



BUSHCARE/PARKCARE POLICY

Policy Number: POL18/43

Adopted: 11/08/2009

Amended: 28/06/2018

Minute Number: MIN09.1049, MIN18.518

File: 1835E, 31317E

Produced By: Planning Environment & Development

Review Date: 1/12/2020

For more information contact the Planning Environment & Development

Administrative Centre, Bridge Road, Nowra • Telephone (02) 4429 3111 • Fax (02) 4422 1816 • PO Box 42 Nowra 2541
Southern District Office – Deering Street, Ulladulla • Telephone (02) 4429 8999 • Fax (02) 4429 8939 • PO Box 737
Ulladulla

council@shoalhaven.nsw.gov.au • www.shoalhaven.nsw.gov.au

CONTENTS

1. Purpose	1
2. Statement	1
3. Aims and Objectives of the Bushcare/Parkcare Programs	3
4. Bushcare/Parkcare Group Action Plans.....	4
5. Provisions	5
6. Implementation	8
7. Review	8
8. Application of ESD Principles	8

1. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to describe the vision, aims and objectives of Bushcare and Parkcare and to define the roles and responsibilities of Council, staff and the volunteers involved in these two programs.

2. STATEMENT

Shoalhaven possesses landscapes of outstanding natural, cultural, aesthetic, social and economic values. Council is responsible for 727 public reserves that are classified as community land that have a total of 1,319 hectares of public land that Council manages in accordance with State Government legislation and planning policies.

The Shoalhaven community has conveyed to Council the high importance it places on conserving the environmental, cultural, aesthetic and social values of parks and natural areas and its desire to build community connection to participate in conserving and caring for local environments.

The Bushcare and Parkcare programs meet the following key priority of the Shoalhaven Community Strategic Plan:

- 1.3 Support active, healthy liveable communities
- 2.3 Protect and showcase the natural environment

Vision:

Shoalhaven City Council's vision is that community members are engaged in partnership with Council in conserving, maintaining and increasing the resilience of natural areas *and parklands*, including biodiversity conservation and ecosystem function and social and cultural heritage, for their intrinsic values as well as supporting liveable communities for the benefit of current and future generations.

The Bushcare and Parkcare programs have been established for around two decades. In that time, there has been an enormous contribution of time and effort by volunteers across both programs. The return on the investment made by council in managing these programs is significant. For example, it has been estimated that the return on Council's investment in Bushcare is around 3-fold.

Bushcare

Bushcare is about volunteer participation in the repair, protection and enhancement of natural areas in public ownership. Shoalhaven City Council established the Shoalhaven Bushcare Program as part of its Natural Areas Program responsibilities for protection and management of the values of extensive areas of land categorised as Community Land - Natural Areas under Section 36 (4) of the NSW Local Government Act. The core objectives for the management of Natural Areas under the Act include: biodiversity conservation and ecosystem function; land and habitat maintenance; the restoration and regeneration of the land; providing for sustainable community use and access; and implementation of threatened species recovery plan or threat abatement plan.

These reserves include areas of bushland, wetland, escarpment, watercourse and foreshore – areas of high conservation value that contain Endangered Ecological Communities and Threatened Species. They are critical elements of the natural and scenic values which define the character of Shoalhaven communities.

These reserves are significant also for their Aboriginal cultural heritage and the social heritage of the community.

Over recent decades, public recognition of increased degradation of bushland areas caused by inappropriate human use of bushland areas has increased, together with recognition of the need to maintain and manage remaining healthy ecosystems for their intrinsic environmental values and social and economic benefits for the current community and future generations.

As a major land manager, Shoalhaven City Council recognises its responsibility to reverse the losses and to protect Shoalhaven's natural assets, in accordance with its Guidelines for Integrating the Principles of Ecologically Sustainable Development (ESD) into all activities.

Within the Shoalhaven 2023 Community Strategic Plan as part of 'Place', the community has told Council that they want Council to 'build on the community connection to and care for the local environment and ecology'. The Bushcare Program is a key mechanism for fostering community connection to, and caring for, the local environment and ecology. Bushcare has a collaborative approach between Council and volunteers in delivering the management, restoration and regeneration of place, which fosters a greater sense of stewardship through direct involvement in land management and regeneration.

Council recognises the crucial role that many community members contribute, in terms of knowledge, experience, enthusiasm, time and effort. The Bushcare Program in-kind volunteer labour contribution, represents a significant financial benefit to the resident/ratepayers of the Shoalhaven. Bushcare volunteers may become involved in a variety of activities including bush regeneration, weed control, pest plant and animal control, stormwater control, track and trail construction and maintenance, flora and fauna surveys, public and school education, site assessment and environmental monitoring.

Concurrently, Landcare, Dunecare and Rivercare programs have been contributing to an ever-increasing body of knowledge about how to manage our natural resources. This knowledge has contributed to a growing appreciation by landholders and the wider community that reversal of land degradation is possible.

Parkcare

Council maintains over 500 reserves for active or passive recreation. Parkcare supports volunteer participation in the repair, protection and enhancement of Passive Recreation areas in public ownership. The Parkcare program provides an opportunity for members of the community to participate in the maintenance, repair, protection and enhancement of these open space areas in public ownership.

Council is therefore committed to supporting community volunteers participating in the Parkcare program. Council acknowledges the effort that members of the community have made in the maintenance of Council's Parks and Reserves, when undertaken in accordance with Parkcare Plans.

Parkcare volunteers can participate in a variety of activities including grass maintenance, landscape construction and maintenance, weed control, stormwater control, track and trail construction and maintenance, flora and fauna surveys, public education, site assessment and environmental monitoring.

3. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE BUSHCARE/PARKCARE PROGRAMS

The aims of both programs are:

1. Achievement of ecologically sustainable management of the natural bushland areas, parks and reserves within the City of Shoalhaven with engagement of the community;
2. Community use of parks and natural areas that provide enhanced positive experiences;
3. The capacity of the community to engage in the management of their local parks and natural areas is enhanced and maintained; and
4. Recognition and protection of the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultural heritage of parks and natural areas are accepted by a majority of community members.

Bushcare-specific Aims

Aims specific to Bushcare are:

1. Conservation of biodiversity and maintenance of ecosystem function in respect of land categorised as a Natural Areas as per the NSW Local Government Act 1993.
2. The restoration and regeneration of Natural Areas in accordance with accepted best practice bush regeneration techniques.
3. Public awareness and appreciation of values of natural areas as public land is demonstrated by majority community support and measurable improvement in the condition of natural areas.

Bushcare/Parkcare Objectives

1. The biodiversity, ecosystem function and connectivity, water quality and resilience, of Bushcare sites across the City are maintained, protected and regenerated using local native plants.
2. The provisions for management of the land as set out in a threatened species recovery or threat abatement plan, prepared under the NSW Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016 and the Fisheries Management Act 1994 are observed, implemented and prioritised.
3. Adopted Plans of Management for Community Land will be implemented in partnership between Council, the Bushcare Representative Group and individual "Bushcare/Park Care groups.
4. Aboriginal cultural heritage is respected, protected and maintained in consultation with Council's Aboriginal Advisory Board, Local Aboriginal Land Councils and traditional elders and in accordance with due diligence provisions for Aboriginal Cultural Heritage sites.

5. The general community's cultural, social and aesthetic values are respected
6. The community's understanding of the natural and cultural values of their local environment, including the ecologically sustainable uses of, and the management of the city's natural areas is fostered and enhanced.
7. The community's understanding of the benefits of the Bushcare Program, is fostered and enhanced.
8. The Bushcare and Parkcare programs are continuously improved to be equitable, apolitical and inclusive, with a high level of collaboration between stakeholders (e.g., Council, Bushcare Representative Committee and volunteers).
9. The understanding, skills and resources of Bushcare volunteers are continuously improved, including those associated with ecological processes, bush regeneration, and evaluation.
10. The health and wellbeing of all volunteers, staff, contractors and the public is maintained through appropriate safe systems of work.
11. The community's awareness of the Bushcare and Parkcare programs is increased and the recruitment and retention of volunteers is prioritised
12. There is high level of awareness and cooperation with resource management and community organisations and other environmental volunteer groups within Shoalhaven City such as Landcare, Dunecare and Shoalhaven Riverwatch.
13. The management of the Bushcare and Parkcare programs is conducted in an effective, efficient and accountable manner.

Aims and objectives will be achieved by implementation of separate Bushcare and Parkcare programs. Council will promote and implement the aims and objectives of this policy through the establishment of Bushcare and Parkcare Groups, in accordance with Council requirements, including approved Bushcare and Parkcare Group Action Plans.

4. BUSHCARE/PARKCARE GROUP ACTION PLANS

Members of each local group will be involved in the development of draft Action Plans. In the case of Bushcare Action Plans, these will be reviewed by the Bushcare Representative Group prior to approval by Council.

Work carried out by a Bushcare/Parkcare group must be carried out in accordance with a Bushcare/Parkcare Group Action Plan.

The Bushcare/Parkcare Group Action Plan will outline the goals of the Bushcare/Parkcare group and the sequence by which they will be achieved. The location of work sites and the required activities will be detailed. Timeframes for activities will be documented.

Bushcare/Parkcare Action Plans must not conflict with any other plans or strategies prepared for the site or surrounding areas including:

- Reserve plans of management;
- Estuary management plans; and
- Generic policies and plans.

If there is any potential conflict between a Bushcare/Parkcare Action Plan and any other plan, Council's Bushcare Coordinator or Parks Coordinator must be notified immediately.

5. PROVISIONS

Roles and Responsibilities

The following roles and responsibilities relate the key stakeholders involved in the Shoalhaven Bushcare and Parkcare programs.

The Shoalhaven Bushcare Representative Group:

Council is to maintain an advisory group on all matters relating to the future directions of the Bushcare Policy and program, maintaining an active dialogue with the Bushcare community.

Council will consider the need for a Parkcare Representative group if required.

Council Staff:

General Program Management

- Coordinate the establishment of new Bushcare/Parkcare groups
- Collate information on volunteer participation and on-ground outputs
- Coordinate activities on a broader scale so that they are compatible with local and regional priorities
- Facilitate coordination and cooperation between other relevant groups within Shoalhaven City;
- Promote practices that reflect and respect the social and cultural diversity contained within the community;
- Consult on matters that will impact volunteer's participation.
- Regularly review the role of volunteers and volunteers' activities;

Training

- Review and implement relevant safety induction for volunteers;
- Where appropriate, identify and provide opportunities for skill development for individual volunteers;
- Provide on-site training to improve volunteers' knowledge and skills;
- Provide sufficient training for each Bushcare/Parkcare group to so that the group can implement the actions outlined in their Group Action Plan.
- Provide information to volunteers on the recognition and conservation of heritage items within their Bushcare/Parkcare site.

Bushcare/Parkcare Group Action Plans

- Preparing Bushcare/Parkcare Action Plans in consultation with: Field Officers; the Bushcare/Parkcare Group Coordinator; and the Bushcare/Parkcare Group.
- Initiating and undertaking review of the action plans.

Operational Support

- Ensure staff provide open and honest information and respond to concerns and queries promptly and in good faith;
- Provide adequate resources for volunteers to conduct activities in accordance with adopted Management Plans and policies;

- Where appropriate, provide each volunteer with identification whilst undertaking volunteer work;
- Provide signage to raise public awareness of Bushcare sites undergoing rehabilitation and/or regeneration;
- Encourage and support research activities undertaken by Bushcare/Parkcare groups
- Encourage and support Bushcare/Parkcare to monitor their activities to access and evaluate if they are achieving the groups goals and aims.

Health and Safety

- Provide a safe system of working that can be readily implemented by volunteers;
- Provide adequate training to allow volunteers to assess and address safety risks on a Bushcare/Parkcare site;
- Provide information and ongoing advice on safe work practices as they relate to Bushcare/Parkcare volunteers; and
- Ensure that all volunteers have access to adequate personal protective and safety equipment as required.

Volunteer Recognition

- Publically acknowledge the extent and importance of volunteer contributions; and
- Identify and acknowledge the skill level of individual volunteers.
- Increase awareness, both internally and externally, of the contribution of volunteers;

Promotion and Recruitment

- Encourage and support appropriate marketing and advertising initiatives of each Bushcare/Parkcare group; ensuring they comply with Council Media Guidelines Policy
- Maintain adequate volunteer recruitment processes;
- Actively promote volunteer and group activities; and
- Provide each volunteer with a Volunteer Position Description and a Group Coordinator Position Description upon commencement of their volunteer role and on request; and

Insurance and indemnity

- Provide appropriate Personal Accident and Public Liability insurance cover;
- Provide Bushcare/Parkcare volunteers with information regarding the extent to which their activities are covered by insurance and indemnity.

Legal Framework Information

- Provide clear operational guidance for activities of Bushcare Plans;
- Provide clear guidelines on the behavioural expectations including behaviours towards others;
- Provide information, on the current legislation, regulations, policies, procedures and guidelines that affect the activities undertaken by Bushcare/Parkcare groups

Volunteers' Roles and Responsibilities

Bushcare/Parkcare volunteers have the following obligations under the Bushcare/Parkcare Program:

Work Commitment

- Complete the work for which the individual volunteered as per the role descriptions;

- Be dependable, honest and reliable;
- Work as part of the team;
- Act in a manner that does not undermine Council in the community as per the Council's Code of Conduct;
- Accept supervision in good faith; and
- Participate in the preparation and the implementation of the Bushcare/Parkcare Action Group Plans for the volunteer's site or group.

Learning and Training

- Be willing to learn;
- Ask for help when needed and ask questions when more information is required to effectively carry out Bushcare/Parkcare activities;
- Be willing to complete formal training and accreditations as are relevant to the Bushcare/Parkcare group or site;
- Consider in good faith information, ideas, practices and experiences of other environmental volunteer groups within Shoalhaven City.

Legal Compliance

- Follow any guidelines, policies and procedures relevant to the Bushcare/Parkcare volunteering position;
- Undertake a Shoalhaven City Council Volunteer safety induction prior to working on a Bushcare or Parkcare site;
- Adhere to Bushcare/Parkcare Group Action Plans;
- Provide proof of identity to Shoalhaven City Council;
- Respect the confidentiality of other volunteers, Council employees, Council and others as appropriate;
- Notify Council of any new members of a Bushcare/Parkcare Group; and
- Where required, undertake Child Protection (Working with Children) Act 2012 (NSW).

Health and Safety

- Comply with work health and safety laws, regulations, policies and procedures;
- Follow site risk assessments and implement the control measures identified;
- Approach volunteer tasks with due care and attention for health and safety risks;
- Notify others of new or immediate risks;
- Report near misses, incidents and injuries promptly;
- Use Personal Protective Equipment provided;
- Do not undertake identified High Risk activities
- Work within your own physical limits and area of skill;
- Notify the Bushcare Group Coordinator or the Bushcare Field Officer of:
 - any health and safety risks on the Bushcare/Parkcare site;
 - any prior or existing physical restrictions that may affect your ability to safely participate in volunteer work tasks; and
 - any other issue that may impact upon the safe participation of Bushcare/Parkcare work tasks.

Record Keeping

- Record volunteer attendance details in an attendance register or log book on each volunteering occasion (for insurance purposes);
- Record all health and safety incidents; and

- Be willing to report on or record any aspect of Bushcare/Parkcare activities.

6. IMPLEMENTATION

The Environmental Services Section of the Planning, Environment and Development Group has principle responsibility for implementation of the policy for the Bushcare program.

The Parks Maintenance Section of the Works and Service group has primary responsibility for the Parkcare program.

Procedures for the Bushcare and Parkcare programs are documented separately. Checklists will be developed as part of these procedures and used where possible to assist with implementation of this policy.

Procedures will include those for monitoring and evaluating the Bushcare and Parkcare programs. Results of monitoring and evaluation will be reported in relation to the programs' aims listed in Section 3. Indicators to be measured will include: the economic contribution of volunteers; the number of volunteers; and the area of land where management is assisted by the volunteers.

7. REVIEW

This policy and related procedures will be reviewed within one year of the election of every new Council, or earlier if circumstances change to warrant a review.

8. APPLICATION OF ESD PRINCIPLES

Ecologically Sustainable Development (ESD) has been defined in the Shoalhaven City Council's Integrated Strategic Plan (ISP) as: using, conserving and enhancing the community's resources so that ecological processes, on which life depends, are maintained, and the total quality of life, now and in the future, can be increased.

The Bushcare/Parkcare programs will comply with the Ecologically Sustainable Development principles listed in the ISP:

Principle	Implementation
The precautionary principle - where there are threats of serious or irreversible environmental damage, lack of full scientific certainty should not be used as a reason for postponing measures to prevent environmental damage	Best practice techniques will be employed, with appropriate follow-up monitoring of activities. New techniques will be trialed where necessary after seeking any required approvals.
Intergenerational equity – making sure impacts on generations are considered	Policy, Procedures and Action Plans are developed with both short-term and long-term goals.

Shoalhaven City Council - Bushcare/Parkcare Policy

<p>Conservation of biological diversity and ecological integrity</p>	<p>Natural Areas reserves are managed in accordance with section 36E of the Local Government Act (1993) with core objectives including biodiversity conservation and maintenance of ecosystem function.</p>
<p>Improved valuation, pricing and incentive mechanisms</p>	<p>Bushcare and Parkcare staff and volunteers will provide input into economic assessments, including data on volunteer effort and data on site values recorded, for example, through citizen science programs.</p>