



EcoNetwork Port Stephens

PO Box 97
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21 November 2021

Port Stephens Council Election 2021 Candidates' Responses to EcoNetwork Questions

Questions to candidates were emailed 13 November to all candidates for whom emails were publicly available, which included at least a representative for all grouped candidates, with the Peter Kafer group for West Ward emailed 17 November when an email was located. Responses were requested by 19 November.

EcoNetwork Port Stephens thanks all candidates (similarly highlighted below) who took the time and care to share with our community their position on important aspects of the environment.

Unfortunately the non highlighted candidates did not share their views on the environment in our LGA with EcoNetwork Port Stephens.

Candidate response for each question is provided in full, and organised by question for ease of comparison, in the order shown below. with the Mayoral Candidates leading the responses.

Of the Mayoral candidates, EcoNetwork Port Stephens received a response from Leah Anderson, and not from Ryan Palmer.

East Ward — grouped candidates

- Group A (Liberal): Matthew Bailey, Jaimie Abbott, Madison Sorensen
- **Group B (Labor): Leah Anderson, Roz Armstrong, Chris Bastic**
- Group C: Ryan Palmer (Independent), Glen Dunkley, Bruce Scott, Natalie Vogtmann, Nicholas Diemar

Central Ward — grouped candidates

- Group A: Steve Tucker (Independent), Sean Brennan and Helen Tucker
- Group B: Chris Doohan (Independent), Ben Niland, Holly Doohan
- **Group C (The Greens): Caitlin Spiller, Michael Collins, Ross Hampton**
- **Group D (Labor): Jason Wells, Kelly Hammond, Kim Oakhill**

Central Ward — ungrouped candidates

- **Bill Doran (Independent)**

West Ward — grouped candidates

- Group A: Peter Kafer (Independent), Lea Smith, Reyna Smith
- **Group B (Labor): Giacomo Arnott, Peter Francis, Vicki McLaughlin**

West Ward — ungrouped candidates

- Monique Malone (Independent)
- Danielle Le Mottee (Independent)
- **Christopher Baguley (Independent)**
- Andrew Cole (Independent)

Please note that the colour above for each respondent is used below to assist you to readily identify respondents between questions.

Question 1 – Environment and Climate Change

What do you think are the greatest risks to the Port Stephens LGA’s habitat and community from climate change? How would you advocate to help minimise those risks?

Leah Anderson, Mayoral candidate, and on behalf of the Labor Groups for Central, East and West wards

Coastal erosion is one of the most obvious signs of climate change here in Port Stephens. We are losing land from our beaches, cliffs, and other water-facing areas across the whole local government area, from Fingal Bay all the way to Karuah, Swan Bay and Lemon Tree Passage.

Increasing incidents of floods and bushfires will impact our native flora and fauna and their habitat and has the capacity to put lives of residents at risk if we do not consider these issues in the planning decisions we make.

Council can minimise these risks by firstly doing its part to reduce emissions and combat climate change. To deal with coastal erosion, proper mapping needs to be undertaken, and strategies need to be planned for and implemented ASAP to protect our coastlines from further erosion.

Floods and bushfire impacts can be minimised by reducing the urban interface with known areas of major flood and bushfire risk, but also by working with land agencies to reduce fuel loads and implement strategies to reduce the risk to our built and natural environments.

As Mayor Leah Anderson “will form a Community Climate Advisory Group” to work with Council.

Caitlin Spiller Greens lead candidate — Central Ward

Terrestrially I see the impacts that drought and increased heat are already having on our vegetation, many old established eucalyptus and other species are suddenly dying. There is evidence that the stress on vegetation caused by drought and heat is causing decreasing nutritional value in the leaves and flowers that our wildlife depends on. Increased storm activity is damaging and felling native vegetation too, and we are experiencing more frequent and more intense bush fires.

For our marine habitat the more frequent and severe storms are damaging our sea floor habitat such as seagrasses and soft coral, as has occurred in our Bay, and the increasing water temperatures will also threaten the plant and animal life. Rising sea level and storm surges threaten inundation and disturbs the balance of coastal ecological communities such as mangroves.

How would you advocate to help minimise those risks?

Our Council has a responsibility to implement climate change action and mitigation strategies, which has begun by the recent move for Council operations to become carbon neutral by 2025 and development of a Coastal Management Plan. I would work to ensure both these are given priority for implementation.

Regarding habitat specifically, as a priority I will move to reinstate and strengthen an effective Tree Management Policy that discourages tree removal, educates the community in the many benefits of trees, ensures there are staff to assess, advise and police the policy and has Council actively supporting planting and revegetation programmes.

I support a marine research and education facility for the Tomaree headland that will enable regular assessment and research aimed at addressing and minimizing the impacts of climate change on our marine and coastal environment.

I would also advocate for the protection of both terrestrial and marine habitat against development pressures and damaging activities.

Bill Doran Independent ungrouped — Central Ward,

Start with the easy questions first. Personally, I believe the greatest risk to our LGA is community apathy and complacency. While what we do here won't have a direct impact upon climate change now, it will set the foundation of our impact for generations to come.

We won't stop rising sea levels or directly reduce the global temperature. However, we can reduce the severity of bush fires, we can proactively support renewables, we can improve the "Lungs" of the earth and we can save our unique fauna and flora.

How would you advocate to help minimise those risks?

To do this we need to understand that the survival of our ecosystem will depend upon give and take. Without this attitude we are destined to fail.

- i. **Bush Fires:** One of the biggest direct impacts of climate change is the severity and increasing longevity of our Bush Fire Seasons. While storms and flooding are another consequence of climate change, drought and fire present a far greater threat in my eyes. Droughts last years, making the environment more susceptible to firestorms. While droughts kill flora and fauna alike, firestorms do so to a much greater degree while filling the atmosphere with carbon dioxide at unimaginable levels.

To combat this, I would advocate the introduction of mandatory fire breaks be placed around the boundaries of all non-residential properties in the LGA. This would include council-controlled crown land. Our current system of using voluntary codes and standards such as the "10/50 Vegetation Clearing" and the "Asset Protection Zones" respectively, are not achieving what they need to any longer.

Mandatory systems are needed to reduce the ability of bush fires from spreading unabated and fire breaks are a system developed by the indigenous people of Australia millennium ago and embraced by the early settlers to protect their property and the environment on which they relied.

I would also advocate limited removal of fallen timber by the public and more frequent back burning on crown land. I understand the controversial nature of these proposals but once again this is a strategy used by the indigenous people of Australia for millennium. By doing this the fires that do get into our bush would be much "COLDER" than what we have seen in recent years. Colder fire tends not to get into the canopy thus giving fauna added refuges and greatly reducing the intensity of the fire. Finally, less intense fires are also safer for our emergency services personnel and one life saved would make it all worthwhile.

- ii. **Renewables:** This is part of that "Give and Take" strategy. With the ever increasing up take of solar within our community's, council need to help those in the position to install it. Firstly, people need to understand that an unshaded solar system generates much more renewable and green energy than one that is in the shade, regardless of the type of system being used.

As such I would advocate that council be proactive in mediating between neighbours in disputes over trees which impact upon solar systems. Don't get me wrong, I'm not talking about the wholesale removal of trees, just the maintenance of trees to ensure solar systems get the chance to reduce as much coal fired power as is possible. Every tonne less of coal burnt to keep you're A/C going is a tonne less for the environment to cope with. I'll admit that I have a personal interest in this subject, as I have a neighbour who doesn't like to trim trees even though the trees in question provide little or no shade on their property. I often wonder if the excess power my system returns to the grid is running their A/C day after day in winter and summer?

Council can also look at investing in other types of renewables through joint ventures with universities, research foundations and the private sector. There are many, many technologies out there that simply need a proving ground and would benefit the entire community, so let Port Stephens become that centre of innovation.

- iii. **“Lungs”** of the earth: With the deplorable news about the PFAS Zone being reduced significantly we as a community need to take stock and look for any opportunities that can be gained from this. I believe there to be two, possibly three very real opportunities that will benefit those residents involved, the LGA and our future if supported by the council.

With the government reducing the PFAS zone by more than 90% that opens almost 9,000 hectares to establish a growth industry (pardon the pun) in trees. If this affected zone is planted with three different crops Port Stephens can develop several new industries.

Firstly, mass plantings of Koala feed trees will not only help our endangered Koala population, but it will also mean we can transplant semi-mature trees into Koala corridors and habitats allowing for better tree survival rates. Such mass plantings also allow for the development of a local Carbon Credit industry which the council could share in, adding a new revenue source outside of rates.

Another industry council could actively support in this zone is the establishment of native wild flowers for the export industry. We have masses of space, and the airport is smack bang in the middle of it. I’m not sure how council could participate in such a venture, but it may be as simple as removing the red tape surrounding getting an industry off the ground!

Finally, the zone could be planted with a giant bamboo species. This is a sustainable resource which is extremely fast growing and can be used as an alternative to many wood products. For example, council could negotiate a joint venture with Weathertex in Heatherbrae to use bamboo in some of its products or develop new products that use bamboo exclusively.

Bamboo can be used to replace wood pulp, it can be used as a building material, and for making fabric. Imagine being at the centre of an industry that stopped the removal of old growth forests. Now that would be an achievement.

Chris Baguley Independent ungrouped — West Ward

Many thanks for the opportunity to answer your questionnaire. Further action at a local level is important to me, especially given the lack of action from our federal politicians. I look forward to being able to represent our region and deliver where I can on addressing climate change within Port Stephens.

With such a varied ecology, the Port Stephens LGA faces unique challenges when it comes to Climate Change. Sea Level rises will lead to coastal erosion, and upstream impacts to boot, with increased flooding to be expected along the Williams and Hunter Rivers. On top of that, our rural areas will suffer further droughts, increased risk of catastrophic bushfires in our forested areas and further wild weather events and ECL’s affecting the entire region.

How would you advocate to help minimise those risks?

At a local level, and with a reluctance from our federal government, it is largely up to individual action. I see councils role to encourage this through leading by example. This includes ensuring that the plan to have council be carbon neutral by 2025 is achieved, through real means such as solar installations on council buildings and fleet replacement, and not accounting tricks and offsets.

Further than that, we need to work to de-stigmatise and de-politicise actions on climate change, incentivise installation of green energy options for property owners, work to the creation of public and private VPP’s.

Given the status of Raymond Terrace as a convenient rest stop on the Sydney to Brisbane Pacific Highway route, EV charging infrastructure installed within town centre to encourage stop off and expenditure during recharges, for vehicles besides Teslas.

Question 2 – Tree management, habitat corridors for koalas and other wildlife

Would you support developing and enacting a plan to identify and rehabilitate potential wildlife corridors and habitat connectivity throughout the LGA? If so, what would be your priorities here?

Leah Anderson, Mayoral candidate, and on behalf of the Labor Groups for Central, East and West wards

Yes, our team supports the development and implementation of a plan to identify and rehabilitate potential wildlife corridors and habitat connectivity and in doing so acknowledges the value of a plan such as that proposed by EcoNetwork, Friends of Tomaree National Park and the recently formed Koala Koalition.

Our priorities are to:

- Stop the decimation of the Port Stephens Koala and other flora and fauna through the removal of corridor habitat that is occurring in the context of unsympathetic development.
- Review of Tree Management Policy
- Preserving and wherever possible increasing tree cover throughout the LGA to protect and enhance native wildlife habitat and connecting corridors.

Caitlin Spiller Greens lead candidate — Central Ward

Yes, and I am a founding member of the Koala Koalition Eco Network Port Stephens (KKEPS) for which this is a primary objective.

If so, what would be your priorities here?

To continue to work with KKEPS in their activities aimed to achieve this by protecting what habitat corridors remain - via submissions against habitat removal, working to increase the Koala's status to endangered (to help expedite protection), seeking the government purchase of key land parcels, working with stakeholders to update vegetation and koala activity mapping and including all these in a new and strengthened Koala Plan of Management (CKPoM).

If elected I would support a more active CKPoM Committee and work with staff to provide resources to get the required funding, obtain and collate accurate and current info, draft the revised plan and receive State approval ASAP.

Bill Doran Independent ungrouped — Central Ward,

I believe my response to the first question outlines my position on this matter. The maintenance of wildlife habitat and the corridors necessary for their safe movement is paramount to see our unique fauna and flora survive us.

And as such I would fully support any realistic measures necessary to see that happen.

If so, what would be your priorities here?

I have already outlined major strategies to achieve the preservation of habitat. Some may appear in opposition to each other however, it's part of the "Give and Take" rationale.

There are other priorities that I would advocate for and which I believe are achievable by council and in the limited term that this new council would have. Firstly, I would advocate a joint volunteer and council project to identify and map as many Koala feed trees within the LGA as possible. I would model such a project on the "Aussie Backyard Bird Count" and would endeavour to achieve an initial, meaningful map within 12 months.

Secondly, I would advocate the introduction of a policy to stop the infilling or sale of public green spaces across the LGA. Communities should feel safe in the knowledge that the small reserves hidden in many of the older suburbs will not one day be replaced by dozens of housing units. These green spaces are where our local flora and fauna thrive and will continue if left be, except for common sense maintenance in and around these spaces to protect property and life.

Finally, I would advocate a mandatory ban on uncontrolled pets such as cats. Initially, I would advocate that cats are banned from being left or let out at night. Such a policy would see less predators available to attack our local fauna. We are cat owners, and our cats are always kept inside, it's easy to do, especially if you care for our natural environment.

Chris Baguley Independent ungrouped — West Ward

Yes, most definitely

If so, what would be your priorities here?

Work with with state counterparts to continue to push against habitat destruction

Community engagement / work closer with conservation societies, Oak vale etc

Push for environmental assessments to include real impact assessment of developments, consult with community before unilaterally making the call to cull wildlife, even if that wildlife is "invasive" (referring to the lack of consultation before sending out letters to residents with no context for the proposed deer cull here).

Question 3 – Marine and coastal protection

What do you think are the greatest risks to protecting our marine and coastal environments?
How would you advocate for protecting these areas?

Leah Anderson, Mayoral candidate, and on behalf of the Labor Groups for Central, East and West wards

The greatest risk to coastal protection and marine health is climate change and the impact this has on:

- Coastal inundation
- Coastal erosion
- Dune Transgression
- Water temperature.

The NSW Coastal Management Act (2016) requires local governments to develop and adopt a Coastal Management Plan. Port Stephens Council has yet to complete this process and our priority would be to do so and to work with State and Federal Grants to implement it.

We would work with Maritime authorities to manage risks posed to marine life by unregulated watercraft and local businesses to eradicate the use of plastic utensils on our beaches.

Caitlin Spiller Greens lead candidate — Central Ward

Climate change - sea level rise and increased storms causing inundation of low lying areas and erosion of the coast line, warming and storms to habitat, storms causing sand movements.

Development, tourism and recreational pressures and activities.

How would you advocate for protecting these areas?

How I would advocate for strategies to address climate change is discussed above (Q1).

I would encourage Council to lobby against the proposed removal of marine sanctuaries protection by the State Government.

I would work with stakeholders and the community to ensure a balance between recreational activities on and around water ways and essential habitat protections.

I would be wary of approving developments in areas that are likely to be impacted by sea level rise and flooding.

Bill Doran Independent ungrouped — Central Ward,

I believe the greatest risk is the lack of Policing, it's that simple. We have more than enough regulation in place to deal with all the fundamental issue facing our marine and coastal environments.

We have noise limits for marine craft, we have speed limits for marine craft and 4X4's using our beaches and we have the same for quad's. What we don't have is enough State provided Police, Parks and Wildlife Rangers or Fisheries Inspectors to enforce the laws.

How would you advocate for protecting these areas?

I would advocate a campaign against the lack of state services during peak periods. For instance, I would propose a council lead petition to be presented to state parliament asking for more staff over those periods when our population swells dramatically because of the influx of tourists and visitors.

Whether they do this through contracts or moving current staff from other, quieter locations I wouldn't care, just as long as there was more presence here. For example, move part of the mounted police unit here over summer, great for police public relations and an increased presence.

Get the state government to approve council staff, with support from a third part such as the Newcastle University, to conduct noise level checks on Jetskis and Quad bikes as they are brought into launching locations. In the case of Quad bikes that are not registered, send them home and notify the police.

Introduce a Jetski and Quad/Trailbike permit system similar to that used for 4x4's on Stockton Beach. That way noise levels and serviceability can be assessed at the time of issue, eliminating the irresponsible users, protecting our environment and making life better for locals and visitors alike.

The state governments usual excuse for a lack of staff is money, so fix that by making the fines for breaking these laws cover those costs. Nothing works more to deter most individuals than a sizable fine.

We can continue to restrict and regulate people, but it means nothing if you can't police it.

Chris Baguley Independent ungrouped — West Ward

Overdevelopment leading to erosion and increased pollution levels.

How would you advocate for protecting these areas?

Again, true environmental impact assessments, balanced approach to the needs of recreational areas, and much more investment into minimally invasive water based activities.

Question 4 – Community engagement

Do you support increasing the amount and quality of two-way engagement with community groups?

Leah Anderson, Mayoral candidate, and on behalf of the Labor Groups for Central, East and West wards

Yes. We would:

- Require Councillors to report their attendance at community meetings each quarter under our plan to improve transparency and community engagement.
- Extend public consultation by default for controversial matters
- Record Councillor Votes
- Return to advertising significant DA and other matters in local papers
- Provide direct email notification to community groups of matters affecting their locality
- Provide better facilities for inspection of documents in Council Chambers
- Maintain ability for Questions

Caitlin Spiller Greens lead candidate — Central Ward

Absolutely. The methods and opportunities for consultation need to be broadened to improve access by people wanting to input into decisions or share knowledge and skills.

Bill Doran Independent ungrouped — Central Ward,

Absolutely, we tend to forget that they work for us. If elected, I would endeavour to meet with each community within the Central Ward at least once a month. I would certainly make myself available to meet with anyone who asked and that would include those outside the Central Ward as well.

I believe my relationship with the community is like that with my wife/partner or a family member, if we don't talk to each other, you miss what's important to each other and if you miss what's important to each other the relationship will fail. I've had enough failed relationships and don't need any more.

Chris Baguley Independent ungrouped — West Ward

Yes, 100%

How can community groups support Councillors to balance pressure for growth with the wider public interest in maintaining the natural environment?

Leah Anderson, Mayoral candidate, and on behalf of the Labor Groups for Central, East and West wards

- Provide informative briefing notes on matters affecting them
- Encourage genuine interaction on a regular basis not only in a consultative and informative rather than confrontational manner
- Understand that Council needs to balance competing priorities
- Provide Council with information about Community Members expertise.

Caitlin Spiller Greens lead candidate — Central Ward

I think that if more people accessed and participated in consultation that this in turn assists councillors in knowing what's important to the community and therefore in being able to truly represent them.

I don't believe people are against growth as such but are rightly concerned with the type and quality of development, how suitable and sustainable it is, whether it's in keeping with the existing environment and community character and that it respects the environment e.g. in housing developments not clear felling, but maintaining the best habitat as green spaces, corridors and trees - co-existing with our natural environment. Developers and business should be encouraged and given the opportunity to have a social and environment conscience and Council has a vital role in ensuring they do.

Bill Doran Independent ungrouped — Central Ward,

In my opinion, the best way community groups can support council with any of the issues faced by a local government is to be flexible in their expectations and offer solutions not simply highlight problems. The more solutions on offer the greater the chances a mutually beneficial outcomes being achieved.

Balancing growth with public interest can be achieved through greater transparency, better social awareness and less greed.

Chris Baguley Independent ungrouped — West Ward

Continued education programs, consultation, push back against development for developments sake. Correct application of LEP with regards to developments, as above, more investment into green spaces for recreational activities.

EcoNetwork Port Stephens is a grassroots community-based environmental and sustainability network comprising individual members and about 30 community environment groups and eco-businesses. We are non-party political. Our focus is on eco-living to help communities and neighbourhoods move toward a more sustainable future to ensure the transfer of intact eco-systems to future generations.

EcoNetwork Affiliates:

Businesses: Destination Port Stephens • Imagine Cruises • Irukandji Shark & Ray Encounters • Salamander Recycling • **Community groups:** Boomerang Park Preservation Group • Climate Action Port Stephens • EcoPollinators Port Stephens • Friends of Tomaree National Park • Hunter Valley Botanic Gardens • Mambo Wanda Wetlands Reserves & Landcare Committee • Mambo-Wanda Wetlands Conservation Group • Myall Koala & Environmental Support Group Inc. • National Parks Association (Hunter) • North Arm Cove Residents Assoc. Inc. • Ocean and Coasts Community Initiative (OCCI) • Pindimar Bundabah Community Association • Plastic Free Port Stephens • Port Stephens Marine Parks Association • Port Stephens Native Flora Gardens • Shoal Bay Community Association Inc. • Soldiers Point Community Group • Soldiers Point-Salamander Bay Tidy Towns Inc • South Tomaree Community Association Inc • Tilligerry Habitat Association Inc. • Tomaree Birdwatchers • Tomaree Community Garden • Tomaree Museum Association • Tomaree Ratepayers & Residents Association Inc • Voice of Wallalong, Woodville & surrounds (VOWW) @Nov21