

Natural Area Volunteers Group – Terms of Reference

Bushcare, **Dunecare**

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Directorate:	City Services	
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1. Purpose

The purpose of the Natural Area Volunteers Group is to act as an advisory and representative group on all matters relating to the future directions of the Bushcare Policy and program (MIN10.1461).

2. Interpretation

For the purpose of this document:

Chairperson / Chair means the chairpersons of the group

Council means Shoalhaven City Council

CSP means the Shoalhaven City Council Community Strategic Plan

DPOP means the Shoalhaven City Council Delivery Program Operational Plan

Elected members mean the elected Councillors of Shoalhaven City Council

Group means Natural Area Volunteers Group

Member means a member of the advisory and representative group

Natural Area means land that is classified as Community Land and categorised as 'Natural Area' in accordance with the Local Government Act 1993 (NSW); or that is shown as 'Natural Area' within Council's Asset Custodian Model mapping.

3. Status of the Committee

The Group provides non-binding advice to Council for consideration.

4. Role

The Group will advise Council on strategic matters pertaining to the Bushcare Program within designated Natural Areas. This will include policies, procedures, resourcing, natural resources management, environmental restoration and preservation techniques and plans, and include community and volunteer stakeholder engagement. Natural Area volunteer groups include those managed under Council's Bushcare program that predominantly work on Natural Areas. These include Bushcare, Dunecare and similar groups.

Particularly relevant to the group are:

- Natural Area Volunteer and Parkcare Policy
- Bushcare/Dunecare/Parkcare Procedures
- Shoalhaven City Council's Workplace Health and Safety policy and manual

5. Key strategy, Plan and Other Linkages

The purpose of this Group is linked to the achievement of the objectives and actions within the Council's Strategies, Plans and other documentation as listed in Table 1.

Table 1 Relevant Strategic Documents

Document	Objective / Action	Anticipated date of achievement
Shoalhaven 2032 Community Strategic Plan	2.3 Protect the natural environment and enhance sustainability Participation in environmental programs - Number of active Bushcare groups on Council managed land (60)	Ongoing
Delivery Program Operational Plan and Budget 2024-2025	2.3.03.05 Prepare new, or review existing Bushcare Group Action Plans in consultation with community (≥8)	June 2025 (Annual target)
Community and Wellbeing Strategy 2022	6.1 Sustainable management of natural resources - People can access our natural resources in a way that supports the longterm sustainability of them.	Ongoing
Sustainability and Climate Action Plan 2023-2027	2.1 Continue to implement and expand the Natural Areas Management Program to ensure conservation of remnant bushland, foreshore, wetland, and riparian areas.	Ongoing
Sustainability and Climate Action Plan 2023-2027	2.5 Continue to develop, support and resource volunteer Bushcare, Parkcare, and Dunecare groups.	Ongoing
Adaptation plan 2022 - 2025	R5 Establish priority weed management control plans ' work with Bushcare teams to gather supporting data and information on pest and weed incidence'.	1-3 years

6. Delegations

The Group may make recommendations to Council on all matters within the role as outlined above. These recommendations are submitted via the minutes of each meeting to Council for consideration.

Substantial issues and recommendations (possibly including expenditure) raised by the Group will be reported to Council by a separate report from the Manager – Environmental Services.

The Group does not have the power to incur expenditure, or the power to bind Council.

7. Membership

The Group will be chaired by a Councillor, elected by Council. The Group is expected to act in accordance with the Role of the Group as defined above in Section 4. The Group will comprise the following:

- Appointed Chair (Councillor)
- All available Councillors (MIN22.1) Any non-voting Councillor in attendance at any of the above Committees may act as an alternate voting member in circumstances where achievement of a quorum is required.
- Council's CEO or nominee
- Up to ten (10) Natural Area volunteer representatives (e.g., Bushcare, Dunecare volunteers)
- South-east Local Land Services representative (optional) (non-voting)
- NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water representative (optional) (non-voting)
- Other Relevant Government Agencies, Community Organisations and Service Providers

Note: Council encourages the appointment of two (2) Indigenous representatives, male and female, on all Advisory Committee.

Councillor Representatives

Council appoints one (1) Councillor to be the voting Chair of the Group. All other Councillors are welcome to attend meetings of the Group as observers and contribute to discussions but are not entitled to vote.

If no Councillors are appointed as members, the Chief Executive Officer or nominee represents the elected member to chair the meeting.

Community Representatives

Council will seek to appoint Group representatives from across the entire region.

Where possible, a minimum of three (3) representatives are to be appointed from each of the northern, central and southern areas of the Local Government Area. In the event where nominations for vacancies are insufficient to support three (3) members from one (1) area, the membership can include more than three (3) members from other areas.

Natural Area volunteer community representatives must be a current active member of a Natural Area volunteer group.

Following an expression of interest process, the Chief Executive Officer appoints a maximum of ten (10) local community representatives that meet the following criteria:

- Experience and skills in community-based volunteering, particularly pertaining to the sustainable management of Natural Areas.
- Ability to represent a cross-section of volunteers that work within Natural Areas.
- Ability in knowledge-sharing and communication.
- Ability in strategic, program-level thinking.

Local knowledge of, and preferably living or working within, the Shoalhaven.

The inclusion of representation from indigenous communities and youth (between the ages of 16 and 30) is to be sought as part of the recruitment process.

Community representatives with Committee membership have voting rights upon completing an induction.

Community Representative Appointments:

- Nominations should be advertised throughout the community via an Expression of Interest (EOI) process.
- Vacancies will be advertised to all registered Natural Area volunteers by the Bushcare Coordinator.
- Council will manage the application process; and
- An assessment panel consisting of a Council staff member (Manager Environmental Services), the Chairperson of the Group and one (1) suitably qualified independent representative will assess the applications and make recommendations for appointments to Council. Each member of the assessment panel will vote on recommendations with a majority ruling.

Natural Area Volunteers Group members who are absent for three (3) consecutive meetings of the Group without tendering an apology will be requested in formal correspondence from Council to confirm their intention regarding their membership. Failure to respond may result in removal from this Group.

Council Officers

Council officers attend meetings to provide specialist professional advice, strategic planning, development assessment and environmental management. Council officers do not have voting rights.

Government Agencies, Community Organisations and Service Providers

The Chief Executive Officer (or nominee) invites the relevant State Government agencies to nominate representatives.

The nominated agency representatives provide advice in relation to their functions and areas of expertise, however, are non-voting members.

Chair and Deputy Chair

Council appoints one (1) Councillor to be the Chair of the Group. In the absence of the nominated Chair at a particular meeting, the members elect a Chair for that meeting.

Terms of Office

The term of the Chair will be three (3) years, which will be reviewed following the election of a new Council. Councillors continue as members of the Group until the next Local Government election, or until the Group is disbanded or completes its purpose in accordance with these Terms of Reference.

Community member Appointments to the Committee will be for a two (2) year term with a set commencement and finish date; with an option to re-stand for appointment for one (1) additional term.

If a representative is terminated or resigns, an early substitute will be appointed only until the fixed finish date as a casual vacancy.

Community member representatives are appointed through an Expression of Interest process.

Elected members (or their representative) continue as members of the Committee until the next ordinary election of the Mayor, or the next general election of Council, or until the Committee is disbanded or completes its purpose in accordance with these Terms of Reference.

8. Group Meetings

Agenda

Agenda will be distributed 7 days prior to the date of the meeting.

The agenda will be developed by the Director - City Development and Community Services with support from the Manager - Environmental Services in view of the prevailing issues. Councillors and members can contribute to the agenda by submitting a report on a particular issue, within the scope of the terms of reference and delegation of the committee four (4) weeks prior to the meeting. The inclusion of the item on the agenda will be subject to approval of the Chair and the Director - City Development and Community Services.

Quorum

Seven (7) provided that a minimum of one (1) Councillor as chair or acting chair with voting rights and six (6) community representatives are present. Attendance at the scheduled meeting will need to be confirmed at least two business days prior to the scheduled meeting. If it is clear that a quorum is not able to be achieved, the meeting will be postponed or other arrangements made.

Voting

It is expected that the Group, and any working group, develop recommendations by consensus. If voting is required, the Chair has a casting vote. Any votes against will be recorded in the minutes.

Meeting Schedule

In general, meeting frequency should be conducted on an as required basis.

Minutes

The Group provides advice to the Council for consideration. The Group's advice is posted on the Council website with minutes reported to the elected Council. Following consideration of the advice from the Group, any resolution determined by Council, will be posted on the Council website.

Confidentiality And Privacy

Members may have contact with confidential or personal information retained by Council. If so, members are required to maintain the security of any confidential or personal information and not access, use, or remove any information, unless the member is authorised to do so.

Communication, Media and Public Comment

In relation to the communication functions of the Group, the following applies:

- Members of the Group are not permitted to speak to the media as Council representatives of the Group unless approved by the Chairperson.
- Where approval has been given by the Chairperson, views and opinions expressed are those of the Group and not of Shoalhaven City Council.
- Where endorsement is required from Shoalhaven City Council, approval must be sought through the formal processes; and
- The Chair of the Group is the point of contact for communication between Group members and Council staff.
- Council will endeavour to utilise the Chair as the primary point of contact to communicate with Group members.

9. Council Staff Responsibility

The Committee's contact within Council is Lead – Land Management, within the City Development Directorate.

Governance is responsible for administrative support functions of the committee such as collating and distributing the agenda, minutes and notation of apologies.

Guiding Principles

It is expected that members will carry out their functions as members of the Community responsibly.

Members will endeavour to:

- Treat each other and those who interact with the Committee with respect and dignity.
- Recognise and respect diverse opinions.
- Give each other the space to speak.
- Listen with open minds.
- Work constructively within the group, including identifying issues and potential recommendations.
- Represent the interests of the community they support.
- Attend scheduled meetings and inform Governance in advance should they be unable to attend.

10. Code of Conduct

All members of the Group are required to observe the provisions of Council's Code of Conduct and any other policy or requirement applicable to the proper functioning of the Group.

A meeting where conduct not in accordance with these requirements may be adjourned or closed without notice and a breach of the Code of Conduct may lead to a member being expelled from the Group.

11. Document Control

These Terms of Reference are reviewed at the commencement of each term of Council or as required. Amendments to these Terms of Reference are to be reported to Council for approval. A version history (footnote on front page) is included if amendments have been approved.

12. Other Relevant Documents List

Code Of Conduct Code of Meeting Practice Shoalhaven 2032 Community Strategic Plan Terms Of Reference Template