



Thriving, healthy and biodiverse natural environments

For the biodiversity and health of our waterways, habitats and wildlife to be protected and enhanced to deliver environmental, economic and recreational benefits for current and future generations of residents and visitors.



Support for the Northern Rivers Watershed Initiative (NRWI)

On 8 February 2019, the NRJO members comprising Ballina Shire Council, Byron Shire Council, Kyogle Council, Lismore City Council, Richmond Valley Council, Rous County Council and Tweed Shire Council endorsed a landmark agreement to restore the Tweed, Brunswick, Richmond and Evans River systems.

Goal: The NRWI brings a holistic approach to the management of water within the catchments that will utilize modern, best practice approaches to catchment management modelling and natural flood mitigation to target improvements in stream bank condition and river health that also contribute to reduced flood risk within the catchments.

Background: Ecohealth is an aquatic ecosystem monitoring program that measures how healthy our rivers and estuaries are for the plants and animals that live in them. It involves an assessment of water quality, riparian vegetation, geomorphic (channel) condition, macroinvertebrates (water bugs), fish (distribution and population sizes) and plankton.

A recent Ecohealth assessment of the Richmond River overall found the river to be a 'D-' - in a 'poor condition' and one of the worst in NSW. Whilst not as degraded, the Tweed, Brunswick and Evans River systems face similar challenges. Poor Ecohealth outcomes across the NR also lead to compromised social and economic values within the catchment and estuarine systems.

Climate change is projected to bring more hot days, bushfires, droughts and intense storms to the NR, placing further strain on water resources and bringing more extreme weather events.

Policy Context: Key modules comprising the NRWI deliver against a range of goals and strategic actions identified in the Strategic Regional Priorities 2019–2022 (NRJO, 2018), demonstrating alignment of the NRWI with the regional priorities that have been established by the NRJO.

The NRWI would integrate both NFM measures and implementation of high priority Coastal Zone Management Plan (CZMP) actions throughout the Tweed, Brunswick, Richmond and Evans River catchments and estuaries. By 2020, the CZMP will transition to a new framework consistent with the guidelines under the Coastal Management Act 2016. Any actions in a Coastal Management Plan (CMP) need to be implemented through a council's Integrated Planning and Reporting (IP&R) framework and land-use planning systems. The injection of external resources will be needed, otherwise high priority actions within future CMPs will be truncated to align with a council's existing budgetary process.

Implementation: The NRWI would consist of the following key modules:

- Soil health improvement
- Riparian restoration and catchment revegetation
- Agronomic best management practice
- Redesigned floodplain drainage to meet contemporary standards
- Sustainable agriculture reform package (including buy backs)
- Scientific framework for landscape design and monitoring.

NRWI will feature genuine and active consultation and partnerships with landholders, industry, stakeholder groups, community groups, Landcare, all levels of government and the broader community to involve a regional collaborative effort. It will be coordinated by Rous County Council in partnership with the NRJO and its member Councils.

Problem: The NSW Government's Sea Level Rise Policy (DECCW, 2009) states that sea level rise is inevitable and establishes planning benchmarks to be adopted in NSW. These benchmarks are an increase above 1990 sea levels of 40 cm by 2050 and 90 cm by 2100, an average increase of 0.8 cm per year.

Sea level rise in the Richmond River estuary is anticipated to result in a broad range of issues including tidal inundation and landward recession of low-lying ecosystems, increased salt penetration through the estuary and adjoining wetland systems, increased bank erosion and implications for drainage and flooding in urban and agricultural areas. This issue has broad implications, affecting most of the other estuary issues in some way and therefore needs to be considered as part of all management and planning for the estuary.

Support and Partnerships

Development of the NRWI concept has been informed by discussions between the Rous County Council Chair and industry, university, community, and government representatives regarding the progression of initiatives to address river health and flooding in the Northern Rivers catchments. This concept has since been reviewed internally by Rous County Council staff. Additional consultation has been undertaken at officer-level with representatives from all councils, NSW Government agencies and the research community.

A key aspect of the further development of the NRWI will be to integrate with existing initiatives across all stakeholder groups in each river system. This includes coordination with the rollout of the NSW Government Marine Estate Management Strategy and the Richmond River Governance and Funding Framework that has been co-funded by the Office of Environment and Heritage and local government.

Solution and Actions sought:

Preliminary scoping of the scale of work needed to address this initiative indicates that a budget in the order of \$150 million over 10 to 15 years would be required to affect the necessary changes across the landscape.





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Advocate for changes to Forestry policy and planning regulations to encourage native plantations and re-forestation

The previously endorsed engagement by NRJO of a Biodiversity Officer is a linked project to support and strengthen this advocacy area.

Goal: *Strategic Action #1.2* – Enhance biodiversity across the region. Increase volume of healthy, stable interconnected habitat. Increase populations of threatened species.

Background: The private property primary processing sector on the North Coast directly creates \$145 million turnover for the regional economy and 490 jobs. This supports the need for increased private land owner involvement in biodiversity conservation and recognises the vital contribution biodiversity makes to the region's economy.

Applying best practice silviculture has the potential to generate income, create new jobs and create forests that are healthier and more productive.

In economic terms, the forest sector contributes more than AUD\$580 billion to the global economy. In Australia, the forest and wood manufacturing industries generate more than AU\$23.5 billion a year and employ an estimated 64,000 Australians*.

If forests are to continue to deliver the full range of benefits that people and nature are dependent on, they need to be conserved and managed responsibly.

Source: Australian Dept. of Agriculture and Water Resources, 2017

Policy Context: The *NSW Forestry Industry Roadmap* sets out the NSW Government's long-term vision for a sustainable forestry sector. The major reform of the regulatory and policy frameworks governing native forestry in NSW includes a comprehensive review of PNF (closed 15 February 2019), which seeks to balance the sustainable development of the private native timber and agricultural industries while recognising the environmental values of the private forest estate.

Several key factors contribute to the significance of PNF in the region and the subsequent critical nature of addressing existing concerns with the scheme:

- PNF operations are most commonly located in areas of high local and regional ecological significance;
- There is an existing and ongoing increasing trend for lifestyle occupation and use of lands, as opposed to agricultural uses in the region;
- PNF operations can have a significant impact on local infrastructure and commonly occur in locations where the existing infrastructure is not suitable;
- Code assessable impact assessment does not satisfactorily address the significance attributed to ecological values through legislation and policy by local communities in the region;
- The burden of poor implementation of the scheme often falls to local government without a corresponding opportunity to have input to the assessment of proposals for PNF operations with reference to local planning and policy instruments.

Recent Actions: The region comprises 9.7 million hectares of land, with 65 per cent of it forested. Over half (3.4 million hectares) of the region's forests are in private ownership, spread across thousands of individual holdings.

The reforms must ensure sufficient information is provided to the relevant local government authority to enable councils to address community enquiries and concerns regarding PNF operations.

Problem: PNF is a significant issue for local government and local communities. The NR has a disproportionately large number of rare and threatened plants, animals and ecological communities and some of the highest number of invasive plants and pest animals in the State. Historical land clearing has also impacted the amount of effective habitat and connectivity between habitats.

Support and Partnerships: Communities support the need for change. Residents care deeply about conserving and enhancing biodiversity, improving ecosystem health and resilience, using natural resources wisely, and reducing environmental impact of population growth and economic development. NRJO will pursue engagement with:

- Landcare, Local Land Services and community groups
- NSW Office of Environment and Heritage
- NSW Department of Primary Industries
- Forestry Corporation NSW



- NSW Environmental Protection Authority
- Local Aboriginal Land Councils
- Private Landholders

Solution and Actions sought: It is critical that the reform process acknowledges that PNF will only be ecologically sustainable with significant transformation of the existing arrangements, adequate resourcing in proactive monitoring and compliance and definitive action where required.

The basic requirements for a proposed Forest Operation Plan must include:

- identification of the linkages and integration with the existing local road network, including proposed haulage routes.
- land use zoning in accordance with the relevant Local Environmental Plan (map component) and identification and analysis of consistency with, and or any relevant approvals required by, the Plan (written component).
- details (mapped and written components) of proposed management actions to avoid impact on values such as water quality, scenic amenity, retained vegetation and habitat features.
- details (mapped and written components) of proposed management actions to assist regeneration of harvested areas, including preventative and ongoing maintenance actions to be taken with regard to weed establishment.

Additional ways to achieve the desired outcomes could include:

1. Enhanced monitoring and increased compliance activity by authorities
2. Undertake baseline mapping of valuable flora and fauna for respective areas
3. Increased training and resourcing for Private Foresters and potential industry participants to achieve best practice forestry outcomes
4. Regular, formal local roundtables comprising all parties

Benefits will flow from demonstrating a collaborative, integrated approach across all three levels of government and other stakeholders. The increase in private landholder involvement in biodiversity will have a positive impact on the region and our residents assisting to achieve the above goal.



Improved community wellbeing now and into the future

For our region to be able to offer its residents a range of affordable, appropriate housing choices and access to health care, mental health care, aged care and other services that enhance wellbeing



Increased social housing, including crisis and emergency accommodation, to be on par with the State average of 4% of housing stock, within people's community of interest.

Goal: *Strategic Action #4.4* - Increased availability, affordability and choice of housing to meet the needs of current and projected Northern Rivers population.

Background: Every day more than 37,000 people in NSW experience homelessness, and this figure is increasing. Having a safe and secure home is out of reach for too many.

According to the NSW Department of Planning and Environment, by 2036 the population of the NSW NR will have grown by a further 20%.

Housing stress is high in the NR with 13.2% of households in the lowest 40% of incomes paying more than 30% of their gross weekly income on housing costs (16,179 households), compared to 11.7% for NSW (2016 Census). Housing stress is very high among renter households in NR at 38.8% compared to 28.4% for NSW.

Policy Context: The *NSW Homelessness Strategy 2018-2023* sets out the NSW Government's plan to prevent and improve the response to homelessness. It sets the direction for the next five years. This Strategy recognises that homelessness is not just a housing problem, with a person's pathway into homelessness driven by:

- the intersection of structural drivers, (such as housing affordability, labour market forces)
- risk factors (such as financial stress, family breakdown)
- protective factors (such as employment, involvement in community).

On 24 January 2016, the NSW Government announced its 10-year vision for social housing, *Future Directions for Social Housing in NSW*. This involves increasing the number of homes and making the best use of existing ones - a large scale program to build a mix of social, affordable and private homes. The focus is to build integrated communities close to transport, education and support services.

The NSW Government has signed a global agreement '*A Place to Call Home*' founded by the Institute of Global Homelessness, to halve street homelessness across the State by 2025. Premier Gladys Berejiklian and Minister for Social Housing Pru Goward, together with service providers and the City of Sydney, signed the agreement on 13 February at NSW Parliament, making Sydney the tenth city to join the fight against street homelessness. The target to halve street homelessness across the entire State by 2025 is welcomed by NRJO.

Problem: Housing affordability and housing stress are major issues in the NSW NR. Over recent decades house prices and rents have risen faster than incomes, particularly in coastal areas.

- The Northern Rivers has second tightest private rental market in NSW, with an average monthly vacancy rate at 1.2% in the 12 months to December 2018 (REINSW) and over 12,000 households in rental stress according (ABS 2016 Census)
- The Northern Rivers is the least affordable regional area for rental accommodation in the state, with Byron, Ballina, Clarence Valley and The Tweed Shire the four least affordable local government areas in regional NSW. (Affordable Housing Income Gap 2018 Report - Compass Housing)
- Tweed Heads is the eighth least affordable housing market in the world (Demographia, 2017)
- In March 2018 Anglicare found just one rental property in Ballina, one in Byron Bay and no rental properties in Tweed Heads that would be affordable to low income households or people on benefits.
- 6,200 additional social and affordable dwellings are needed in the Northern Rivers region by 2026 (based on *The Everybody's Home Campaign* methodology, *Housing Needs Northern Rivers Housing Study 2018 – North Coast Community Housing*). This is the equivalent of more than 600 per year over 10 years. Half of those will be needed just to clear the current social housing wait list. (John McKenna, CEO North Coast Community Housing)

Support and Partnerships: NRJO is committed to partnering with the NSW Department of Planning and Environment to progress relevant directions in the North Coast Regional Plan 2036, including:

Direction 22: Deliver greater housing supply

Direction 23: Increase housing diversity and choice

Direction 24: Deliver well-planned rural residential housing areas

Direction 25: Deliver more opportunities for affordable housing

Homelessness NSW, NCOSS and Social Futures are requesting action from the State Government on six key pillars arising from the 2018 Northern Rivers Housing Forum:

1. Develop a minimum of 100 additional social housing properties per year for 10 years
2. Quarantine part of the Social and Affordable Housing Fund (SAHF) for regional areas
3. Additional 150 transitional accommodation properties for specialist homelessness services' clients
4. Additional homelessness support funding for Northern Rivers
5. Better quality and higher density Housing NSW properties in appropriate locations
6. Extend existing planning instruments that support affordable housing development to NR LGAs.

Landcom develops award-winning places for the people of NSW, being a state-owned corporation that partners with the private sector to create quality residential communities that demonstrate leadership in sustainable urban development. Landcom is focused on increasing its activity in the regions, taking



an active role in supporting the NSW Government's housing affordability agenda and delivering the local infrastructure that helps new communities grow and thrive.

Solution and Actions sought: In the Northern Rivers 3659 households lived in rented social housing (3%) compared to 4.2% for Regional NSW and 4.4% for the whole of NSW in 2016.

Status Quo: No action by the NSW Govt will impact heavily on NR communities

Small Increase: Will offer wide ranging benefits to NR communities and restore dignity for those in crisis and emergency situations

Increase to 4%: Will put people at the centre and demonstrate equity between the city and the regions





A physically and digitally connected region

For our communities, businesses and visitors to be connected through a diverse range of safe, inclusive, low impact private and public transport options and high quality, reliable internet and mobile telecommunications services.



Accelerated road repair program through doubling the funding of the Commonwealth Government's Roads to Recovery Program and the NSW Government's Regional Roads Repair Program over the next four years.

Goal #6: An efficient, safe and sustainable regional transport system that enables improved productivity, connectivity and social inclusion for businesses, residents and visitors.

Background: The Roads to Recovery Program supports the maintenance of the nation's local road infrastructure asset, which facilitates greater access for Australians and improved safety, economic and social outcomes. From the 2013 to 2014 financial year to the 2021 to 2022 financial year the Australian Government will provide \$4.8 billion under the Roads to Recovery Program.

The REPAIR Program is a *Roads and Maritime Services* grant program providing funding to Local Government for the management and maintenance of Regional Roads, providing funds to assist councils in carrying out larger rehabilitation and development works on Regional Roads, aiming to minimise the long-term maintenance costs of these roads in line with their function and usage.

Policy Context: The *Regional NSW Services and Infrastructure Plan* sets a 40-year vision for transport in regional NSW to support liveable communities and productive economies. The aspiration for regional NSW is to maximise its potential recognising the diversity between regions in their natural assets, individual communities, local skills and globally competitive industries. The **vision for regional NSW** is a safe, efficient and reliable network of transport services and infrastructure that recognises and reinforces the vital role of regional cities such as **Lismore** as hubs for services, employment and social interaction for their surrounding communities. Achieving this vision will require an integrated whole-of-government approach, working in partnership with local communities and stakeholders to deliver integrated transport networks and places that best meet the needs of our wide range of customers. The NSW Government's *Regional Development Framework* provides an overall vision across Government for regional development in NSW and acts as a point of reference for work such as *Future Transport 2056*.

Should the Nationals be elected, they have announced in February 2019 that cost shifting will be addressed by establishing a process to take back up to 15,000km of the 'Regional Road' network. NRJO councils will require input into the independent expert panel that will determine a process, cost and timeline to take back these regional roads.

Achievements and changes needed to achieve the goal: Transport plays a key role and the NR has some important links in place including several regional airports, upgraded sections of the Pacific Highway and access to external markets through the Gold Coast International Airport and the Port of Brisbane.

Unfortunately, transport shortfalls remain. Many communities have no access to public transport and poor quality roads limit tourism, safety and the movement of freight.

Problem: The financial information is compiled from council annual statutory returns. The NRMA has highlighted the infrastructure backlog issues with regional data highlighting the problem:

- The North Coast had the biggest infrastructure shortfall at \$16.6m
- The North Coast is one of the top five infrastructure backlog regions. The combined infrastructure backlog in these regions totals \$1.29b representing 77% of the total regional backlog and 57.3% of total NSW backlog.
- North Coast region has the highest infrastructure backlog estimate at \$437.8m, being 26% of the total backlog.

A good quality transportation network requires ongoing and increased investment, which is vital to a region achieving its economic growth potential and so enabling the appropriate regional development for the NR that is envisaged and embodied within the *Northern Rivers and Tweed Transport Plans* and corresponding *Regional Economic Development Strategies*.

Support and Partnerships: A collaboration between Regional Development Australia – Northern Rivers, DPC and Southern Cross University is producing a *NR Freight and Supply Chain Strategy*. The study included extensive stakeholder engagement, with the study being enriched by the valued local input from producers, manufacturers, council staff and industry bodies. The study has explored what is needed for resilience of the system and the following issues must be addressed and resourced:

- Flooding risk and improved immunity of structures and particular routes
- Impact of vehicle accidents/incidents on the transport system and the need for alternate routes and options
- Bushfire impacts both on transport systems and transport systems that provide improved ability to combat bushfires
- Dealing with congestion points and drivers
- Vehicle type selections and route approvals
- Opportunities for building in redundancy and/or additional transport options of similar or equal efficiency



NRJO will represent the region's interests in the *Transport for NSW*-led process to develop region-specific, place-based and corridor plans for the NR, with a focus on:

- Improved connectivity between regional centres, including east-west connectivity
- More public, community and active transport options
- Use of innovative technology and materials in transport options
- Low emissions transport

Solution and Actions sought: As demonstrated in the attached table of NRJO member councils (Special Schedule 7 of Annual Financial Statements), the total estimated cost to bring infrastructure to satisfactory standard is **\$123,485,000**.

NRJO has agreed that a doubling of the two key roads programs is needed for a satisfactory standard.



Estimated Cost to Bring to Satisfactory Standard	Sealed roads	Unsealed roads	Bridges	Footpaths	Totals
Kyogle Council	2,793,000	3,158,000	6,807,000	26,000	12,784,000
Tweed Shire Council	6,639,000	101,000	16,000	606,000	7,362,000
Byron Shire Council	24,037,000	1,045,000	6,274,000	550,000	31,906,000
Ballina Shire Council	628,000	216,000	717,000	46,000	1,607,000
Lismore City Council	47,106,000	5,868,000	9,820,000	773,000	63,567,000
Richmond Valley Council	5,135,000	294,000	830,000	-	6,259,000
Total for the NRJO Member Councils in the Region					\$123,485,000



Innovative, sustainable energy, water and waste management

For our region to establish itself as a leader in renewable energy production; effective, sustainable water management; and innovative approaches to waste management to improve environmental and service delivery outcomes



Removal or redistribution of the Waste Levy

Goal: *Strategic Action #10.3* - Increased recycling, reduced landfill and improved, cost-effective service delivery through collaborative, innovative approaches to waste management.

Background: The *Protection of the Environment Operations Act 1997* (POEO Act) requires certain licensed waste facilities to pay a contribution to the NSW Government for each tonne of waste received at the facility.

Waste and recycling management is a major responsibility for councils, and is significant socially, environmentally and economically. As a region in the NR we face a future impacted by waste disposal challenges related to pressure on landfill and a changing recycling industry.

In 2016/17, the NSW Gov't collected \$726 million from LG, community, businesses and industry via the waste levy, but only committed to use \$72 million on waste avoidance and recycling in 2017-18.

Policy Context: In NSW, waste activities and strategy are primarily governed by the State under the direction of the NSW Environment Protection Authority (EPA). Local councils aim to meet State government targets and are usually responsible for the collection and disposal of waste.

Regional groups, such as North East Waste, provide support to Councils and help facilitate collaboration and resource sharing. At a Federal level there exists a National Waste Policy but the day to day operations of waste management are generally governed at a State and Local Government level. Other new legislation impacting on waste management in NSW and also in Queensland is the introduction of the Container Deposit Scheme in December 2017.

It is imperative that LG has a 'seat at the table' in setting future policy direction on the waste levy.

What has been achieved: Under the State Government's *Waste Less Recycle More* initiative, a number of challenges have been met. Significant progress has been made in areas such as organics collection and processing, managing household problem wastes, waste avoidance and improved engagement of the commercial sector. However, many challenges remain. NRJO councils are part of North East Waste (NEW), a voluntary regional waste group, formed in 1997.

In 2013 a Regional Waste Strategy was developed in collaboration with Councils to set the strategic direction of waste management through a coordinated and collaborative approach that optimises skills and resource sharing opportunities. NEW has an updated Strategy to guide the region in 2017-2021.

It is the firm view of Councils that a great deal can be achieved by the desired policy changes.

Problem: In NSW, councils manage an estimated 3.5 million tonnes of waste generated by residents each year.

Councils across the state work tirelessly to reduce the amount of waste ending up in landfill. According to Environment Protection Authority's Local Gov't Waste and Resource Recovery Data, some councils are achieving up to 77% diversion of waste from landfill.

To achieve these outcomes, councils are dedicating effort across the waste and recycling process to:

- Collect an ever-increasing variety of materials for recycling
- Provide improved waste and recycling education and communication to the community
- Process waste in new ways to increase recycling, decrease reliance on landfills and avoid other environmental impacts.

Support and Partnerships: There is a good strategic alignment between this advocacy area and *the North Coast Regional Plan 2036*, changes to the waste levy would enable pursuit of the following directions:

Direction 4: promote renewable energy opportunities

Direction 5: strengthen communities of interest and cross regional relationships

Direction 21: Coordinate local infrastructure delivery

Support from Local Government NSW's campaign, Save Our Recycling, so that 100% of the Waste Levy collected by the NSW Gov't be reinvested in waste avoidance, recycling and resource recovery.

DPC has advised that that State Gov't. wants to see 'region-changing projects' and DPC is keen to participate in innovative projects such as the Richmond Valley's Energy from Waste Proposal considered by the NRJO General Managers in December 2018.

There is broad community support for change, with the NR region being an outstanding example of a committed community in terms of responsible waste management.

Solution and Actions Sought: Adopting innovative and sustainable approaches to waste will play a vital role in allowing the NR to continue delivery of essential services to regional residents.

That the NSW Government be called upon to ensure that 100% of the levy arising from Section 88 of the Protection of the Environment Operations Act 1997 be used for waste infrastructure and programs, predominantly by local government and the waste sector, for initiatives such as:



- Development of regional and region-specific solutions for sustainable waste management (e.g. soft plastic recycling facilities, green waste, waste to energy).
- Support innovative solutions to reduce waste and waste transport requirements.
- Protect existing and identify new waste management locations.
- Local community waste recovery and repair facilities.
- Funding a wider range of sustainability initiatives, such as marketing and strategies, that promote and support a circular economy.

Above motion unanimously endorsed at the Local Government NSW (LGNSW) 2018 Conference.

Status Quo: No action by the NSW Govt will negatively impact Councils and NR communities

Redistribution of Waste Levy: 100% of waste levy returned and reinvested by Councils will enable opportunities for implementation of pilot or demonstration projects to establish the NR as a 'Centre of Excellence' for innovative waste processing and to realise the potential for economic growth, new infrastructure, new technology and new jobs, particularly in our regional areas.

Removal of Waste Levy: Will enable Councils to direct monies where needed in the budget process to resolve the issue of waste collection and processing.





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A diversified, prosperous and sustainable regional economy

For our region to have a strong, diversified economy that provides increased employment and business opportunities and financial wellbeing for communities while protecting and maintaining our region's unique character



Advocate for change
<p>Goal: A strong, diverse regional economy which provides local employment by attracting new enterprises, enabling existing enterprises to innovate and expand, and offering the conditions required for emerging industries to flourish</p> <p>Increased contribution to the regional economy from tourism and dispersal of tourists across the region, while protecting the Northern Rivers' unique character, environment and quality of life</p> <p>Increased contribution to the regional economy from tourism and dispersal of tourists across the region, while protecting the Northern Rivers' unique character, environment and quality of life</p>
<p>Background The nub of the issue and basic explanation. Cite evidence.</p>
<p>Policy Context</p>
What has been done and understand what changes are needed to achieve the goal?
<p>Problem What is the problem and what is the evidence base? What groups are affected? How are they impacted? To what extent?</p>
<p>Support and Partnerships Broad community support? Which other groups are key stakeholders and partners in support of the need for change.</p>
<p>Solution and Actions sought Demonstrate benefits of changes and positive impact on the region and our residents. Draw analogies with other areas where similar changes have been made and provide stats to back up. Compelling case and call to action.</p>



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United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) Biosphere Reserve

Goal #13:

Increased contribution to the regional economy from tourism and dispersal of tourists across the region, while protecting the Northern Rivers' unique character, environment and quality of life.

Policy Context:

Policy makers need to ensure better integration of diverse community interests, so that understanding and cooperation are encouraged, and mutual interests and objectives are defined and pursued. Communities are often characterised by very diverse and at times conflicting interests. Priorities may differ between industries and small-scale farming; between individual landowners and public land managers; between multiple levels and sectors of government. Policy makers are thus challenged to consider these interests while forging policies that are fair and encourage the community's long-term well-being. This is all the more difficult because many communities are excessively exploiting local natural resources for both local uses and global markets, consequently jeopardising the resource base for future generations – this trend is reflected in the local area and is a significant concern to our communities.

Strategic Context:

As the operating platform of the NRJO is one of advocacy for communities through collaborative action, the Board members consider it important for a range of measures to be used when assessing funding proposals. One example is *Strategic Merit Test*, where alignment of the proposal with stakeholder directions and strategic context is weighted more highly than pure economic efficiency grounds.

NRJO will partner with the *NSW Department of Planning and Environment* to progress Direction 8 of the *North Coast Regional Plan 2036* to sustainably 'promote the growth of tourism'. (NRJO Strategic Action #13.1)

NRJO will deepen the relationship with *Destination North Coast* to facilitate regional input into:

- Tourism planning and development
- Regional branding and promotion

Problem:

In the area, the bulk of tourist activity, together with its benefits and pressures, is centred in a few small areas. The task now is to make the most of our opportunities in the region – to grow tourism sustainably in ways that minimise impact and maximise benefit to our region as a whole.

Solution and Actions sought:

Biosphere reserves encourage economies that are based on the sustainable and wise use of regional natural and human resources; they foster a long-term perspective and strive for economic stability based on efficiency, diversity and equity. They promote income and employment opportunities and the balance between consumption and production.

With the benefits of promotion of this international status, the NR could increase high quality tourism product and sustainable tourism growth.

NRJO seeks \$100,000 to proceed with an application, obtain approval and gain the internationally significant designation.

