

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. Shoalhaven City Council recognises the international scientific consensus that warming of the climate system is unequivocal, and that human activities (primarily greenhouse gas emissions) are the principle cause of these changes. The decisions and activities of Council have implications on the local and regional environment, and the ecological systems that current and future generations value and depend upon. 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.

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. While 'sustainability' seeks to maintain the current health and function of our environment to ensure no net loss for future generations, Council will look beyond this goal and work to continually improve outcomes for our community and environment, to achieve a healthy, safe, and equitable future for the Shoalhaven.

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.

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.

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

A change of climate which is attributed directly or indirectly to human activity that alters the composition of the global atmosphere" (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change).

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 adapt to climate change, and empower positive environmental action in our community.

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 carbon 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 adapting to climate change
- 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 and water wisely and avoiding waste to protect natural resources
- Supporting our residents and business community to adopt positive sustainable living practices and prepare for a changing climate, and
- Innovating, collaborating, and advocating with all levels of government to enhance sustainability and improve 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:

1. Integrate the principles of sustainability and Ecologically Sustainable Development into planning, asset management and decision-making processes across the organisation
2. Mitigate and build resilience to climate change by reducing Council greenhouse gas emissions, seeking opportunities for carbon abatement, and adapting to climate change impacts
3. Achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions across Council operations by 2035, with an interim target to reduce emissions by 50% by 2028 compared to 2020 levels
4. 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
5. Support the circular economy and adopt the principles of the waste hierarchy to prioritise avoiding and minimising waste
6. Embed sustainability into Council procurement processes to encourage sustainable, low-carbon and high recycled content procurement
7. Support the principles of a water sensitive city by increasing the use of recycled water, providing efficient and effective water and waste-water services, and improving the quality of waterways
8. Increase the provision of low and zero emissions vehicles for Council's fleet and support active and low-emissions transport options for our community
9. Encourage environmentally and socially sustainable, equitable, and climate resilient land-use planning and development across the Shoalhaven region
10. Recognise and support the rich cultural heritage and Aboriginal history of the Shoalhaven region and the practice of caring for country
11. Improve the ecological and environmental values of the Shoalhaven through a stronger emphasis on biodiversity conservation, natural areas management, and sustainable tourism

12. Increase tree canopy cover in our towns and villages in order to enhance community resilience to climate change and support wildlife.
13. Reduce pollution and protect the health and safety of our air, water, and natural resources
14. Prioritise sustainable and low-carbon building materials across Council buildings, infrastructure, and other assets
15. 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
16. Advocate to all levels of government for greater action and support to reduce emissions, meet renewable energy targets, and adapt to climate change.

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 and projects.
- Delivering and regularly renewing Council's 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.
- Preparing an emissions reduction plan with bi-annual reporting on Council's operational carbon emissions and energy consumption.
- Working in partnership with all levels of 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 work 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.

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.