

Draft Sustainability and Climate Policy

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1. Purpose

This policy articulates Shoalhaven City Council's position and commitment to address climate change and integrate the principles of sustainability and Ecologically Sustainable Development across Council operations and throughout the wider Shoalhaven community. Looking beyond the goals of sustaining our current environment and quality of life, Council will work to continually improve outcomes for our community and environment, to achieve a better, healthier, and more equitable future for the Shoalhaven.

Sustainability is defined by the United Nations as 'meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'. It is the process of ensuring the wise use and management of all resources within a framework which balances the best outcomes for the community, the environment, and the economy, both now and in the future. The decisions and activities of Shoalhaven City Council ('Council') have implications on the local and regional environment, and the ecological systems that current and future generations value and depend upon. While 'sustainability' seeks to maintain the current health and function of our environment to ensure no net loss for future generations, we must look beyond this goal and seek to restore and improve outcomes for our community, environment, and economy. The purpose of this Policy is to outline Council's commitment to protect and nurture our natural environment, address climate change, and enhance the quality of life for current and future generations.

Under the NSW Local Government Act 1993, Council has an obligation to properly manage, develop, protect, restore, enhance, and conserve the environment of the area for which it is responsible in a manner which is consistent with the principles of Ecologically Sustainable Development. This Policy identifies goals and targets for Council to embed the principles of Ecologically Sustainable Development across our organisation and operations, reduce environmental impacts, and support the ongoing health and sustainability of our region.

These goals are consistent with the community's vision for 'Sustainable liveable environments', as outlined in the Shoalhaven 2032 Community Strategic Plan. The Policy also supports the Local Government NSW Environmental Policy Position Statements (2020), the delivery of the United Nations Sustainable Development 2030 Goals, and the strategic vision and direction of the Illawarra Shoalhaven Regional Plan 2041 (2021).

1.1. Definitions

Climate change

Climate change means long-term shifts in local, regional, and global temperature and weather patterns, mainly caused by human activities, particularly the burning of fossil fuels.

Ecologically Sustainable Development (ESD)

Ecologically Sustainable Development requires the effective integration of economic, environmental, social and equity considerations in decision-making processes. Ecologically Sustainable Development aims to use, conserve, and enhance the community's resources so that the ecological processes on which life depends are maintained, and the total quality of life, now and in the future, can be increased.

The key principles of Ecologically Sustainable Development, as stated in the Local Government Act 1993, include:

- Intergenerational equity
- Social equity, wellbeing and inclusion
- Conservation of biological diversity and ecological integrity

- Improved valuation, pricing and incentive mechanisms
- The precautionary principle

Natural environment

Encompasses all living and non-living things occurring naturally on Earth.

Net-zero emissions

An overall balance between greenhouse gas emissions produced and greenhouse gas emissions taken out of the atmosphere.

Sustainability

Sustainability is defined by the United Nations as ‘meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’. It is the process of ensuring the wise use and management of all resources within a framework which balances community liveability, environmental sustainability, and economic prosperity over time.

The goal of sustainability is to enhance the wellbeing of society whilst minimising our impact on the environment, so that we can protect the ecological processes on which life depends and ensure a healthy environment and quality of life for current and future generations. The quadruple bottom line of sustainability includes consideration of environmental, cultural, social, and economic elements, through a framework of robust governance.

1.2. Scope

This policy applies to all staff or persons conducting or undertaking business on behalf of Council. This includes Councillors, Council staff, contractors and others that act on Council’s behalf to ensure they work in accordance with the policy principles.

2. Statement

Council is committed to embedding the principles of sustainability and Ecologically Sustainable Development in its day-to-day operations and decision-making processes. We will work to continually improve our environmental performance as an organisation, enhance the ecological health of the Shoalhaven, mitigate and respond to climate challenges, and empower positive environmental action in our community.

It was resolved at Council’s Ordinary meeting on 24 November 2020, that Council acknowledge the efforts of the international Community in coming together to attempt to mitigate the rate of global warming and its impact on world climate; and continue to actively support its proactive policy of exploring all practical means of reducing its carbon footprint as a local endeavour to help mitigate the impacts of global warming.

3. Provisions

3.1. Vision

The Shoalhaven will be a thriving and sustainable region which celebrates and protects our unique natural environment and strives to continuously improve outcomes for current and future generations. Council will work to reduce emissions and transition to sustainable energy and transport, minimise waste, use resources wisely, and support our community to adopt sustainable living practices and prepare for a changing climate.

Creating a sustainable Shoalhaven means:

- Reducing greenhouse gas emissions and responding to climate change challenges
- Living in balance with our natural environment to protect and support our ecosystems
- Ensuring our assets, towns and villages are future-ready, environmentally sustainable, and climate resilient
- Using materials wisely and avoiding waste to protect natural resources
- Supporting our community to adopt positive sustainable living practices and prepare for a changing climate, and
- Innovating and collaborating to achieve better outcomes for our community and environment.

3.2. Objectives and Targets

To achieve this vision, and in partnership with stakeholders and the community, Shoalhaven City Council will:

- Integrate the principles of sustainability and Ecologically Sustainable Development into planning, asset management and decision-making processes across the organisation
- Mitigate and build resilience to climate change by reducing Council greenhouse gas emissions, seeking opportunities for carbon abatement, and adapting to climate change impacts
- Achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions across Council operations by 2035, with an interim target to reduce emissions by 50% by 2028 compared to 2015 levels
- Implement Council's Sustainable Energy Strategy to generate renewable energy on Council assets, transition Council plant and equipment away from fossil fuels, and continually improve energy efficiency across the organisation
- Support the circular economy and adopt the principles of the waste hierarchy to prioritise avoiding and minimising waste
- Embed sustainability into Council procurement processes to encourage sustainable, low-carbon and high recycled content procurement
- Support the principles of a water sensitive city by increasing the use of recycled water, managing potable water use, improving the quality of waterways, and reducing local flood risk
- Increase the provision of low-emissions vehicles for Council's fleet and support active and low-emissions transport options for our community
- Encourage environmentally sustainable, equitable, and climate resilient land-use planning and development across the Shoalhaven region
- Recognise and support the rich cultural heritage and Aboriginal history of the Shoalhaven region and the practice of caring for country
- Improve the ecological and environmental values of the Shoalhaven through a stronger emphasis on biodiversity conservation and natural area management
- Prevent pollution and protect the health and safety of our air, water, and natural resources
- Prioritise sustainable and low-carbon building materials across Council buildings, infrastructure, and other assets
- Support our community to adopt sustainable living practices, engage with the natural environment, and contribute to the ongoing sustainability and health of the Shoalhaven region
- Advocate to State and Federal Government for greater action and support to reduce emissions, meet renewable energy targets, and respond to climate change challenges.

4. Implementation

Shoalhaven City Council will support this Policy by:

- Preparing and implementing a Sustainability and Climate Action Plan to identify priority actions and meet the objectives outlined in this Policy.
- Implementing Council's Sustainable Energy Strategy targeting a reduction in energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions.
- Maintaining the Revolving Energy Fund to fund high priority energy efficiency and renewable energy projects across Council assets.

- Delivering and regularly renewing Council's Climate Adaptation Plan to identify and prepare for climate change risks.
- Resourcing initiatives identified in the Sustainability and Climate Action Plan and Climate Adaptation Plan by means of sufficient annual budget allocations.
- Measuring, monitoring, and reporting on carbon emissions and energy consumption to identify issues and work toward agreed targets of this Policy and related Sustainability and Climate Action Plan.
- Working in partnership with government, organisations, and the community to promote the ecological, social, and economic health of the Shoalhaven and broader region.
- Providing opportunities and training for staff to improve their understanding of sustainable practices and to adopt these in their day-to-day work.
- Measuring, monitoring, and reporting on progress achieved through the delivery of this Policy and the Sustainability and Climate Action Plan.
- Preserving solar access rights across the Shoalhaven local government area on both public and private land to protect the efficiency of existing and future solar systems.

5. Review

This Policy will be reviewed within 12 months of the election of a new council, and particularly where new legislation, guidelines and/or management information dictates. Council will monitor progress toward achieving its Policy target of net-zero greenhouse gas emissions through annual reports and will continue to review and revise this target as required in line with the latest available data, scientific advice, and best practice recommendations.