorded being dissatisfied with the transport connections in their area.

"Sporting and community events bring people together. To have those two things you need social infrastructure - sporting fields, halls, parks and other spaces to have events in." – Online survey participant

"I enjoy bushwalking and swimming as leisure activities so access to the natural environment and quality open spaces and recreational facilities are important to me" – Online survey participant

"My favourite activity is walking my dogs on the beach where I can chat to other dog owners." – Online survey participant

"We are rapidly developing and currently kids have very little access to sporting facilities. We should have adequate and accessible basketball and netball courts. Not to mention a skate park or pump track. Things like a golf driving range or a PCYC would be hugely beneficial for our rapidly expanding community." – Online survey participant

Council's work

Legislative responsibilities include:

- Plan actions to address identified local community needs and priorities, using a strategic plan and by working with others. Councils should make decisions in a way that is transparent, recognising diverse local needs and considering social justice principles of equity, access, participation and rights (*Local Government Act 1993*).
- Carry out land-use planning in a way that promotes the social and economic welfare of the community by the proper management, development and conservation of the State's natural and other resources (*Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*). This includes acting as the determining authority for relevant development applications and identifying the basis for the land-use planning strategy and planning priorities for the Shoalhaven.
- Prepare and implement Coastal Management Programs (to replace the previous Shoalhaven Coastal Zone Management Plan) to manage the use and development of the coastal environment in an ecologically sustainable way, for the social, cultural and economic well-being of the people of New South Wales (*Coastal Management Act 2016*).
- Plan for and manage public land as the appointed Crown land manager under the *Crown Lands Management Act 2016*, including having a Plan of Management for land classified as 'natural area' or 'reserve'.
- Act as the roads authority in the Shoalhaven, performing functions including regulating traffic and giving consent for any work (including pedestrian facilities) in the road reserve, as outlined in the *Roads Act 1993* which recognises the rights of members of the public to pass along public roads (whether on foot, in a vehicle or otherwise).
- Ensure compliance with *Public Health Act 2010* requirements for public swimming pools and spa pools.
- Act as the local authority in carrying out the provisions of the Companion Animals Act 1998 which provides for the effective and responsible management of companion animals, including to protect native birds and animals. In addition, this requires Council to promote awareness of the responsibilities of dog and cat owners, including penalties for not complying.
- Ensure compliance with *Public Health Act 2010* requirements for public health safety in public swimming pools.

Other current and planned work includes:

- Plan, design and manage open space, recreational facilities and other public space to facilitate active lifestyles (recreation and play), including:
  - Plan, provide and maintain recreational infrastructure (sportsgrounds, recreation centres, pools, play equipment, exercise equipment, walking and cycling facilities), guided by the documents including the Community Infrastructure Strategic Plan, PAMP, Bike Plan and site masterplans. This includes providing learn-to-ride facilities to build cycling skills and confidence.
  - Provide active recreational activities, including Shoalhaven Indoor Sports Centres holiday programs, Swim Sport & Fitness leisure centre programs and bike safety events in parks
  - Manage Crown lands, beaches and coastal zone, guided by plans including Plans of Management, Strategic Direction for Nowra Riverfront Precinct, and using thirteen Coastal Management Programs and the Shoalhaven Development Control Plan

- Provide strategic guidance for land use development across the region, guided by *Shoalhaven 2040 – Our Strategic Land-use Planning Statement*.
- Work with community partners to provide programs and activities to support people to live active lifestyles:
  - Hiring sportsground and facilities to local sporting clubs.
  - Convening the Sports Board advisory committee.
  - Working with NSW Office of Sport alongside community partners to deliver the Shoalhaven Active Youth Program.
  - Provide Community Wellbeing Grants to support community groups and sports clubs to increase participation and improve resources.

Future directions

Opportunities for future work require investigation of resourcing requirements. Opportunities that could be considered include:

- Explore opportunities to work with or support community partners to:
  - Improve access to inclusive sport and physical activity programs, including programs for people with disability and programs that increase the participation of young women. For example, providing 'come and try' days, social sport and recreational activities, and adaptive sport activities like Shoalhaven Walking Basketball.
  - Provide programs that respond to emerging health issues and develop an evidence base for program impact.
- Explore opportunities to adapt processes and policies to better support:
  - Provision of open space, recreational equipment, community facilities and youth spaces to equitably meet the needs of community members of all ages across the Shoalhaven, guided by a provision strategy that identifies resourcing needed for delivery and is informed by engagement on contemporary community use of community infrastructure. This could consider ways to support activation of town and village centres, climate resilience and adaption, flexible and multipurpose infrastructure, the needs of young people and older people, and small interventions to provide meeting points in key environmental sites. Also listed under 1.1 Community life.

Good practice examples that could inform Council's future work:

- The Draft Wilton Growth Area Development Control Plan 2019 identifies wellbeing as a purpose of the plan, by saying that one of the plan's purposes is to "Support the health and wellbeing of local residents and workers by promoting physical activity, transport choice and accessibility, access to employment and education opportunities, social infrastructure, housing diversity and affordability, access to healthy food, a desirable and safe public domain, opportunities for recreation and entertainment, access to the natural environment, and a sense of place and community identity".
- The network of Jordan Springs Lake, Lakeside Parade and Melaleuca Lake is an example of drainage infrastructure that is also designed to perform a recreational function for community.

Key partners

Stakeholders who play a role in creating this Domain:

- People across the Shoalhaven being committed to active lifestyles for their household, using available places to be active and supporting others to be active.
- Non-profit and business facilitators of diverse 'active recreation' activities across the Shoalhaven – sporting clubs and coaches, Pilates instructors, dance teaches, walking groups, personal trainers, park-run groups, cross-fit boxes, gym operators, etc.
- Property developers provide contributions towards meeting the needs of new population, including towards the provision of open space and recreational infrastructure identified in any relevant development contributions plans"Community service organisations improving equitable access to healthy food, including providers of programs including food relief for vulnerable community members, Kitchen Garden programs, and FoodREDi or other healthy eating learning programs.
- South Coast Medical Service Aboriginal Corporation are an Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation providing health and health related services at 8 sites.
- Healthy Cities Illawarra help design the infrastructure of a healthy community by developing, implementing and evaluating evidence-based and sustainable programs that address the underlying social, economic and environmental causes of health inequity.
- Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District has a service agreement with NSW Health and is responsible for promoting, protecting and managing the community's health, including through the work of their Health Promotion Officers and by providing the Illawarra Shoalhaven Health Education Centre in Wollongong.
- Coordinare is funded by the Australian Government as the southern Eastern NSW PHN to:
  - conduct assessments of the health needs of the region and identify groups who need more resources, programs and services.
  - PHNs can commission external healthcare providers to meet the needs in the region, such as funding or providing health promotion programs.
- Office of Sport NSW provides programs, funding and infrastructure to enable higher rates of participation in sport and active recreation, including grants for facilities and local programs, as well as Active Kids and First Lap vouchers through Service NSW.
- Heart Foundation provides advice and resources to support councils to create healthy built environments. For example, Good for Busine$$ - The benefits of making streets more walking and cycling friendly and Healthy Active by Design.
- Infrastructure NSW and NSW Sport invest in public transport infrastructure and regional/ subregional sporting and recreation facilities.
- Other managers of public lands used for active recreation: NSW DPE holds Crown land and appoints Council as the Crown Land Manager, Forestry Corporation of NSW manage State forests in NSW, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service manages national parks.
- Roads and Maritime Services plan and maintain state and regional roads, including pedestrian infrastructure in the road reserve.
- Federal and NSW State Government agencies and land-use planning authorities that support Council to carry out land-use planning in a way that promotes the social and economic welfare of the community, including NSW Department of Planning and Environment, Government Architect NSW and Marine Estate Management Authority.

4.3
Healthy and equitable food systems

People have equitable access to healthy food.

Everyone in the Shoalhaven should have fair, secure and affordable access to healthy food. For this to occur, we need a healthy, equitable, sustainable and resilient food system that supports connected communities and good food for all. An equitable system supports fair outcomes for people throughout the food supply chain, from farmers, food processers, transport and logistics providers, retailers and consumers[19]. An equitable food system provides and prioritises nutritious and culturally appropriate food for all, and is resilient to issues like the impacts of disaster or international supply chain logistics. An equitable food system also manages food waste. Access to safe, nutritious and sufficient food is a basic need and should be treated as a human right, with priority given to the most vulnerable.

What we consume is critical for individual health and wellbeing. On Maslow's hierarchy of needs, food and water are essential foundations for a healthy human, more important for our survival than safety or a sense of community. Eating a wide variety of healthy foods helps to keep you in good health and to protect against chronic disease. Eating a well-balanced diet means eating a variety of foods from each of the 5 food groups daily, in the recommended amounts[20]
. The main reason for food insecurity is material hardship and inadequate financial resources. People can also experience food insecurity due to financial or geographic difficulties accessing affordable healthy food, or because they have limited understanding about how to purchase and prepare ingredients to make a healthy meal[21].

Equitable access to healthy food is also important for building social connections because social activities are often focused on food – in the home, on picnics or in restaurants. Food also has a cultural meaning, as shown by the range of food-related festivals and events and the emergence of community and verge gardens. This highlights the need for the community

to have access to culturally appropriate food as across cultures food plays an important role in building social and community connections.

Achieving an equitable and sustainable food system depends on the co-operation of stakeholders throughout the food supply chain, from primary producers to transport industry and consumers. Land-use controls, regulated by state and local government, need to facilitate local food production and processing, as well as retail locations that provide access for all in the community. The activities of businesses including producers, processers, transporters and retailers are also needed to meet the community's needs. Community groups and service providers can also contribute, such as providers of low-cost food programs for vulnerable community members. Other examples are breastfeeding promotion and support groups, and community garden groups who support people to grow and access fresh food locally. Access to healthy food can be improved through initiatives to improve health and nutrition literacy, so people better understand the impacts of food choices and have the skills and confidence needed to make better nutrition choices[22]. Council also plays a role in implementing food safety regulations.

Many Victorian local councils have dedicated food system policies that articulate the interconnection between the environmental, social, health, and economic elements of the food system. A project to comprehensively map local government's role in creating healthy and equitable food systems was completed in 2021.[23] This is a good resource to support councils to understand the variety of ways they can influence food systems, from having community garden policies or strategies to support local food production.

What the community told us

While 91.8% of survey participants living in the Shoalhaven felt they could easily access healthy and fresh from where they live, there were 6.5% that said they couldn't. It was commonly acknowledged that the most affordable and freshest food was concentrated at farmers markets, and that they were difficult to access for most of the population with cost, transport, and lack of inclusion being the three main barriers. The community suggested that this could be improved by expanding the farmer's market network and providing a more accessible co-op for local growers and producers in the Shoalhaven.

"Markets, like the Berry farmers market with fresh produce at reasonable prices would be a great improvement for the community living in Nowra" – Online survey participant

"Community gardens are wonderful" – Online survey participant

"While I can access fresh food it is very expensive so it's one meal a day" – Online survey participant

"(My ideas for improving community wellbeing are) Information boards with healthy eating suggestions. Cheap meal information days at local community centres. Information boards with dangers of obesity. A community weight loss programme. Obesity seems to be a huge (pardon the pun) problem in Shoalhaven." – Online survey participant

"If our access to fresh food was limited because of a natural disaster, conflict or transport problems due to fuel shortages, our ability to live well would be affected. The fires that impacted the south coast during the summer of 2019 / 20 are an example of how quickly our access to fresh food and water, which are staples for life, became limited or temporarily unavailable. The impact of this event created panic, stress and uncertainty, all factors that do not support wellbeing"– Online survey participant

Council's work

Legislative responsibilities include:

- Plan actions to address identified local community needs and priorities, using a strategic plan and by working with others. Councils should make decisions in a way that is transparent, recognising diverse local needs and considering social justice principles of equity, access, participation and rights (*Local Government Act 1993*).
- Carry out land-use planning in a way that promotes the social and economic welfare of the community by the proper management, development and conservation of the State's natural and other resources (*Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*). This includes acting as the determining authority for relevant development applications and identifying the basis for the land-use planning strategy and planning priorities for the Shoalhaven.
- Ensure compliance with *Public Health Act 2010* requirements for private water suppliers and water carters, including ensuring businesses use approved quality assurance programs for potable water.
- By appointment by NSW Food Authority, act an enforcement agency to ensure retail food businesses comply with *Food Act 2003* requirements to ensure that food for sale is safe and suitable for human consumption, including annual inspection of all retail food businesses.

Other current and planned work includes:

- Provide Community Wellbeing Grants to support community groups to:
  - Create and maintain community gardens, guided by the Community Garden Policy.
  - Provide food for vulnerable community members.
- Provide strategic guidance for land use development across the region, guided by *Shoalhaven 2040 – Our Strategic Land-use Planning Statement*.
- Provide water and wastewater services including:
  - Manage collection, treatment and distribution of water.
  - Manage the collection, treatment and disposal of wastewater safely back into the environment, including managing a water recycling scheme that provides irrigation for dairy farmers Provide community spaces for food markets.
- Provide waste management services.
- Provide education programs to residents to learn about growing food at home.

Future directions

Opportunities for future work require investigation of resourcing requirements. Opportunities that could be considered include:

- Explore opportunities to work with or support community partners to improve access to healthy food by:
  - Improving local producers' access to networks and information, such as farmer's markets, co-operatives for local growers and producers, and awareness of planning permissibility for roadside stalls and farmers markets.
  - Improving community use of school facilities for community gardens and produce markets.
  - Providing healthy eating education programs to improve health literacy and programs to improve access for people with food insecurity. For example, offering FoodREDi train-the-trainer program to local service providers and school canteen staff would allow food literacy programs to be run at locations across the Shoalhaven.
  - Support a regional approach to agricultural production, with updated mapping of productive resource land.
- Explore opportunities to demonstrate leadership as a provider of community facilities and activities:
  - That provides healthy food options and encourages healthy food choices.
- Explore opportunities to adapt processes and policies to better support:
  - Provision of community gardens that are managed by community groups.

Good practice examples that could inform Council's future work:

- Several local governments in Victoria have introduced food systems policies to enhance the capacity of local food systems to sustainably meet current and future community needs. Examples include Cardinia Shire's Community Food Strategy and City of Ballarat's Good Food For All Food Strategy 2019-22.
- Northern Rivers Food Project was a federally funded project in 2016 that explored the role of councils in providing for and promoting access to healthy food. The project produced a full kit of advice for councils, ranging from model clauses and policy documents, through to standard development application forms and lodgement advice.

Key partners

Stakeholders who play a role in creating this Domain:

- People being committed to healthy and equitable food systems: growing food at home for themselves or to share with friends, family and neighbours; buying locally grown produce, locally processed food and supporting local retailers.

- Local producers including community gardens and farmers/growers (and co-operatives) of diverse products like honey and oysters.

- Local businesses providing food transport, storage, processing and retail services, including farmers market organisers. Some businesses use food waste reduction programs to provide food relief, such as the Second Bite, OzHarvest programs and other small-scale local programs.

- Community garden organisers sharing learnings and resources to help communities establish new community gardens.

- Community service organisations improving equitable access to healthy food, including providers of programs including food relief for vulnerable community members, food co-operatives, Kitchen Garden programs, and FoodREDi or other healthy eating learning programs. To establish a community garden on Council land, communities need the support of a local incorporated community group (including Community Consultative Bodies).

- South Coast Medical Service Aboriginal Corporation are an Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation providing health and health related services at 8 sites.

- Healthy Cities Illawarra help design the infrastructure of a healthy community by developing, implementing and evaluating evidence-based and sustainable programs that address the underlying social, economic and environmental causes of health inequity.

- Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District has a service agreement with NSW Health and is responsible for providing health services in the Shoalhaven and promoting, protecting and managing the community's health, including through the work of their Health Promotion Officers and by providing the Illawarra Shoalhaven Health Education Centre in Wollongong.

- Coordinare is funded by the Australian Government as the southern Eastern NSW PHN to:
  - Conduct assessments of the health needs of the region and identify groups who need more resources, programs and services.
  - PHNs can commission external healthcare providers to meet the needs in the region, such as funding or providing health promotion programs.

- Federal and NSW State Government agencies and land-use planning authorities that support Council to carry out land-use planning in a way that promotes the social and economic welfare of the community, including NSW Department of Planning and Environment, Government Architect NSW and Marine Estate Management Authority.2018 - 2028 which outlines how to protect and enhance our waterways, coastline and estuaries over the next ten years.

5

Transport connections to access our community's opportunities

Access to transport infrastructure and services so we can participate in life

5.1
Active transport

People access places and services in their community by walking or cycling; People with additional access needs can get around.

When we walk or cycle to access places and services in the community, we are undertaking physical activity as a means of transport. Active transport is possible when destinations are close to home, workplaces, or transport connections. Places that support use of active transport provide an affordable and healthy way to get around, visit our family and friends, and access local services and opportunities.

There is strong evidence that walking improves health[24] and that well-designed pedestrian networks promote walking. Designing our built environment to encourage active transport is a foundational step in which Council plays an important role, particularly in new housing developments. Australian research in 2016 found that two key factors encourage walking for transport: the connectivity of streets (more intersections, fewer big blocks) and a high number of local living destinations, such as supermarkets, shops, parks and public transport, within 1600m.[25] At a walking pace, the potential for incidental interaction is improved, compared to being in a car or cycling, encouraging the local community connections highlighted in 1.1 Community Life.

Even within the existing built environment, walking and cycling can be encouraged by improving the pedestrian experience with facilities such as shared paths, shading and pedestrian-friendly intersections. By addressing the barriers experienced by people with additional access needs, active transport becomes more accessible for everyone in the community. With our ageing population, and for those with limited mobility, the use of 'mobility scooters' is increasing, and work is needed to adapt the built environment to cater for this mode of transport, particularly in localities with seniors and aged accommodation.

'Pedestrian Access and Management Plans' (PAMPs) can outline the principles and actions necessary for a safe, accessible, well-located and well-designed pedestrian network. Bike Plans or Cycling Strategies can address the same matters to encourage bicycle use, also covering 'end-of-trip facilities' such as bike racks, showers and change rooms (for larger commercial premises and at other key destinations)[26]. As one of the largest landowners of public space, councils play an important role in providing active transport infrastructure, but there is a significant funding gap between community expectations and what can be provided, even when grant funding is available. Community education and the promotion of local activities like walking groups and events like Walk to School Day can also encourage the use of active transport.

'Active transport' is also relevant for bus and train travel because public transport (addressed within 5.2 Transport facilities and services) is often used in combination with walking. This makes active transport connections particularly important to those relying on public transport, including children, young people and those unable to drive (or walk long distances).

What the community told us

Walkable suburbs were seen as one of the top 3 priorities for creating more supportive natural and built environments, identified through the community consultation. When asked to nominate a big idea that would improve community wellbeing, the second most common response nominated by survey participants was "Increased active transport", noting a need for action around people feeling unsafe using the road or verge to get around in locations across the Shoalhaven.

Residents living in neighbourhoods they reported as being pleasant and walkable recorded the highest level of personal wellbeing from survey participants. However, across all engagement methods, the community reported that moving within suburbs and town centres was difficult in the majority of towns in the Shoalhaven. The topography of the land and the prioritisation of vehicular traffic were the two most common causes captured during the engagement.

"We need to improve active transport connections to the beautiful destinations in our LGA, since having a kid recently I've noticed a lot of the natural areas, open spaces or recreation facilities I want to go to aren't accessible in a pram" – Online survey participant

"The streets have no footpaths and makes it difficult to access medical and shops or social. In the rain or wet the middle of the road is your only option and it's not safe so it isolates me" – Online survey participant

Council's work

Legislative responsibilities include:

- Plan actions to address identified local community needs and priorities, using a strategic plan and by working with others. Councils should make decisions in a way that is transparent, recognising diverse local needs and considering social justice principles of equity, access, participation and rights (*Local Government Act 1993*).
- Carry out land-use planning in a way that promotes the social and economic welfare of the community by the proper management, development and conservation of the State's natural and other resources (*Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*). This includes acting as the determining authority for relevant development applications and identifying the basis for the land-use planning strategy and planning priorities for the Shoalhaven.

Other current and planned work includes:

- Plan, design and manage public space to facilitate active transport, including:
  - Plan, provide and maintain active transport facilities (footpaths, cycleways, kerb ramps, pedestrian crossings, shading and roadside verges), guided by the PAMP and Bike Plan.
  - Provide learn-to-ride facilities to build cycling skills and confidence.
  - Develop strategies and project plans to get projects 'shovel ready' to help secure grant funding.
  - Ongoing advocacy for increase in funding at all government levels.
- *Provide strategic guidance for land use development across the region, guided by Shoalhaven 2040 – Our Strategic Land-use Planning Statement.*

Future directions

Opportunities for future work require investigation of resourcing requirements. Opportunities that could be considered include:

- Explore opportunities to adapt processes and policies to better support:
  - Use of active transport.

Key partners

Stakeholders who play a role in creating this Domain:

- People in the community: local walking and cycling groups, pedestrians creating a welcoming environment for other pedestrians, motorists creating a welcoming environment for people walking and cycling.
- Non-profit organisations and service providers promoting active transport locally, including the Heart Foundation providing 'Healthy Active by Design' resource.
- Property developers provide paths to contribute to meeting the needs of new population.
- Healthy Cities Illawarra help design the infrastructure of a healthy community by developing, implementing and evaluating evidence-based and sustainable programs that address the underlying social, economic and environmental causes of health inequity. There has been limited expansion of activity into the Shoalhaven due to funding limitations. Healthy Cities Illawarra will also facilitate the Illawarra Shoalhaven Active Transport Taskforce.
- Local businesses providing equipment and services to support active transport, such as bicycle retailers and servicing, as well as end of trip facilities.
- Transport for NSW provide advice and partner to connect active transport facilities with public transport services, and extend these networks to improve service, accessibility and connectivity in and between communities. The Illawarra Shoalhaven Regional Transport Plan provides a blueprint for how Transport for NSW will proactively respond to the transport needs of the region, as well as address the key trends that will necessitate a transport related response into the future.
- Federal and NSW State Government agencies and land-use planning authorities that support Council to carry out land-use planning in a way that promotes the social and economic welfare of the community, including NSW Department of Planning and Environment, NSW Movement and Place Community of Practice and Government Architect NSW.
- Federal and State Government funding providers.

Transport facilities and services

People can get around with public transport and other transport services; People have good facilities when using public transport.

Transport facilities and services support people to get around when active transport is not available or is unsuitable. In addition, some community members are unable to drive or access a private vehicle, including aged persons, those with a disability, school children, young people and unemployed people trying to enter the workforce. For these people, public or community transport services are essential for them to access services and places in the community.

Public transport provision is an NSW Government responsibility. The challenge of a smaller population spread over a large geographical area means that public transport opportunities are limited in the Shoalhaven. Transport for NSW provides a train line linking Bomaderry and Berry through Gerringong to Wollongong and beyond via the South Coast line. Transport for NSW also contracts a range of private bus companies to provide public bus services across

the large Shoalhaven region. As an NSW Government responsibility, public transport services in the Shoalhaven are dependent on the planning and funding priorities of Transport for NSW.

Public and community-based transport services provide opportunities for socialising and incidental interactions when compared to private car transport. For people without car access, a reliable publicly accessible system provides a means of getting to and from essential services, open space, shopping and community facilities.

What the community told us

Transport infrastructure in the Shoalhaven was identified in the community engagement as the second highest priority for strengthening community connections. Survey and workshop participants agreed that some residents are unable to participate in community events, work, study or join clubs due to poor public transport and active transport options. Stakeholders and community members alike acknowledged the increased health risks of residents being unable to access essential services and professional health advice. The Shoalhaven's reliance on private vehicles, due to lack of transport alternatives, was viewed as the most common barrier to creating a sense of local community and connection. Participants highlighted the need to create better connectivity between townships through an improved regional transport plan, including the potential benefits of a unified Opal card system.

"Transport is a major issue. Providing transport opportunities to all is an imperative to improving community wellbeing. Access to employment and education opportunities improve quality of life. People cannot better themselves if they cannot get to work or school. Their situation cannot change, and they are powerless to change it. Increasing the diversity of routes and decreasing commute times is essential to improving community wellbeing." – Online survey participant

"It is near impossible to travel by public transport if you are time poor… You need a car to get anywhere within a reasonable amount of time therefore creating congestion on the roads" – Online survey participant

Council's work

Legislative responsibilities include:

- Plan actions to meet identified local community needs and priorities, and collaborate with others to maximise achievement of strategic goals. Councils should make decisions in a way that recognises diverse local needs and considers social justice principles of equity, access, participation and rights (*Local Government Act 1993*).
- Act as the roads authority in the Shoalhaven, performing functions including opening and closing roads, regulating traffic and giving consent for any work (including public transport facilities) in the road reserve, as outlined in the *Roads Act 1993*.

Other current and planned work includes:

- Plan and provide transport facilities:
  - Provide transport facilities such as bus interchange and bus-stop facilities, park and ride facilities, and transport hubs.
  - Advocate for increased funding, expanded public transport services and expanded active transport infrastructure to connect with public transport nodes.
  - Develop strategies and project plans to get projects 'shovel ready' to help secure grant funding
- Provide Comerong Ferry services.
- Provide strategic guidance for land use development across the region, guided by *Shoalhaven 2040 – Our Strategic Land-use Planning Statement*.

Future directions

Opportunities for future work require investigation of resourcing requirements. Opportunities that could be considered include:

- Explore opportunities to work with or support community partners to:
  - Extend the Jobs and Skills Bus trial.
  - Embrace new technologies to enhance our travel options and lessen our footprint.
- Explore opportunities to adapt processes and policies to better support:
- Consideration of mobility scooter use in planning and providing transport facilities and services.
- Continue to advocate for the public transport actions identified in the Illawarra Shoalhaven Regional Transport Plan to be brought forward, and include an expansion of the 16 Cities program to extend more broadly across the Shoalhaven.

Good practice examples that could inform Council's future work:

- Community Transport provision by Eurobodalla Shire Council is co-ordinated by the council and the eligibility criteria make it available to a broad range of community members.

Key partners

Stakeholders who play a role in creating this Domain:

- Shoalhaven Community Transport Service provide the Shoalhaven Transport Guide website, a comprehensive guide to public transport services in the Shoalhaven.
- Service providers and non-profit organisations (including Shoalhaven Community Transport Service) delivering local community transport programs for isolated community members.
- Property developers provide road infrastructure that cater for bus networks, that contribute to meeting the needs of new population.
- South East Australian Transport Strategy has developed the South East Transport Strategy which identifies priority projects to benefit the entire region and beyond. Their goal is to advocate for an effective integrated transport network that stimulates economic growth that is sustainable and sensitive to the environment and enhances communities.
- Transport for NSW provide rail services and engage local bus providers, including delivering the 16 Cities Program. The Illawarra Shoalhaven Regional Transport Plan provides a blueprint for how Transport for NSW will proactively respond to the transport needs of the region, as well as address the key trends that will necessitate a transport related response into the future.
- Federal and NSW State Government agencies and land-use planning authorities that support Council to carry out land-use planning in a way that promotes the social and economic welfare of the community, including NSW Department of Planning and Environment, NSW Movement and Place Community of Practice and Government Architect NSW.
- Federal and State Government funding providers for community transport programs.

5.3
Road access

People can get around by road.

The network of local, regional and state roads is an essential link providing people with access to services and places in their community. The road network is used by private vehicles, as well as public bus services and community transport providers. Effective road networks also require provision of appropriate car parking facilities. Road assets represent significant infrastructure, with planning and maintenance requiring services including traffic engineering, civil engineering, drainage and bridge infrastructure, as well as liaison between local and state government where road assets intersect.

The challenge of a smaller population spread over a large geographical area means that there is a high rate of road asset per household, with 42.8m of road per household in the Shoalhaven, nearly triple the rate for similar regional areas. As local and regional road maintenance is carried out by Council using rates collections with limited grant funding assistance provided by other levels of government, these road assets represent a significant cost for ratepayers. Provision of state roads is primarily a NSW Government responsibility. In the Shoalhaven, only the Princes Highway and Moss Vale Road form part of the State Road network, but Council has some limited maintenance responsibilities where these roads pass through towns and villages. State road provision plays a significant role in transport access as the Princes Highway acts as the main transport spine running north-south through the Shoalhaven.

Physical access to essential services and other key destinations via a well-designed and maintained road system is essential for individual and community wellbeing and requires ongoing direct action by the Council. Extensive damage caused by weather events between 2019 and 2022 (including more than 9 floods) impacted the community's ability to get around using the road network, highlighting the rising costs of road maintenance through an increase in extreme weather and disaster events. The Black Summer bushfires of 2019-20 emphasised the role Shoalhaven roads play during emergency events, acting as a critical evacuation route for many of the 'one road in' villages along our coastline.

What the community told us

As the dominant mode of transport in the Shoalhaven is the private car, provision of roads consistently shows as a high priority for people in the Shoalhaven. Shoalhaven City Council's 2020 Customer Satisfaction Survey recorded that the Council service with the lowest resident satisfaction was the maintenance of sealed local roads, with 49% of respondents dissatisfied. The main reasons for dissatisfaction were the condition of the roads and the quality of the maintenance carried out. The primary issue identified was potholes, with 23% of respondents mentioning potholes. Some references were also made to 'patchwork' maintenance, stating that roads should be repaired properly rather temporarily maintained.

"The roads and intersections of our villages are getting busier as our population both permanent and temporary has increased over the last 12 to 24 months" – Online survey participant

"Roads are not safe due to the poor condition they are in" – Online survey participant

Council's work

Legislative responsibilities include:

- Plan actions to meet identified local community needs and priorities, using a strategic plan and by working with others. Councils should make decisions in a way that is transparent, recognising diverse local needs and considering social justice principles of equity, access, participation and rights (*Local Government Act 1993*).
- Act as the roads authority in the Shoalhaven, performing functions including opening and closing roads, regulating traffic, giving consent for any work in the road reserve, approving use of roads for footpath dining and permitting road events, as outlined in the *Roads Act 1993*.

Other current and planned work includes:

- Planning, providing and maintaining road infrastructure:
  - Construction and maintenance of local and regional roads and bridges.
  - Planning for local road networks in new subdivisions and upgrades of existing local road assets to respond to changing needs.
  - Liaising with Transport for NSW regarding the intersection of state road assets with local and regional assets.
  - Advocacy for responsibility for regional roads to be handed back to the NSW Government.
  - Develop strategies and project plans to get projects 'shovel ready' to help secure grant funding.
- Provide strategic guidance for land use development across the region, guided by *Shoalhaven 2040 – Our Strategic Land-use Planning Statement*.

Future directions

Opportunities for future work require investigation of resourcing requirements. Opportunities that could be considered include:

- Building on existing advocacy for responsibility for regional roads to be handed back to the NSW Government, deliver a program to raise awareness of the high rate of road assets (metres) per household in the Shoalhaven and impacts related to condition of roads.
- Continue to advocate to other levels of government to "Keep Nowra Moving" and continue to develop Nowra Key Roads Strategic Direction projects and advocate for their funding.

Key partners

Stakeholders who play a role in creating this Domain:

- Local businesses providing services to support road transport, such as road maintenance services and learner driver schools.
- Property developers provide contributions towards meeting the needs of new population, including towards the provision of road infrastructure identified in any relevant development contributions plans, in addition to other road and intersection improvements identified as part of development assessment determinations.
- South East Australian Transport Strategy has developed the South East Transport Strategy which identifies priority projects to benefit the entire region and beyond. Their goal is to advocate for an effective integrated transport network that stimulates economic growth that is sustainable and sensitive to the environment and enhances communities.
- Transport for NSW provide state roads, including delivering the 16 Cities Program actions related to road upgrades. TfNSW are key partners in delivering any approved congestion-busting projects in Nowra including State Road upgrades and Local Nowra Key Roads projects. The Illawarra Shoalhaven Regional Transport Plan provides a blueprint for how Transport for NSW will proactively respond to the transport needs of the region, as well as address the key trends that will necessitate a transport related response into the future.
- Federal and NSW State Government agencies and land-use planning authorities that support Council to carry out land-use planning in a way that promotes the social and economic welfare of the community, including NSW Department of Planning and Environment, NSW Movement and Place Community of Practice and Government Architect NSW.
- Federal and State Government funding providers, including Infrastructure Australia and Infrastructure NSW.

Sustainable natural and built environments

Sustainable access to natural resources by managing our impact on them

Sustainable management of natural resources

People can access our natural resources in a way that supports the long-term sustainability of them.

Our natural resources include the air we breathe, the water we drink, the soil we use to grow food and the wood we use to build our homes, as well as energy resources like gas and solar power that provide comfort and enjoyment in our homes. These natural resources are central to our quality of life because they provide us with safety, shelter, nourishment and comfort that is needed for wellbeing.

With a deep understanding and respect for the environment in which they lived, Aboriginal people lived for tens of thousands of years without depleting these resources, using only what was needed and ensuring that these resources would continue to be available for generations to come. As Aboriginal people have done for so long, environmental sustainability requires us to find ways of meeting our own needs without compromising those of future generations. As people sharing the beautiful and rich resources of the south coast of NSW, we have a shared responsibility to continue to manage our resources sustainably.

Managing our natural resources sustainably requires everyone in the community to make thoughtful and conscious choices about how we live our lives. People can use active or public transport to get around, where these are available, instead of travelling by car. Homeowners can choose to build their home with sustainable materials and using thermally-efficient designs, or can install solar panels and retrofit measures to improve thermal and energy efficiency. Businesses can supply their local community and use more sustainable inputs, like renewable products, local employees and local suppliers. When we choose to buy food that is grown locally or made in Australia, we are making sustainable choices because less energy was used for transport. Recycling, reusing and repurposing our waste can reduce landfill and mean we need to buy fewer things. Reducing our material consumption means that there will be more for future generations, whilst composting our food waste reduces pressure on landfill and minimise fuel consumption associated with transporting waste.

People are more able to live sustainably when they understand the value of natural resources, the choices available to them and the impacts of their choices on current and future generations. Awareness-raising initiatives can help individuals, business and whole communities to make more sustainable choices – for example, 'place of origin' product labels and advertising campaigns like 'Go Local First' to support local businesses. Solar rebates and the 'return and earn' program are examples of incentive programs that can be used by all levels of government to encourage more sustainable behaviour. At a local government level, volunteer programs such as Landcare, Coastcare and Bushcare, as well as participation in Council managed environmental awareness programs, can play a critical role in guiding best practice in sustainable management of our natural resources in a way that encourages community education, participation and ownership. Government, particularly at state and national levels, also play a legislative and regulatory role to ensure that individuals, businesses and industry comply with requirements to manage our natural resources sustainably. For example, the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999(Commonwealth) and Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016 (NSW) provide a strong framework for protection of the environment and the conservation of biodiversity.

Our natural resources are increasingly impacted by global issues, including population growth, climate change and natural disasters, and supply chain issues such as fuel shortages. Our local agricultural industry, which is key to ensuring local supply, can use sustainable practices to help manage the food bowl for the future by maintaining soil quality, reducing erosion, and protecting water catchments and water quality. In the Shoalhaven, Council helps the community to sustainably access clean drinking water and helps ensure wastewater can be safely returned into the environment (with wastewater treatment and liquid trade waste regulation).

What the community told us

"I am lucky to have land where we can grow our own food and satisfy our needs to maintain the quality natural environment (keep weeds at bay etc). I enjoy living in a community where values of sustainable food growing and maintenance of the environment are paramount." – Online survey participant

"I take pride in the Shoalhaven it's such a beautiful place. Having grown up in the Hunter I saw the massive growth the highway upgrade to Sydney had on our region. The Shoalhaven is coming to this point. It would be great to see it happen in the region but it needs to be closely controlled to make sure people aren't left behind and our natural resources are ruined." – Online survey participant

"Community gardens in every town and village to promote sustainable living" – Online survey participant

"Managing our natural resources sustainably is central to our wellbeing because we cannot live without access to clean air, the plants we eat, the water we drink, resources to heat our homes and provide us with shelter… Maintaining soil quality, reducing erosion, protecting water catchments and water quality are all examples of what is required to manage our resources sustainably, and thus, positively impact our wellbeing." – Online survey participant

Council's work

Legislative responsibilities include:

- Plan actions to address identified local community needs and priorities, using a strategic plan and by working with others. Councils should make decisions in a way that is transparent, recognising diverse local needs and considering social justice principles of equity, access, participation and rights (*Local Government Act 1993*).
- Carry out land-use planning in a way that promotes the social and economic welfare of the community by the proper management, development and conservation of the State's natural and other resources (*Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*). This includes acting as the determining authority for relevant development applications and identifying the basis for the land-use planning strategy and planning priorities for the Shoalhaven.
- Prepare and implement Coastal Management Programs (to replace the previous Shoalhaven Coastal Zone Management Plan) to manage the use and development of the coastal environment in an ecologically sustainable way, for the social, cultural and economic well-being of the people of New South Wales (*Coastal Management Act 2016*).
- Develop and implement floodplain risk management plans in accordance with NSW Government's Flood Prone Land Policy and Floodplain Development Manual, including preparation of flood studies.
- Plan for and manage public land as the appointed Crown land manager under the *Crown Land Management Act 2016*, including having a Plan of Management for land classified as 'natural area' or 'reserve'.
- Ensure compliance with *Local Government Act 1993* requirements for onsite sewage management systems, including operational approval and inspections.
- Monitor environmental pollution and ensure compliance with *Protection of the Environment Operations Act 1997* including water quality, air quality, noise pollution and waste management.

Other current and planned work includes:

- Provide water and wastewater services including:
  - Manage collection, treatment and distribution of water using 3 large storage dams, 38 reservoirs, 26 pumping stations, 4 water treatment plants, 1,500km of water mains and a water sharing agreement with Water NSW.
  - Manage the collection, treatment and disposal of wastewater safely back into the environment using 13 EPA-licensed wastewater treatment plants and by regulating liquid trade waste and managing the 'REMS' reclaimed water recycling scheme.
  - Use water and carry out of activities near water sources in a way that protects water sources, water quality, features of Aboriginal significance, habitats, animals and plants.
  - Provide water conservation education and incentive programs, including water treatment plant tours, rainwater tank rebates and the TAPSTAR program in primary schools.
- Support volunteers to participate in programs to restore and rehabilitate natural environments, including Bush care and Coastcare groups and Clean Up Australia Day.
- Provide waste management services (including green waste and household bulky waste vouchers) and provide education programs, including waste facility tours.
- Provide cemetery and cremation services.
- Provide strategic guidance for land use development across the region, guided by *Shoalhaven 2040 – Our Strategic Land-use Planning Statement*.

Future directions

Opportunities for future work require investigation of resourcing requirements. Opportunities that could be considered include:

- Explore opportunities to work with or support community partners to:
  - Deliver education initiatives such as sustainable farm tours and information resources (eg. guide to encouraging biodiversity, local sustainable businesses).
  - Improve capacity of community groups to access grants and information for delivering sustainability initiatives.
  - Improve capacity of local businesses to deliver services in an environmentally sustainable way (eg single-use plastic free villages).
  - Grow trees in schools or community gardens, for planting in the local community to improve canopy cover in urban settings.
  - Develop partnerships to improve understanding and use of Aboriginal cultural burning practices.
  - Install electric vehicle chargers in town centres using programs such as NSW Government Energy Saver electric vehicle charging grants.
- Explore opportunities to demonstrate leadership as a manager of public space that:
  - Demonstrates good practice use of sustainable control measures for noxious species.
- Explore resourcing opportunities to:
  - Expand water conservation education and incentive programs, such as expanding water-wise education programs into high schools and improving understanding of rainwater tank rebate program and other incentive programs.
  - Expand capacity of REMS water recycling scheme.
  - Expand programs to make water infrastructure more resilient to disasters and climate change impacts, considering learning from bushfires and other natural disasters.
- Advocate for state and federal government policies and programs to improve protection of natural resources like Ramsar wetlands and water resources, reflecting our experience of natural disasters.
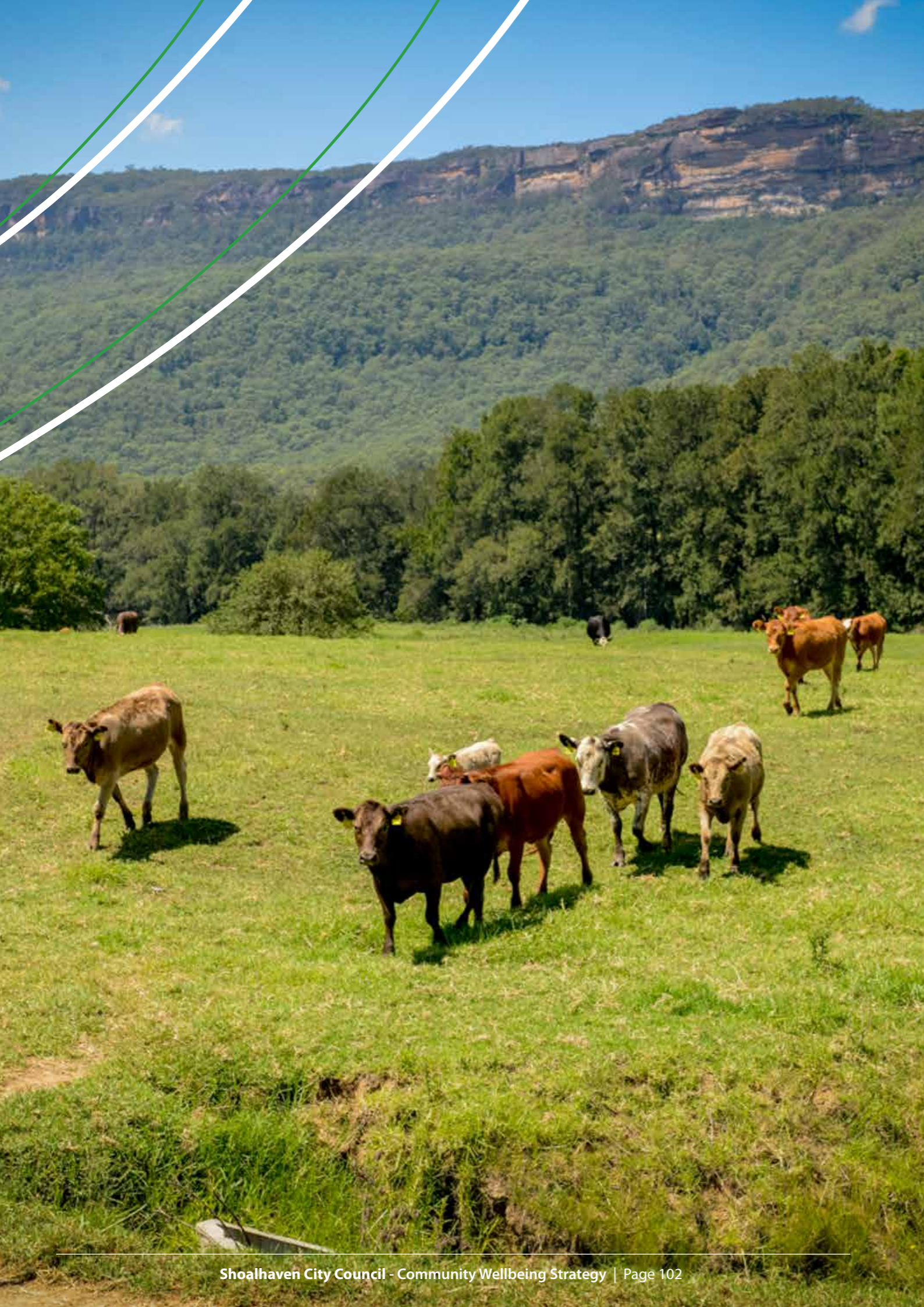
Stakeholders who play a role in creating this Domain:

- People in the community being committed to making environmentally sustainable choices for their household.
- Non-profit organisations, community groups and education institutions promoting and providing environmental sustainability initiatives, such as Landcare and Bushcare groups and Re-Power Shoalhaven.
- Local Aboriginal community members and Aboriginal Land Councils working to protect natural resources which are culturally important to their community, including through sharing their knowledge of sustainable management of natural resources (through the use of cultural burning, etc).
- Local businesses being committed to making environmentally sustainable choices and providing locally-grown or locally-produced products.
- Suppliers of natural resource products offering sustainable options, including energy suppliers.
- Water NSW have a water-sharing agreement with Council.
- Office of Local Government providing advice on Plans of Management for community lands.
- NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service protect and maintain natural resources in our National Parks.
- Natural Resources Commission identifies strategic priorities for the NSW government to manage our natural resources for the benefit of all of NSW.
- NSW Rural Fire Services carry out hazard reduction strategies, including to mitigate the risk of damage to natural environment from fire.
- NSW DPE (NSW Crown Land) holds Crown land and appoints Council as the Crown Land Manager
- NSW Farmers Association represent farmers across the state and advocates for a profitable and sustainable NSW farming sector.
- Federal and NSW State Government agencies and land-use planning authorities that support Council to carry out land-use planning in a way that promotes the social and economic welfare of the community, including NSW Department of Planning and Environment, Environment and Heritage Group, Marine Estate Management, NSW Movement and Place Community of Practice and Government Architect NSW.
- NSW Government providing a legislative framework and regulatory oversight of how our natural resources are managed, and approvals/licenses are granted for the protection of the environment and the community, including through NSW Department of Primary Industry (DPI), NSW Crown Land and the Environment Protection Authority. NSW DPI (which includes NSW DPI - Fisheries and NSW DPI - Marine Parks) deliver programs to grow the agriculture, fisheries and forestry sectors, and enforce regulations including related biosecurity and recreational fishing.

6.2
Sustainable access to natural environments

People can enjoy our natural environment in a way that is sustainable for future generations (Natural environments are sustainably managed so people will have access in the future).

This domain is about people being able to access our natural environments to spend time in nature and enjoy recreational activities. Boating and fishing on our waterways, walking through bushland, enjoying our beaches and picnicking in our parks are all ways that we enjoy access to our natural environments. Spending time in this way can reduce stress and increase feelings of emotional wellbeing, as well as contributing to our physical wellbeing. The provision of well-managed and approved pet-friendly natural sites supports recreational activities like dog-walking and horse-riding to happen in a way that manages the impact on our natural environments. It is widely understood that time with pets can have similar benefits to spending time in nature, and appropriate policies and controls allows us to combine these two wellbeing benefits without negatively impacting the environment.

Access to these natural places is highly valued by people that live in and visit the region, as well as tourism businesses which are a critical part of our local economy on the south coast. There is a need to balance the community's desires and expectations for access with the need to protect and restore our natural environments. Our access to natural spaces to benefit our wellbeing must not compromise the need to protect our natural environments, and the diverse land and water resources within them, that sustainably support industries like agriculture, tourism, fisheries and forestry. In vast national and marine parks, people can completely immerse themselves in nature and enjoy the wellbeing benefits – this distance from urban and built-up environments is highly valued by the community when enjoying the expanses of natural environment in the Shoalhaven.

Access to our national and marine parks, reserves, waterways and beaches is important for the traditional custodians of the Shoalhaven region because of the cultural significance of these places to local Aboriginal people. The long and deep connection that the traditional custodians have means that access to natural environments can include being able to hunt, fish, gather and participate in cultural activities on Country, as well as be involved in the management of national parks, state conservation areas and wilderness reserves. Genuine consultation with traditional custodians is needed to ensure community access to natural areas is culturally appropriate. When culturally-sensitive sites are unsuitable for public access, indirect access and community education can be facilitated by cultural talks, signage and visitor centres. This provides opportunities to improve community understanding (including businesses like tour operators, and government), whilst protecting Country and nurturing connection to place and wellbeing.

The many walkways and bike paths that give us physical access to natural sites also help to protect the sensitive environments around them to ensure long term sustainable use. Infrastructure to get there is needed too – the establishment and maintenance of road networks, public transport, bridges, interpretative signage, amenities blocks and car parks are all necessary to support access. We improve access for everyone when we consider additional mobility needs by providing pathways, parking and amenities that are suitable for people with a disability, parents with prams and people using mobility aids.

NSW State Forests (managed by Forestry Corporation of NSW), National Parks (managed by National Parks and Wildlife Service) and Crown lands (some of which are managed by Council as the appointed Crown Land Manager) are important natural environments in the Shoalhaven. Council also manages other important natural environments including beaches, parks and reserves. For each of these natural environments, the land manager is responsible for the management strategy and providing paths, amenities and accessibility plans. When managers of assets work co-operatively, the community benefits with more sustainable access to natural environments. For example, well-integrated interfaces between NSW government managed land and Council-managed reserves could reduce damage of the road reserve from informal parking or preserve wildlife corridors (terrestrial and aquatic). Another example would be improved access to key sites through better public transport services and facilities (for more information on transport connections, see Foundation 5).

Infrastructure offers the opportunity, but sustainability of access to our natural environments relies on people in the community choosing to use these places in a sustainable way, including residents, visitors and businesses. Awareness-raising initiatives can help the community understand the value of natural environments and the impacts of their behaviour. Community volunteers in programs like Landcare, Bushcare and Coastcare also play an important role in protecting and restoring our natural environments to ensure they will be there for future generations, and also encourage community education, participation and ownership. Government, particularly at state and national levels, also use legislation and regulation to manage access to our natural areas in a sustainable manner. Both state and local governments play a role in developing and implementing land-use planning controls, which are used to manage residential, agricultural and industrial development and its proximity to, and impact on, our important natural environments, as a way of balancing development and environmental conservation outcomes.

What the community told us

Eighty-nine percent of survey respondents spend time in nature several times a month and 80 percent acknowledge that they were able to easily walk to a park or natural areas. To create greater access to the natural environment and natural assets in the region, community workshop and survey participants highlighted the need for pathways and connections within these landscapes and parks to be accessible for people of all ages and abilities.

Opportunities highlighted by engagement participants included expanding the network of walking trails and access paths in key environmental sites, and expanding the provision of facilities and amenities around key natural assets, with a focus on facilitating social gathering and coming together. In addition, the need for better public transport connectivity between suburbs and areas of natural beauty was a common recommendation, within the broader desire to see better transport linkages in the region. Many respondents noted the need for more off-leash dog areas amongst the natural landscape. This point was a key priority for engagement participants over the age of 65.

"The Shoalhaven is all about nature and outdoor living. We try to spend as much time outdoors with our young kids, so having access to community facilities, having recreation facilities is important" – Online survey participant

"We live in a beautiful place and making use of our natural resources such as our beaches, nature reserves etc is great for our physical and mental wellbeing" – Online survey participant

"Connection to Country – vital for environment and acknowledges traditional custodians and their knowledge " – Online survey participant

"The over-use of these coastal areas is of increasing concern. There is a need for greater ongoing attention to access by providing and maintaining access to beaches, reserves, footpaths and toilet facilities that are high quality, reduce damage to the environment but designed to blend appropriately." – Online survey participant

Council's work

Legislative responsibilities include:

- Plan actions to address identified local community needs and priorities, using a strategic plan and by working with others. Councils should make decisions in a way that is transparent, recognising diverse local needs and considering social justice principles of equity, access, participation and rights (*Local Government Act 1993*).

- Carry out land-use planning in a way that promotes the social and economic welfare of the community by the proper management, development and conservation of the State's natural and other resources (*Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*). This includes acting as the determining authority for relevant development applications and identifying the basis for the land-use planning strategy and planning priorities for the Shoalhaven.

- Prepare and implement Coastal Management Programs (to replace the previous Shoalhaven Coastal Zone Management Plan) to manage the use and development of the coastal environment in an ecologically sustainable way, for the social, cultural and economic well-being of the people of New South Wales (*Coastal Management Act 2016*).

- Develop and implement floodplain risk management plans in accordance with NSW Government's Flood Prone Land Policy and Floodplain Development Manual, including preparation of flood studies.

- Plan for and manage public land as the appointed Crown land manager under the *Crown Land Management Act 2016*, including having a Plan of Management for land classified as 'natural area' or 'reserve'.

- Act as the local authority in carrying out the provisions of the *Companion Animals Act 1998* which provides for the effective and responsible management of companion animals, including to protect native birds and animals. In addition, this requires Council to promote awareness of the responsibilities of dog and cat owners, including penalties for not complying.

- Monitor environmental pollution and ensure compliance with *Protection of the Environment Operations Act 1997* including water quality, air quality, noise pollution and waste management. This includes providing community health safety advice and warnings, such as advice to avoid swimming in natural environments after floods.

Other current and planned work includes:

- Manage areas of natural environment to protect and conserve them whilst facilitating community access and use. This includes providing infrastructure such as tracks and paths (including accessibility ramps), bridges, carparking and amenities, and local roads that facilitate access to:
  - Beaches and coastal zone, guided by plans including 13 Coastal Management Programs and the Strategic Direction for Nowra Riverfront Precinct, and using the Shoalhaven Development Control Plan.
  - Crown lands, guided by Plans of Management.
  - Assessment of coastal environments after weather events to mitigate further damage from community use of damaged access points.

- Provide strategic guidance for land use development across the region, guided by *Shoalhaven 2040 – Our Strategic Land-use Planning Statement*.

- Promote responsible access to natural environments, for example 'Leave only footprints' and 'Take three for the sea' campaigns.

Future directions

Opportunities for future work require investigation of resourcing requirements. Opportunities that could be considered include:

- Explore opportunities to work with or support community partners to:
  - Build capacity of tourism operators to deliver services in an environmentally sustainable way. This could include incentives or certification programs for businesses, or initiatives to help visitors understand and appreciate natural environments, resources and systems.
  - Understand how young people wish to come together in open spaces and in the natural environment.
  - Work with Aboriginal community partners to improve the community's understanding about access to culturally-sensitive natural environments and protection of natural environments which are culturally important).

- Explore resourcing opportunities to:
  - Improve access to existing walking trails through improved signage and promotion, which could include an online information resource.
  - Expand the network of walking trails and access paths at key environmental sites, with special consideration of accessibility for all, subject to approvals and further investigation and ensuring a balance between conservation and accessibility.
  - Expand environmental awareness programs to engage young people.

- Explore opportunities to adapt processes and policies to better support:
  - Co-location of community facilities and amenities with key natural assets.
  - Access to natural environments that considers adaption to climate change and observed community behaviours (such as access after weather events and areas where litter like fishing line is frequently discarded). Inclusive access should consider the needs of diverse people, including all disabilities and CALD communities. Inclusive access could include information to help people understand natural hazards present in natural environments.

Key partners

Stakeholders who play a role in creating this Domain:

- People in the community being committed to using natural environments in an environmentally sustainable way
- Non-profit organisations and community groups helping restore and protect natural environments, such as Landcare and Bushcare groups
- Local Aboriginal community members and Aboriginal Land Councils providing advice on appropriate access to culturally-sensitive natural environments and helping to protect natural environments which are culturally important to their community, including through sharing their knowledge of sustainable management of natural environments (through the use of cultural burning, etc)
- Local businesses being committed to using natural environments in an environmentally sustainable way, such as tour operators on our waterways
- Office of Local Government providing advice on Plans of Management for community lands
- NSW DPE (NSW Crown Land) holds Crown land and appoints Council as the Crown Land Manager
- Forestry Corporation of NSW manage State forests in NSW, including permits for collection of firewood
- NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service manages National Parks
- Parks Australia works in partnership with Wreck Bay Aboriginal Community to manage Booderee National Park, and manages Jervis Bay Marine Park
- Natural Resources Commission identifies strategic priorities for the NSW government to manage our natural resources for the benefit of all of NSW
- Federal and NSW State Government agencies and land-use planning authorities that support Council to carry out land-use planning in a way that promotes the social and economic welfare of the community, including NSW Department of Planning and Environment, Environment and Heritage Group, Marine Estate Management, NSW Movement and Place Community of Practice and Government Architect NSW.
- NSW Government providing a legislative framework and regulatory oversight, through the Environment Protection Authority, of how our natural resources are managed.
- NSW Government providing a legislative framework and regulatory oversight of how our natural resources are managed, and approvals/licenses are granted for the protection of the environment and the community, including through NSW Department of Primary Industry (DPI), NSW Crown Land and the Environment Protection Authority. NSW DPI (which includes NSW DPI - Fisheries and NSW DPI - Marine Parks) deliver programs to grow the agriculture, fisheries and forestry sectors, and enforce regulations including related biosecurity and recreational fishing.

6.3
Sustainable built environment

People are supported to understand sustainable building and to build sustainably.

The built environment touches on all aspects of our lives, including the buildings we live in and the buildings we use for leisure, like halls, libraries and sports centres. The distribution systems that provide us with water, electricity and transport (roads, bridges and public transport) are all part of our built environment. These structures and networks provide us with suitable spaces for living, working and recreation. Creating and maintaining all these spaces and systems requires the use of natural resources on a very large scale and we need to ensure that we manage them in a way that is environmentally sustainable. We spend significant amounts of our time in these built environments and our experiences using them can contribute to our social connections, relationships, physical health, work productivity, community cohesion and even crime rates.   Factors within the indoor built environment that we may rarely consider but that impact our wellbeing, include air quality, light, temperature comfort, access to and quality of the natural environment.

Technological advances and our understanding of the natural resources that we have available to use for our built environment have changed over time. As a result, there are many opportunities for the private sector and all levels of government to collectively develop programs, design incentives and implement policies so people know what to do to achieve sustainable built environments. With consumers becoming more environmentally conscious and wanting more from their homes and urban environments, organisations such as the Housing Industry Association (HIA) have developed HIA GreenSmart® - Australia's first sustainable building program designed for the residential building industry.[27] It is tailored to support builders in getting their green building credentials, so they are then able to support their customers with sustainable building design and implementation.

Programs such as Your Home, an initiative of the Federal Government, is an independent guide to designing, building or renovating homes to ensure they are energy efficient, comfortable, affordable and adaptable for the future. When people have access to these programs and thus, building a sustainable home, the wellbeing of the occupants can benefit from the use of energy-efficient products and environmentally durable materials for long-term lifestyle and health benefits. The NSW Department of Fair Trading manages a building sustainability index so residents can learn how to ensure a newly built home uses less water and energy. Such online tools make access to this information easily and readily available.

The Australian Sustainable Built Environment Council (ASBEC) works to understand the long-term productivity, liveability and sustainability of our cities, urban communities, and their infrastructure.[28] Their advocacy for improving and enforcing energy efficiency requirements in the Building Code will support communities to improve the sustainability of our built environment.   It is necessary for this information to be available at the community level when people are at the early stages of their decision making around building a new home. Local councils, providers of sustainable building products, architects and builders are all well placed to develop programs with support from organisations such as the ASBEC so that this information can be accessible at a local level.

As one the largest owners and planners of the built environment in the Shoalhaven, Council can play a leadership role by demonstrating good practice in environmentally sustainable building planning, construction, retrofitting and maintenance. As real-life examples that helps us see what is achievable, sustainable Council buildings are a valuable resources for tours and talks, whether aimed at commercial and government developers or primary school students and their home-building parents. Community or cultural facilities with sustainable designs or using sustainable materials are also an ideal venue to hold sustainability workshops and environmental education programs that build community awareness and motivation for environmental stewardship.

What the community told us

The importance of the natural environment to the wellbeing of Shoalhaven residents is a theme throughout the entire engagement. This was a top three theme for Local Stakeholders and Service Providers, the Youth Workshop, Seniors Workshop and the Online Survey. Comments captured in the Online Survey highlight that the priority given to climate change action is directly related to the importance that the community place on being able to access pristine natural environments. Almost 80% of Youth Workshop participants acknowledged that they worry deeply about climate change, having a profound impact on their mental health.

Survey participants identified that financial stress and concerns about environmental degradation (due to development in the area and global warming) were issues causing them stress. Whilst the community didn't raise sustainable built environments as an issue, improving the sustainability of the built environment is a vital component of reducing the impact that people have on the environment. Environmentally sustainable homes can incorporate thermally efficient designs and make use of energy-saving features, which also reduces the ongoing costs of living in the home.

"Design and develop an environmentally sustainable community" – Online survey participant

"I believe well-designed housing that can adapt to both the environment and variable needs of residents into the future is vital in all housing considerations" – Online survey participant

"Sustainable living needs to be a priority, this does not mean new housing estates but more so adaptive living or multiple housing on single existing blocks." – Online survey participant

Council's work

Legislative responsibilities include:

- Plan actions to address identified local community needs and priorities, using a strategic plan and by working with others. Councils should make decisions in a way that is transparent, recognising diverse local needs and considering social justice principles of equity, access, participation and rights (*Local Government Act 1993*).
- Carry out land-use planning in a way that promotes the social and economic welfare of the community by the proper management, development and conservation of the State's natural and other resources (*Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*). This includes acting as the determining authority for relevant development applications and identifying the basis for the land-use planning strategy and planning priorities for the Shoalhaven.
- Prepare and implement Coastal Management Programs (to replace the previous Shoalhaven Coastal Zone Management Plan) to manage the use and development of the coastal environment in an ecologically sustainable way, for the social, cultural and economic well-being of the people of New South Wales (*Coastal Management Act 2016*).
- Ensure compliance with *Local Government Act 1993* requirements for onsite sewage management system, including operational approval and inspections.

Other current and planned work includes:

- Provide strategic guidance for land use development across the region, guided by *Shoalhaven 2040 – Our Strategic Land-use Planning Statement*.
- Provide a mapping tool that helps residents understand the solar access of their home and potential for solar energy systems.
- Through the FORTIS House project, help residents save time and money by providing free buildings designs for highly resilient, sustainable, affordable and adaptable homes. This project is delivered in partnership with the Bushfire Building Council of Australia and NRMA Insurance.

Future directions

Opportunities for future work require investigation of resourcing requirements. Opportunities that could be considered include:

- Explore opportunities to work with or support community partners to:
  - Support the community to understand and implement sustainable building design and retro-fitting techniques such as light-coloured surfaces, rooftop solar, water sensitive urban design, compact homes, canopy cover and street trees. This could include incentive programs for residents and businesses or education initiatives like tours of sustainable homes and farms.

Good practice examples that could inform Council's future work:

- Penrith City Council's urban heat research learnings in implementing projects in disadvantaged communities and working through community objection and street tree projects provide.
- University of Wollongong's Sustainability Street and Illawarra Flame demonstration home that shows how to retrofit a 'fibro' home into a sustainable 21st-century net-zero energy home.

Key partners

Stakeholders who play a role in creating this Domain:

- People in the community being committed to building and renovating in an in environmentally sustainable way.
- Non-profit organisations and community groups supporting people to understand sustainable building and build sustainably.
- Local businesses being committed to and offering sustainable building products and services.
- Federal and NSW State Government agencies and land-use planning authorities that support Council to carry out land-use planning in a way that promotes the social and economic welfare of the community, including NSW Department of Planning and Environment, Environment and Heritage Group, Marine Estate Management, NSW Movement and Place Community of Practice and Government Architect NSW.
- NSW Government providing a legislative framework and regulatory oversight of how our natural resources are managed when we build.

Foundation

7

Housing that meets the community's needs

Access to secure and affordable housing that meets our households' needs

7.1
Housing security for people of all income levels and tenure types

People can live without housing stress; People can access social and Affordable dwellings.

Housing is the basis of stability and security for an individual or family – a place to live in peace, security and dignity. Access to adequate housing is recognised as a human right because it meets our fundamental need for shelter and safety. Housing security is when people live in housing that is stable, safe and adequate. Conversely, housing insecurity means people experience uncertainty from lack of control over their housing or are vulnerable to being forced to move. Housing insecurity is linked to higher levels of insecurity in other aspects of our life, including financial, employment, health, self-identity, family and relationship insecurity[29].

Security of occupancy is an important aspect of housing security, with tenure security being a central component of the right to adequate housing. Security of occupancy means that people feel a sense of certainty that they can remain in their home for as long as they wish. For renters, this is impacted by their rights in relation to the length of their lease, required notice periods, and ending of the lease.

Housing affordability is a key factor in housing security. A lack of affordable housing can lead to overcrowded housing and people living in areas that have poor access to essential services, employment opportunities and other supports. This makes it harder for people to participate in life – to get and keep jobs, to get to education and training, to access health services, healthy food, parks and social support networks.

Housing stress happens when housing costs are not affordable for the household's income. Housing stress is most common in households that are renting or have a mortgage, but can also occur for homes owned outright if income is lower than the cost of upkeep. Most definitions of housing stress consider that more than 30% of pre-tax income is unaffordable for low-income households. However, this does not consider that inadequate housing may cost more to heat, or involve higher transport costs because it is poorly located.

Affordability of housing for purchase and rental is related to the supply of and demand for housing in an area. The housing market is influenced by complex and inter-related supply and demand factors including:

- land-use zoning and development approval (provided by state and local government, as well as market provision by town planning consultants and private certifiers)
- development industry profitability and appetite, and supply of construction services (provided by the market)
- other market factors including government subsidies and incentive programs (NSW government), and cost/availability of financial services products (lending provided by the market)Affordable Rental Housing is for people on very low to moderate incomes so they

can afford to pay rent while meeting other living costs. It is poorly supplied by the market without government intervention, and a number of initiatives by the NSW government to encourage the market have not seen significant improvements in supply. The provision of Affordable Rental Housing is complex – the costs for establishment are high, there is often community objection, and ongoing management needs to be planned. However, working with social housing providers can help by managing Affordable Rental Housing, and this improves the viability of their social housing provision. This is vital as the current supply of social housing is inadequate to meet community needs.

What the community told us

The results of the online survey uncovered the financial stress that is crippling many members of the Shoalhaven community. Participants could not overstate the importance that housing security placed on personal wellbeing. Both survey and workshop participants identified the perceived increase in the number of holiday homes as one cause of the issue, forcing residents into unsuitable homes and causing financial stress. While not ignorant of the financial benefits of increased tourism in the region, many shared stories of households struggling due to the unaffordable rental market in the region: families living in separate house, workers travelling long distances from home, and elderly people living in unsuitable housing.

For some, this is impacting their health as they forgo professional medical assistance to make rental and mortgage payments. Those particularly struggling to find or afford suitable dwellings included: young parents trying to live near schools, older residents with special access requirements, people needing good public transport, and pet-owners who considered their companion animals as essential for maintaining their mental health. It was highlighted that the Shoalhaven's greatest asset, its natural environment and coastal lifestyle, no longer appeals to young people who feel they will be unable to afford housing here.

The community suggested that Council could do more to provide affordable housing, advocate for stronger state and federal taxation on investment properties, address the concerns of young people and work with local social housing providers to better understand the key risks and needs of vulnerable community members.

"Affordable housing has become completely inaccessible. I myself am paying almost half of my weekly wage to keep a roof over my family's heads, while employment opportunities are few, rental prices continue to increase and security of keeping that rental has become very stressful for a lot of families" – Online survey participant

"We feel very insecure as renters as there are so few rental properties vs. holiday rentals around. Rising house prices and demand from investors mean it is difficult to buy and feel secure that we can stay in the area." – Online survey participant

"There is a housing crisis in the Shoalhaven. So many people homeless and couch surfing who don't have the stability of their own home. The prices of homes in the Shoalhaven have dramatically risen along with rents which is pricing people out." – Online survey participant

"Affordable housing options increase social cohesion. People on lower incomes will be able to remain in their local neighbourhoods. Affordable housing for the elderly, people starting their first jobs, socially disadvantaged peopled, single people etc" – Online survey participant

Council's work

Legislative responsibilities include:

- Plan actions to address identified local community needs and priorities, using a strategic plan and by working with others. Councils should make decisions in a way that is transparent, recognising diverse local needs and considering social justice principles of equity, access, participation and rights (*Local Government Act 1993*).
- Carry out land-use planning in a way that promotes the social and economic welfare of the community by the proper management, development and conservation of the State's natural and other resources (*Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*). This includes acting as the determining authority for relevant development applications and identifying the basis for the land-use planning strategy and planning priorities for the Shoalhaven.
- Ensure compliance with *Local Government Act 1993* requirements and associated regulations for caravan parks and manufactured home estates, including for operational approval, fire safety, amenities, waste and upkeep.

Other current and planned work includes:

- Provide strategic guidance for land use development across the region, guided by *Shoalhaven 2040 – Our Strategic Land-use Planning Statement*.
- Deliver actions identified in the *Shoalhaven Affordable Housing Strategy 2018* to improve access to affordable housing in the Shoalhaven, including working with Southern Cross Housing to deliver the Coomea St project.
- Co-ordinate regular meetings between Council staff and local specialised homelessness services, to support vulnerable people who present at Council facilities to link with housing services.
- Convene the Homelessness Taskforce, a strategic advisory committee to advocate for and inform Council decisions. It is made up of all levels of government, community organisations and service providers, and community members including people with lived experience of homelessness. The Taskforce also monitors and reviews delivery of the Homelessness Community Strategic Plan through a range of collaborative actions that will be implemented by the homelessness and housing sector.
- Through the FORTIS House project, help residents save time and money by providing free buildings designs for highly resilient, sustainable, affordable and adaptable homes. This project is delivered in partnership with the Bushfire Building Council of Australia and NRMA Insurance.

Future directions

Opportunities for future work require investigation of resourcing requirements. Opportunities that could be considered include:

- Explore opportunities to work with or support community partners to:
  - Support the community to understand the planning framework, how they can participate in planning processes, and how to they can contribute to improved community outcomes related to housing security.
  - Understand the housing needs of vulnerable community members.
- Advocate for state and federal policies and programs to improve housing security.

Key partners

Stakeholders who play a role in creating this Domain:

- People in the community: owners of investment properties who support tenants to experience housing security.
- Community housing providers including Southern Cross Community Housing plan, provide and manage social housing and Affordable housing.
- Local suppliers of construction services, property developers and private certifiers provide supply of new housing.
- Developers of local property (whether owners of one investment property or large portfolio) choosing to provide diverse and affordable housing types.
- Home loan providers provide financial products that people use to purchase homes.
- Shoalcoast Community Legal Centre offers community education and free legal advice to help people understand their legal rights and responsibilities, including in relation to tenancy matters like rental repairs, eviction and arrears.
- Housing NSW provides social and affordable housing using Land and Housing Corporation property.
- National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation provides long-term and low-cost finance, and capability building assistance, to registered community housing providers to support the provision of more social and affordable housing.
- Federal and NSW State Government agencies and land-use planning authorities that support Council to carry out land-use planning in a way that promotes the social and economic welfare of the community, including NSW Department of Planning and Environment.
- NSW government provides subsidies and incentive programs for home-buyers and renters.
- Department of Defence provides housing for their staff.

7.2
Housing for people with access and support needs

People can access adaptable and accessible dwellings;
People can live in supported accommodation.

Some people in our community have additional needs for support and accessibility. Our needs change over time and these additional needs can be a result of ageing or physical disabilities, whether short or long-term. Our human right to access to adequate housing must consider our access and support needs – housing is inadequate if people are unable to get out of their bedroom or house to access basic living requirements. With an ageing population and a high proportion of older people in the Shoalhaven, increased demand is expected in the future for housing for people with increased access and support needs.

Accessible housing is any housing that includes features that enable use by people either with a disability or transitioning through life stages. Although the focus of many accessibility features is on mobility disabilities, accessible housing should also consider the needs of people with other types of disability. Adaptable housing is housing that can be easily modified to become accessible in the future. Whilst improved housing can meet our access needs within our dwelling, it is important that accessible housing facilitates our participation in the community as well, by being well-located and connected to

community places and services. Accessible and adaptable housing is poorly provided by the market without government intervention. Whilst Council can promote the construction of accessible and adaptable housing with affirmative emphasis in the Development Control Plan, housing developers and individual home-owners often provide the minimum required as accessibility features can increase construction costs.

For people with high support needs, such as the frail aged or people with more severe disabilities, supported accommodation has trained staff to provide varying levels of assistance with daily living. Supported accommodation for younger people with disabilities is needed so that they are not housed inappropriately in an aged care setting. Supported accommodation is provided by aged care providers and disability service providers, which are privatised sectors providing services to recipients of government-funded support packages. There is poor community understanding of this complicated system and private sector market, with significant opportunities to improve community understanding with education initiatives and information resources.

What the community told us

Some older participants in the Community Wellbeing survey highlighted concerns about aged care and home support as one of the biggest issues causing them stress, particularly when supported living was not available in the local village they live in and where they have built support networks. Concerns about aged care and home support related to availability, affordability, and suitability to meet their needs.

A community survey was completed for the development of the Disability Inclusion Action Plan 2022-26 (DIAP), targeted to reach people with a disability, their families and carers, and the service providers and businesses that support them. Accessible and affordable housing in the area was an issue for many individuals surveyed. Many residents were concerned about the increasing cost of rent and property prices, and the lack of accessible building design was another concern. 62% of the respondents said it was difficult to find appropriate and affordable housing in the Shoalhaven, stating that more social housing is needed

"Accessible, adaptable housing - I feel this is important with the ageing community it provides the ability to live independently longer. Also important to include for all people with low-mobility." – Online survey participant

"There is a huge need to for affordable, accessible and adaptable housing" – Online survey participant

Council's work

Legislative responsibilities include:

- Plan actions to address identified local community needs and priorities, using a strategic plan and by working with others. Councils should make decisions in a way that is transparent, recognising diverse local needs and considering social justice principles of equity, access, participation and rights (*Local Government Act 1993*).
- Carry out land-use planning in a way that promotes the social and economic welfare of the community by the proper management, development and conservation of the State's natural and other resources (*Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*). This includes acting as the determining authority for relevant development applications and identifying the basis for the land-use planning strategy and planning priorities for the Shoalhaven.

Other current and planned work includes:

- Provide strategic guidance for land use development across the region, guided by *Shoalhaven 2040 – Our Strategic Land-use Planning Statement*.

Future directions

Opportunities for future work require investigation of resourcing requirements. Opportunities that could be considered include:

- Explore opportunities to work with or support community partners to:
  - Support the community to understand the planning framework, how they can participate in planning processes, and how to they can contribute to improved community outcomes related to accessible and adaptable housing.

Good practice examples that could inform Council's future work:

- University of Wollongong's Desert Rose demonstration home is designed to show that a dwelling can be architecturally inspiring and cater to the changing needs of occupants as they age, specifically considering design for dementia.

Key partners

Stakeholders who play a role in creating this Domain:

- Community housing providers and Housing NSW (with Land and Housing Corporation) plan, provide and manage social housing and Affordable housing that includes accessible and adaptable housing.
- Providers of supported accommodation including aged care providers and disability service providers.
- Developers of local property (whether home-owners building or developers of large portfolios) choosing to build accessible and adaptable housing.
- Local suppliers of design, architecture and construction services needed to build accessible and adaptable housing.
- Federal and NSW State Government agencies and land-use planning authorities that support Council to carry out land-use planning in a way that promotes the social and economic welfare of the community, including NSW Department of Planning and Environment and Government Architect NSW.
- Australian Building Codes Board maintains the National Construction Code of Australia (previously called the Building Code of Australia), a national set of technical requirements for the design, construction and performance of buildings and other structures throughout Australia. The NCC includes requirements related to access for people with a disability.

7.3
Housing for residents

People can live where resident communities live
(the majority of housing is available for residents)

In Foundation 1, we considered the importance of Community life:

"Participation in local activities is vital for forming social connections that develop a sense of belonging and connection to the community. When people come together as a community, they feel community pride and develop community identity. This contributes to a vibrant community life that supports individual wellbeing and resilience."

For people to form social connections and come together as a community, they need to live in communities where a stable community of residents lives. Visitors can bring vibrancy and economic activity to a place, but residents are needed to make that place a community. A requirement for 'community' is people living there, which means the majority of housing is available for residents rather than being vacant or used for short-term occupation. Regular visitors, who return to the same towns and villages, can be part of a community but perform a different role from stable resident communities. The choice of whether a dwelling is used for resident housing or not is made by the property-owner.

For over 50 years, coastal towns in the Shoalhaven have been destinations for visitors. Over 30% of visitors give their reason for coming to the Shoalhaven as visiting family and friends, and there are many more who seasonally come to the same towns and villages for family holidays. Many holiday homes are used for private use only, rather than holiday letting. Proximity to the major population centres of Sydney and Canberra, improved by upgrades to road networks, has made living in the Shoalhaven and working in cities more accessible than ever before. This increased demand for coastal living, heightened during COVID, has seen significant

increases to housing purchase and rental prices. During this time, accommodation prices and supply have stayed reasonably the same. Whilst holiday letting is perceived to be having a significant impact on availability of housing for residents, the holiday letting data indicates that the situation is more complex. 2021 Census data shows 12,791 unoccupied dwellings in the Shoalhaven, a decrease of 661 dwellings from 2016. However, current holiday accommodation data shows only 4,394 properties in the Shoalhaven listed for accommodation, including hotels, motels, bed & breakfasts, and short term holiday letting.

In 2020, NSW Fair Trading introduced a new code of conduct to regulate short-term rental accommodation platforms, hosts, management agents and guests. The code is a move towards greater regulation of this industry and requires short-term rental accommodation to be registered with NSW Department of Planning and Environment. While the code doesn't prevent housing being used for short-term rental accommodation, it puts the NSW Government in a better position to implement stricter regulations if they are needed in the future.

In addition to housing being available for residents to live in, the quality and diversity of housing options within an area allow households to live in that community throughout their lives, choosing from a range of different housing types and arrangements based on their needs and resources as they change over time. If people's housing needs change and their community's housing options don't meet their new needs, they may have to move out of an area they feel established in or adopt unsatisfactory accommodation arrangements. This can have a significant impact on the health and wellbeing of

individuals and families as their relationships and social supports are affected. NSW Government and Council can play a role in encouraging housing diversity by developing land-use controls that allow diverse housing types. However, housing developers and individual home-owners often deliver housing that maximises profitability or affordability, rather than providing diverse housing.

What the community told us

Both survey and workshop participants identified the high number of holiday home purchases as a perceived root cause of financial stress crippling many members of the community, as those outside of the Shoalhaven are affecting affordability by purchasing homes to relocate to regional areas from cities or only making them available for short term rental. However, data on short term rental stocks does not show significant growth, indicating that housing supply situation is more complex. While participants acknowledge the benefits of tourism in the region, there is a general lack of understanding around the many causes of housing shortages, with many community members providing stories of families who are living in separate houses, travelling long distances from home for work, and elderly people living in unsuitable housing, driven by a lack of stock in the long-term rental market

The high number of holiday rentals was seen as having a negative impact on the sense of community within the suburbs of the Shoalhaven, although holiday accommodation has been a longstanding part of our communities and has decreased in recent years Beyond the stress that participants reported feeling due to roads and local infrastructure struggling to accommodate peak holiday crowd, participants also felt that an increasingly 'temporary population' was eroding the fabric of neighbourhoods, and ultimately residents' sense of safety in their own home. Lack of school enrolments was raised by the community as a potential impact for communities with high levels of holiday letting, though this is also impacted by the high proportion of older households in the Shoalhaven.

"…people buying houses to use as holiday rental is taking away the options for locals…This is also destroying the sense of community with so many empty houses in non-peak times" – Online survey participant

"The continuous building of 'McMansions', massive land sale and land clearing - mostly for holiday houses and non-permanent residents. Empty houses don't build communities - people do!!! I am not against growing and development but not at the expense of the natural beauty that people come here for in the first place, and whilst lots of existing buildings sit empty. Would love it if we could find a way to limit the amount of 'non-permanent' housing and favor affordable smaller houses and jobs for younger people and families instead plus proper infrastructure to support them living here" – Online survey participant

"Their first jobs, socially disadvantaged peopled, single people etc" – Online survey participant

Council's work

Legislative responsibilities include:

- Plan actions to address identified local community needs and priorities, using a strategic plan and by working with others. Councils should make decisions in a way that is transparent, recognising diverse local needs and considering social justice principles of equity, access, participation and rights (*Local Government Act 1993*).
- Carry out land-use planning in a way that promotes the social and economic welfare of the community by the proper management, development and conservation of the State's natural and other resources (*Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*). This includes acting as the determining authority for relevant development applications and identifying the basis for the land-use planning strategy and planning priorities for the Shoalhaven.

Other current and planned work includes:

- Provide strategic guidance for land use development across the region, guided by *Shoalhaven 2040 – Our Strategic Land-use Planning Statement*.
- Ensure compliance with *Local Government Act 1993* requirements and associated regulations for caravan parks and manufactured home estates, including for operational approval, fire safety, amenities, waste and upkeep.

Future directions

Opportunities for future work require investigation of resourcing requirements. Opportunities that could be considered include:

- Explore opportunities to work with or support community partners to:
  - Support the community to understand the planning framework, how they can participate in planning processes, and how to they can contribute to improved community outcomes related to accessible and adaptable housing.
- Advocate for state and federal policies and programs to improve housing for residents.
- Investigate the impacts and scale of short term rental accommodation in the Shoalhaven.

Key partners

Stakeholders who play a role in creating this Domain:

- People in the community: owners of properties living in them, owners of investment properties choosing to use them for long-term rental.
- Developers of local property (whether owners of one investment property or large portfolio) choosing to provide diverse housing types.
- Community housing providers and Housing NSW (with Land and Housing Corporation) plan, provide and manage social housing and Affordable housing and supporting tenants to be part of communities of residents.
- Federal and NSW State Government agencies and land-use planning authorities that support Council to carry out land-use planning in a way that promotes the social and economic welfare of the community, including NSW Department of Planning and Environment and Government Architect NSW. DPE also manages the register of short-term rental accommodation providers, required by the NSW Fair Trading's Code of Conduct for the Short-term Rental Accommodation Industry.
- Government Architect NSW provides advice and resources on well-designed built environment (Better Placed) and healthy built environments in regional areas (Urban Design for Regional NSW).

Foundation
8

Resilient local economies and inclusive economic opportunities

Access to secure employment opportunities and income to provide for our households

Economic opportunity

People have secure employment; People have income to meet their household's needs; People have equitable access to material and social resources.

To thrive, people need economic stability through access to the means to provide for their household's needs. Many people rely on employment to do this, whilst others receive income from other sources such as welfare payments or income-producing assets. In the Shoalhaven, 2016 figures show 46.7% of people over 15yo are part of the labour force (either employed or looking for work), compared with 59.2% for NSW[30], however it should be noted that 2021 data is not yet available to show changes post COVID. The Shoalhaven's low rate of participation in the labour force is linked to the high proportion of people of retirement-age, who may receive a pension and/or income from assets. Feedback from major employers in the area indicate recruiting to roles is currently difficult, stating that many jobs are available and are a challenge to fill.

To provide economic stability, income needs to be in balance with local costs of living and come from a reliable source, such as secure employment or a secure asset. A high rate of part-time employment in the Shoalhaven[31] and increasing casualisation of the workforce contribute to reduced security of local employment. In addition, employment cannot positively contribute to wellbeing when there is poor work-life balance or stress from working conditions and pressures. Access to employment opportunities is supported by availability of and participation in employment-related education (see 2.1 Training for employment).

Regardless of how people provide for their household's needs, socio-economic disadvantage and advantage happens when access to resources is not equitably available to everyone in the community, so that some people are unable to participate fully in society. Disadvantaged households face more barriers to accessing life opportunities than other households. When there is equitable access to material and social resources, economic opportunities are inclusively available for everyone in the community.

Access to economic opportunities in the Shoalhaven can be improved by strengthening the local economy (see 8.2 Economic diversity and resilience) and improving people's capacity to take advantage of opportunities. It is also significantly impacted by external influences including Federal government welfare support and global financial market performance.

What the community told us

The 3 biggest issues that survey participants identified as affecting their sense of wellbeing or causing them stress related to financially meeting their household's needs, including housing and employment pressures. The top 3 responses were:

1. Financial stress/concern
2. Work-life balance
3. Unemployment and housing security

Regional migration due to Covid-19 and increasing housing costs (both rental and mortgage) have created a housing bubble within the Shoalhaven that is out of step with local wages and work opportunities, and was the number one source of stress within households. The results from the survey worryingly showed that financial stress is impacting the health (addressed in 4.1 Health services and support) of people in the Shoalhaven community, including some forgoing professional medical assistance in order to make rental and mortgage payments. Consultation participants also commonly identified financial stress and the need to maintain job security as the number one factor impacting their mental health.

Across all survey questions relating to financial stress and stability, female survey participants faced greater risk than their male counterparts. Most poignantly, when asked "If you suddenly had to raise $5,000 for an emergency, would you be able to do so?" there were 5 times as many women as men who responded "No", indicating a significant gender gap in ability to respond to a major shock or stress that posed a threat to the safety of a household.

Participants in the community engagement identified an immediate need for the region to attract major industries or employers who can offer stable, full-time employment in large numbers, and provide residents with an opportunity to build a career in the Shoalhaven, rather than simply working a job.

"Banks will not lend money to people working in casual work and casual work does not give people security, especially if they do not know how many hours a week they will get and also penalty rates have been taken away from many in the hospitality, retail & fast food industries." – Online survey participant

"One man in his 40s said he had to move into a share house as he couldn't afford to rent by himself any more as he didn't get enough hours." – Online survey participant

"It is getting to the point where people who work here can no longer afford to even rent here, let alone buy. There is no real full time work. It is mostly contract/part time or casual, and average weekly rent is outstripping the average wage." – Online survey participant

Council's work

Legislative responsibilities include:

- Plan actions to address identified local community needs and priorities, using a strategic plan and by working with others. Councils should make decisions in a way that is transparent, recognising diverse local needs and considering social justice principles of equity, access, participation and rights (Local Government Act 1993*).*
- Carry out land-use planning in a way that promotes the social and economic welfare of the community by the proper management, development and conservation of the State's natural and other resources (*Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*). This includes acting as the determining authority for relevant development applications and identifying the basis for the land-use planning strategy and planning priorities for the Shoalhaven.

Other current and planned work includes:

- Provide strategic guidance for land use development across the region, guided by *Shoalhaven 2040 – Our Strategic Land-use Planning Statement*.
- Demonstrate leadership as a large employer in the region by promoting availability of secure employment with career development opportunities and supports for employee wellbeing, including addressing barriers experienced by people living with disability through implementation of the *Disability Inclusion Action Plan 2022-26*.

Future directions

Opportunities for future work require further investigation of resourcing requirements to assess feasibility. Opportunities that could be considered include:

- Explore opportunities to work with or support community partners to:
  - Understand the key barriers to training and employment for young people in the Shoalhaven.

Key partners

Stakeholders who play a role in creating this Domain:

- Non-profit organisations and businesses supporting people to access employment opportunities
- Local employers offering secure employment opportunities.
- NSW Ministry of Health providing resources on workplace-related programs and projects such as the 'Get healthy at Work' program.
- Federal and NSW State Government agencies and land-use planning authorities that support Council to carry out land-use planning in a way that promotes the social and economic welfare of the community, including NSW Department of Planning and Environment, NSW Movement and Place Community of Practice and Government Architect NSW.
- Federal and State Government funding providers, including Services Australia's provision of welfare support programs.

Economic diversity and resilience

People have local employment opportunities in diverse and resilient industries.

The resilience of the local economy is improved through the diversity of local industries and the readiness of employers to adapt and innovate. Diverse employment opportunities are also more aligned with the employment needs and skills of our diverse population which has a range of ages, abilities, training and talents. Local economic resilience helps ensure that economic opportunities will be available in the future, resistant to the unpredictability of economic change and shocks.

With a strong historical base in Defence industries, manufacturing, primary industries and tourism, demographic and technological changes are opening up new opportunities for economic diversity in the Shoalhaven. Recent major infrastructure projects are bringing approximately $1.5 billion to the region and COVID saw a dramatic increase in domestic tourism in 2021-22. As a major employer for the Shoalhaven, Council contributes to the diversity of local employment opportunities, as well as working with a range of partners to improve economic activity in the region and linking local businesses with available supports to innovate and adapt to change.

The diversity and resilience of local employment opportunities depends on the actions of all the employers in the Shoalhaven – manufacturers and farmers, sole traders and gig economy workers, educational institutions and non-profit organisations, small businesses and branches of national corporations, state government entities and more. Access to information about emerging markets and technologies, and a willingness to adapt in response, is needed for local employers to be part of building economic resilience and diversity across the region.

Local residents play an important role in local economic resilience by offering a consistent customer base and supporting local businesses. By joining local events and activities in community gathering places (covered in 1.1 Community life), people across the Shoalhaven help activate the Shoalhaven's villages and make them more attractive to spend time.

What the community told us

Community consultation participants emphasised the need for diverse employment available to all groups, but particularly for the future of young people. Participants of all ages, including those in the Youth Workshop, considered the lack of employment and training opportunities for young people as key risks for the future of the region.

In addition to not being home to large industry, community consultation participants felt that the region does not provide a business ecosystem that facilitates growth of medium sized businesses or leverages the region's proximity to the national and international gateway of Sydney. Instead, it was felt that the local economy was built on small businesses that lacked resilience and were unable to provide job security or provide training or development for young people. Tourism was acknowledged as an important employment sector but there was concern about managing the impacts on the environment, amenity and infrastructure for local residents, as well as housing affordability.

Community consultation participants wished to see Council build a strong, long-term economic proposition for industry in the region. Whilst this acknowledged that secure employment as a foundation for people accessing other life opportunities, it may indicate a lack of understanding of the limitations and conflicts of Council's role in working collaboratively with stakeholders and partners to develop equitable economic opportunities for people across the Shoalhaven.

"Liveable communities need to have chances for all- whether down on their luck or/and ambitious- renewable industry and manufacturing to support the tourism industry in off seasons" – Online survey participant

"we need to encourage visitors to the Shoalhaven area, for a lot of businesses in the region this is their main trade and livelihoods. I realise that there can be negative impacts on the residential areas especially during the peak times, but if we didn't have the tourists we would suffer greatly employment opportunity wise." – Online survey participant

"full-time, solid jobs from within the manufacturing sectors… This type of employment creates long term prospects" – Online survey participant

Council's work

Legislative responsibilities include:

- Plan actions to meet identified local community needs and priorities, and collaborate with others to maximise achievement of strategic goals. Councils should make decisions in a way that recognises diverse local needs and considers social justice principles of equity, access, participation and rights (*Local Government Act 1993*).
- Carry out land-use planning in a way that promotes the social and economic welfare of the community by the proper management, development and conservation of the State's natural and other resources (*Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*). This includes acting as the determining authority for relevant development applications and identifying the basis for the land-use planning strategy and planning priorities for the Shoalhaven.

Other current and planned work includes:

- Provide strategic guidance to economic development across the region (including working with government, institutional and business partners) guided by the *Shoalhaven Economic Development Strategy 2017-2026*, *Shoalhaven Regional Economic Development Strategy 2018-22* and *Shoalhaven Tourism Master Pla*n.
- Provide strategic guidance for land use development across the region, guided by *Shoalhaven 2040 – Our Strategic Land-use Planning Statement*.

Future directions

Opportunities for future work require further investigation of resourcing requirements to assess feasibility. Opportunities that could be considered include:

- Explore opportunities to work with or support community partners to:
  - Create more vibrant town and village centres with a strong sense of place and community, with community, business and other stakeholders delivering activation strategies that foster community connections and enhance spaces providing informal opportunities for people to interact. Also listed under 1.1 Community life.
  - Create a co-ordinated program of diverse community events across the Shoalhaven for all residents (including younger and older people) and visitors, and considering how transport connections can be improved. Also listed under 1.1 Community life.
  - Establish local apprenticeship and graduate networks and investigate setting up incubator space for start-up businesses.

Key partners

Stakeholders who play a role in creating this Domain:

- Local employers being future-focused and ready for change
- Public and private industry stakeholders (including State and Federal governments) partnering in the delivery of employment and education related programs and initiatives such as the State Regional Tourism and Marine-based Tourism Strategies.
- Federal and NSW State Government agencies and land-use planning authorities that support Council to carry out land-use planning in a way that promotes the social and economic welfare of the community, including NSW Department of Planning and Environment, Environment and Heritage Group, Marine Estate Management, NSW Movement and Place Community of Practice and Government Architect NSW.
- Federal and State Government funding providers for regional and economic development programs.

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