

# ANNUAL REPORT

## 2022 - 2023



### Overview

For EcoNetwork Port Stephens the 2022 - 2023 reporting period was significant for two reasons. Firstly, in September 2022 we delivered the inaugural Sustainable Futures Festival where over 1000 people attended and 94% of people surveyed had a positive experience. The second reason was that we celebrated our 30th Anniversary since the launch of the organisation in 1993. Founding life member Darryl Dawson received the Freeman of Port Stephens award and was the special guest at a gathering of past and present committee members at a special lunch held in February. Celebrating 30 years of advocacy, action and education for the environment was a theme celebrated at every event or activity across the year.

In summary, over the past 12 months EcoNetwork has:

- advocated for environmentally responsible decision-making by writing over 11 submissions, giving 2 presentations, briefing local representatives on 2 occasions and appearing in 7 newspaper articles that influenced the final outcome in a favourable way on at least seven of these occasions.
- supported over 50 affiliates and members achieve their aspirations by providing networking opportunities, promoting events and increasing their profile through the website and the EcoUpdate e-publication which had an 86% increase in subscribers.
- advocated successfully to have the Port Stephens Council pass a motion to investigate Ramsar listing for the Mambo-Wanda wetlands
- increased knowledge as part of the Festival where Professor Veena Sahajwalla, the 2022 NSW Australian of the Year, headed up an impressive program of presentations including experts in community power, energy efficient homes, sustainable gardening, interior design, recycled plastic and electric vehicles
- connected local community groups and businesses with research and innovation expertise resulting in Salamander Bay Recycling negotiating a partnership agreement with the University of NSW for a new recycling technology that may have practical applications locally
- supported the progression of St Philip's Christian College and Tomaree High School towards sustainability. St Philip's strengthened their recycling program and Tomaree's sustainability and environment program was revitalised as a result of the festival.
- raised sufficient funds to place the organisation in a secure financial position. The fundraising efforts associated with the Festival in combination with frugal financial management has meant that EcoNetwork has been able to support local initiatives and secure expertise for educational workshops for the next financial year.

Over the next 12 months and beyond we are aspiring to improve by:

- understanding more about how we can better represent the needs of our affiliates and members
- developing partnerships to build on the momentum of the inaugural Sustainable Futures Festival
- building our internal operational systems around our membership database and technology systems
- harnessing our potential to proactively develop into a hub for environmental issues in the area.

### What changes have EcoNetwork contributed towards?

In 2022-23 EcoNetwork contributed to changes in alignment with our goal of promoting *Sustainable Communities* predominantly as a result of the Sustainable Futures Festival. We held the festival between June and September 2022. It culminated with a festival day on 11 September that involved displays, speakers and a

marketplace for innovative technologies and community opportunities that are sustainable and environmentally sound. Over 1000 people attended the festival and 94% of people surveyed indicated they had a positive experience.

Not only did the event create a positive atmosphere for learning about sustainability, but we supported the progression of St Philip's Christian College and Tomaree High School towards sustainability. St Philip's strengthened their recycling program and Tomaree's sustainability and environment program was revitalised as a result of the festival. Both schools expressed interest in working with EcoNetwork more closely for future Festivals. The festival also resulted in stronger links between the schools and the waste management area of Port Stephens Council.

EcoNetwork connected local community groups and businesses with research, innovation and tourism expertise. New technologies developed at the University of NSW may have practical applications locally as Salamander Bay Recycling is negotiating a partnership agreement as a result of introductions that occurred at the festival. EcoNetwork connected local community groups with eco-tour operators and other support organisations. Through the festival, the Friends of Tomaree National Park, met a local tour group Escape EcoAdventures, and committed to an initial partnership of at least three full day events on One Mile Beach and the national park to attract a broader age range into local landcare.

Our network advocated successfully to have the Port Stephens Council pass a motion to investigate Ramsar listing for the Mambo Wanda wetlands. This is after six years of research and lobbying. In November 2016 an EcoNetwork forum called for the establishment of a working group to pursue Ramsar listing for the wetlands. The working group, formed in March 2017, established, after much field work and correspondence with the then NSW Office of Environment and Heritage, that the wetlands fulfilled the necessary criteria for listing. The group had several meetings with Council to obtain support, but progress was frustrated by the onset of Covid and turnover of key Council personnel, necessitating re-briefings. Finally, on 13 June 2023 a motion was put to Council calling on the General Manager to prepare a report on the implications of Ramsar listing. In a Public Access address EcoNetwork advocated support of the motion, which was passed unanimously. The report is expected late in 2023.

EcoNetwork has also been a founding and ongoing partner to the Barrington to Hawkesbury Climate Corridors Alliance. In conjunction with the Hunter Community Environment Centre, we have been active in a campaign to develop climate corridors to protect endangered species and have participated in Ministerial meetings advocating for action in this area.

## To what extent has EcoNetwork effectively advocated?

A key approach of EcoNetwork is to campaign for environmentally responsible decision-making. In 2022-2023 we did this by responding to development proposals, proactively developing policy position statements and representing affiliates on consultation and advisory bodies. EcoNetwork wrote over 11 submissions, gave 2 presentations and briefed local representatives on 2 occasions. On at least seven of these occasions we influenced the final outcome in a favourable way. Many of these submissions were made by EcoNetwork's Special Interest Group Koala Coalition (KKEPS). An example is regarding the Trotters Rd Ingenia development application that resulted in amendments that will enhance the ability of koalas and other wildlife to cross the site. Another was a submission to the Independent Planning Commission that resulted in the rejection of the Martins Creek Quarry expansion.

EcoNetwork developed a position statement on the VOICE referendum and distributed it to all affiliates and members. This was developed into a series of articles in EcoUpdate.

<https://www.econetworkps.org/ecoupdate16/the-voice-referendum-econetwork-update/>

EcoNetwork's advocacy extends to representation on a range of advisory groups. We have executive members represented on the Marine Advisory Committee, on the National Parks and Wildlife Service Hunter Central Coast Branch Regional Advisory Committee. EcoNetwork, along with other groups, advocated for improved liaison with Port Stephens Council on environmental matters. EcoNetwork with groups such as Climate Action

Port Stephens and Tomaree Ratepayers and Residents Association, worked through Councillor Anderson to create a structured and representative Environmental Advisory Group to Port Stephens Council, which was passed by motion in July 2023.

EcoNetwork was featured in the Port Stephens Examiner on several occasions including:

- Promotions associated with gala dinner and Festival
- 'Questions in the wind' associated with the proposed wind turbines
- Promotions associated with the Mambo-Wanda Wetlands tours
- Acknowledgement of Darryl Dawson receiving the Freeman Award
- 30th anniversary celebrations

In the News of the Area, EcoNetwork was mentioned in these stories:

- Promotions associated with gala dinner and Festival
- 'Reducing impacts of light pollution on threatened species'
- Supporting the Renew Hunter Region Branch's Travelling Electric event

Associated with the Festival, EcoNetwork also appeared in The Port Stephens Council Newsletter, CLEANas Newsletter, National Parks Association newsletters, The Newcastle Weekly, Business Port Stephens, Hunter and Coastal Lifestyle, Hunter Business Review, InTouch Magazine and What's on in our backyard.

## To what extent has EcoNetwork increased knowledge or changed behaviour?

EcoNetwork aims to educate the community by sharing information to support environmental sustainability and cultural heritage. EcoNetwork's e-publication EcoUpdate and associated website provides an ongoing source of shared information in an easily digestible and friendly format, increasing knowledge of issues and events in our local community.

Specifically, we increased knowledge and changed behaviours in 2022-23 by delivering educational opportunities and accessing expertise and science-based research. The main educational opportunity EcoNetwork delivered was as part of the Festival. Professor Veena Sahajwalla, the 2022 NSW Australian of the Year, headed up an impressive program of presentations including experts in community power, energy efficient homes, sustainable gardening, interior design, recycled plastic, electric vehicles and much more.

The survey results from the festival revealed:

76% learned about new sustainable practices



■ Agree ■ Disagree or neutral

70% intended to adopt sustainable practices



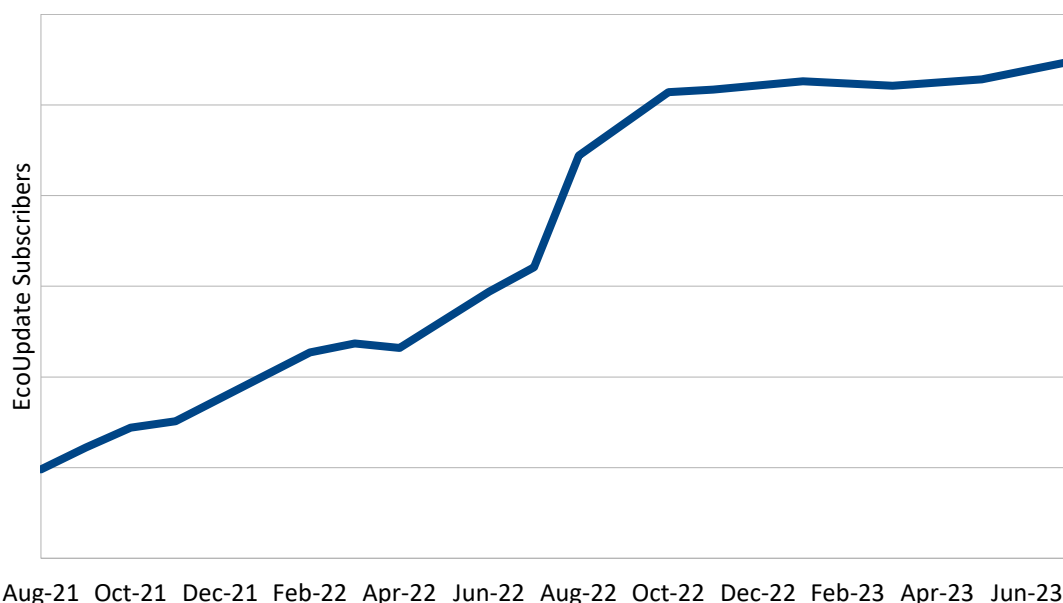
■ Agree ■ Disagree or neutral

## To what extent has EcoNetwork supported the affiliates to achieve their objectives?

Another key role for EcoNetwork is to support our affiliates in achieving their objectives. We aimed to keep affiliates informed about current issues, events and resources through monthly reports, our EcoUpdate e-publication and social media. We also provided networking opportunities, promote affiliates events and campaigns and recognise and promote affiliates on the website. For instance, Friends of Tomaree National Park use the site as an information and advocacy base.

We currently have over 50 affiliates and members. Four new affiliates joined EcoNetwork in the previous 12 months including Rainbird Farm, Boomerang Bags Raymond Terrace, Resourceful Living and Renew - Hunter Branch. EcoNetwork has also enabled and supported formation of special interest groups. Groups such as KKEPS (Koala Coalition EcoNetwork Port Stephens) and EcoPollinators EcoNetwork Port Stephens further enhance the protection of our natural environment and encourage appropriate local gardening and bushland plantings.

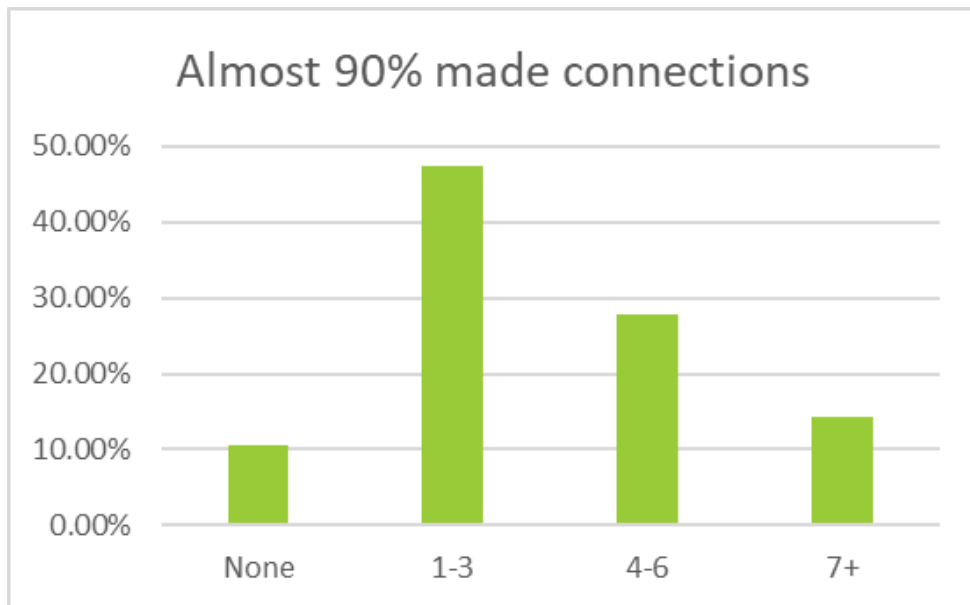
The number of EcoUpdate subscribers increased by 86% in the last year and we initiated a new feature highlighting an affiliate in every edition. A book review section was also added to the e-publication and a community events calendar. The calendar will enable EcoNetwork and affiliates to highlight regular activities and promote special events. <https://www.econetworkps.org/events/>



The website continues to develop and the Sustainable Living section was further populated with progressive articles by several local experts. <https://www.econetworkps.org/sustainable-living/> Website traffic peaked during the lead up to the festival day. Analysis of traffic on EcoNetwork's web page from May until September also revealed a steady increase in hits that peaked on the day of the festival. The pre-registration system for speakers also proved useful for gauging interest and assisting with planning.

During 2022-2023 we created an Instagram account ([www.instagram.com/econetworkps](http://www.instagram.com/econetworkps)) and significantly increased our followers on Facebook ([www.facebook.com/groups/EconetworkPortStephens/](http://www.facebook.com/groups/EconetworkPortStephens/)). The Facebook page 'EcoNetwork PS Community' ([www.facebook.com/EcoNetworkPScommunity/](http://www.facebook.com/EcoNetworkPScommunity/)) achieved a post reach of approximately 11,100 in the 90 days prior to the festival day, representing an increase of nearly 200%. Of the Facebook audience, derived from the likes, women hugely exceed men, 86% compared with 14%. Nearly 60% of the women are 45-64yrs, with 35-44yrs (18%) exceeding 65+ (14%).

A survey question from the evaluation of the festival asked, 'How many groups or businesses did you connect with at the Sustainable Futures Festival that were previously unknown to you?' Almost half of the respondents made at least 1 new connection and over 40% made between 4 and 7 connections.



## To what degree has EcoNetwork conducted the organisation with integrity and transparency?

Over the past 12 months EcoNetwork has aspired to conduct itself with integrity and transparency by engaging with affiliates in meaningful ways, being accountable, developing the diverse network, cooperating with other community-based organisation and aspiring to fairness and equity.

The executive committee have spent time reviewing the strategy that was developed in 2021, articulating how we believe the organisation can affect change and developing a monitoring and evaluation framework to determine the degree to which we are achieving our ambitions (Refer to Appendix 1, 2 and 3). It is our intention to review the strategy on an annual basis and develop an associated workplan. The committee members on the Executive during 2022-2023 reporting period included:

- President Iain Watt
- Vice President Sue Olsson
- Secretary Kathy Brown
- Treasurer Nigel Dique
- Alison Rogers
- Andrew Steel
- Brian Tehan
- Bruce Pease
- Nigel Waters

Tim Meyer also played a key role in further developing the website and provided technological expertise to enable tools that supported the administration of the Festival. His technological skills enabled EcoNetwork to offer a high level of professionalism that assisted with facilitating stallholder applications and promoting the event.

Ewa Meyer as Editor continued to strengthen the EcoUpdate e-publication. The Executive Committee, affiliates, members and subscribers highly value this publication for the wide range of articles, level of detail and quality of information that can be found in each edition. The Executive recognises and greatly appreciates Ewa's ongoing commitment and hard work.

Thanks to financial support from sponsors in combination with fundraising efforts, the festival was financially viable and has placed EcoNetwork in a secure financial position. Frugal financial management overall has meant that EcoNetwork has been able to support initiatives such as investing in local projects and securing expertise for educational workshops for the next financial year. We have purchased a banner that can be used at events and produced a brochure to assist communicate the role and purpose of the network.

Co-operation on events has occurred with the following organisations:

- Climate Action Port Stephens to celebrate the Climate Action Day
- Renew - Hunter Branch - Travelling Electric
- National Park Association - Bush walks held by Friends of Tomaree National Park and Port Stephens Walking Group
- Mambo-Wanda Wetland Tours

EcoNetwork is continually looking for feedback and for ways to improve our working relationship with affiliates. Quotations from affiliates and members include:

- *Being a part of the Eco network for the past year or so has been great! We've got to attend events and meet people we otherwise may have missed. It's awesome that such a group exists in our local area fighting for and highlighting the need to protect and preserve our ecosystem right here at home!*  
Rainbird Farm
- *We appreciate receiving information on what is happening in the Port Stephens area.* Vivien Panhuber  
President (Pindimar Bundabar Community Association)
- *Thank you for the newsletter, Your group is doing very important work in raising awareness of environmental issues in the local community.* Reader of EcoUpdate
- *A totally necessary institution!* Jeannie Lawson (Local poet and environmental activist)
- *We get support and access to expertise from EcoNetwork that results in mutually beneficial collaboration.* Margarete Ritchie President (Voice of Wallalong and Woodville)

## Future aspirations

In the 2023- 2024 reporting period and beyond these are some of the areas that we would like to undertake as part of our commitment to continuous improvement:

- Develop a partnership with another organisation with event management expertise to capitalise on the momentum generated at the successful inaugural Festival
- Review systems to enhancing methods of communication with affiliates and members and enhance the membership database
- Undertake a survey of affiliates and members so we can garner confidential feedback on required improvements
- Further progress as an environmental hub for environmental issues in the area. We intend to expand issues on our website, enable more representation of affiliate groups on our website, and further promote opportunities for all environmental activities offered by our calendar of events.
- Develop our capacity on the executive to proactively developing policy position statements
- Obtain the technological tools that will enable us to make electronic transfers in the field as we can potentially raise more money if we have a way of collecting money by a portable device.

## Appendix 1: How we believe we influence change

Overarching vision: Ecologically sustainable communities existing in harmony with the natural environment.

The change we want to see:

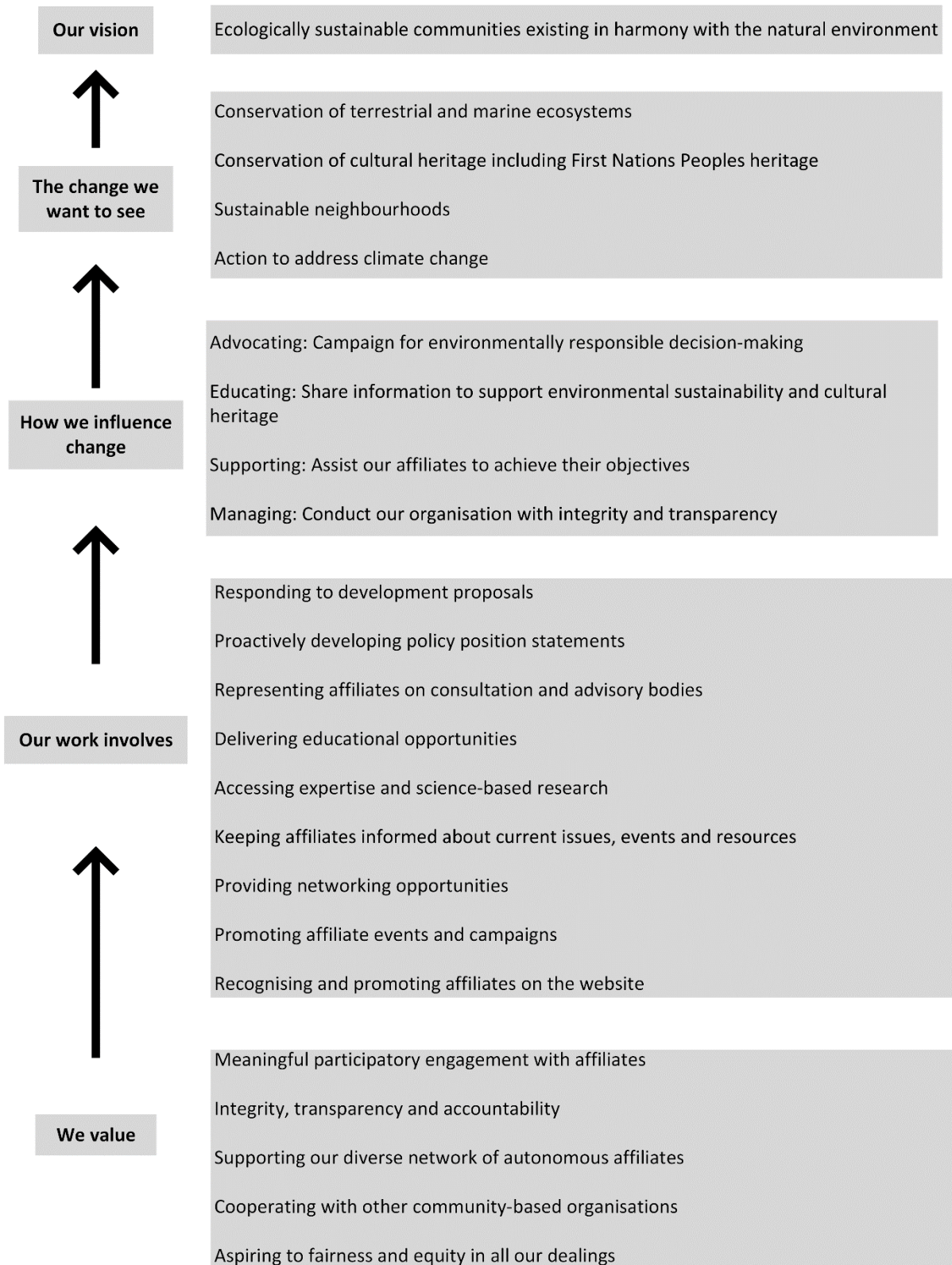
- Conservation of terrestrial and marine ecosystems
- Conservation of cultural heritage including First Nations Peoples heritage
- Sustainable communities
- Action to address climate change

How we will do this:

1. Advocate — Campaign for environmentally responsible decision-making
  - i. Responding to development proposals
  - ii. Proactively developing policy position statements
  - iii. Representing affiliates on consultation and advisory bodies
2. Educate — Share information to support environmental sustainability and cultural heritage
  - i. Delivering educational opportunities including seminars, tours, workshops, forums, stalls, newsletters and social media
  - ii. Accessing expertise and science-based research
3. Support — Assist our affiliates in achieving their objectives
  - i. Keeping affiliates informed about current issues, events and resources including monthly reports, EcoUpdate e-publication and social media
  - ii. Providing networking opportunities
  - iii. Promoting affiliates events and campaigns
  - iv. Recognising and promoting affiliates on the website
4. Manage — Conduct our organization with integrity and transparency
  - i. Meaningful participatory engagement with affiliates
  - ii. Integrity, transparency and accountability
  - iii. Supporting our diverse network of autonomous affiliates
  - iv. Cooperating with other community-based organisations
  - v. Aspiring to fairness and equity in all our dealings



**Visual overview**





## Appendix 2: Underpinning strategy

Strategy	Objectives	Deliverables
1. Advocate: Campaign for environmentally responsible decision-making	1.1 Establish our identity and key messages	Agreed purpose and vision statement
		Agreed key messages
	1.2 Enhance our reputation as the lead network for eco advocacy in Port Stephens	Recognition of our achievements and value by the Port Stephens community
		Improved relationships with elected representatives and public servants, and the media
		High quality submissions
	1.3 Provide leadership and empowerment to the eco-community and members	Documented process for identifying, prioritising and endorsing issues
	1.4 Project a professional, consistent and recognisable brand	Agreed logo and style guide
		Core branded information and materials reflecting our identity inclusive of our objectives, history, successes and membership
2. Educate: Share information to support environmental sustainability and cultural heritage and assist members and community to thrive in a changing external environment	2.1 Create a modern and relevant member communications program to add to member value	Regular updates to members and the wider community on issues of concern and EcoNetwork activities via online/emailed e-publication, inc. use of website and Facebook, and public forums
		Sub-strategies for different target audiences
	2.2 Share relevant information between members	Digest of government policies/legislation and private initiatives impacting the local environment
		Public forums minimum -3/year
	2.3 Advocate for environmental education in schools and community	Contact list in each school using SSF as a vehicle
	3. Support: Assist our members and affiliates to achieve their objectives	3.1 Identify the objectives of each of our members
Opportunities for involvement of individual members that meets their needs.		
3.2 Maximize benefits to attract and retain members		A statement of membership benefits for both affiliate and individual members
		Affiliate sub-pages on EcoNetwork website

Strategy	Objectives	Deliverables
	3.3 Identify strategic partners and their benefits	Sharing of affiliate Facebook posts and of their news by other means
		Insurance cover understood by affiliates
		All members' awareness of value of liaison with external groups: Nature Conservation Council; Better Planning Network, Environmental Defenders Office, Hunter Renewal, Lock the Gate (new) OEH etc.
4. Manage: Conduct our organisation with integrity and transparency	4.1 Sound organisational foundations	Develop and promote synergies between affiliates
		A modern and relevant constitution
		Periodic reviews of Purpose, Mission and Values statement
	4.2 Implement and maintain an effective organisational structure	Amend constitution when necessary to align with best practice or legislation
		Clear responsibilities for office-bearers and committee members
		Support of individual members for operational activities
		Regular executive committee meetings, the AGM and GMs as required
		3-yearly strategy review
		Plan for succession
	4.3 A sustainable business model	Annual budget process inc. reviews
		Revenue committee to review membership categories and fees, and explore fund-raising
		Develop a Membership recruitment strategy
	4.4 A respectful culture of integrity	Inclusive processes that encourage and welcome input from members and treats everyone fairly
		Transparency around all decision making and activities

## Appendix 3: Monitoring and evaluation plan

Evaluation questions	Indicators	Data sources	Examples of reporting
What changes have EcoNetwork contributed towards?	Evidence of progress towards our goals Evidence of the strength of the network	- Media reports - Affiliate reports - Government communiques - Network analysis	<i>EcoNetwork contributed to:</i> - Lot 666 not being sold - Mambo wetland being recognised under the DAMSAR declaration - Expansion of the X and Y national marine park - 60% of affiliates have medium to strong links with the network
To what extent has EcoNetwork effectively advocated?	- # of development proposals submitted - # of development proposals with positive outcome - # and type of position statements - # and type of consultations	- Spreadsheet of actions and outcomes	- EcoNetwork wrote X number of submissions of which X% contributed to a positive outcome - EcoNetwork distribute X number of position statements to affiliates of which X% had input from more than # affiliates - EcoNetwork represented affiliates on the X, Y and Z consultation processes
To what extent has EcoNetwork increased knowledge or changed behaviour?	- # and type of educational sessions - # and type of access to expertise - % of attendees indicating increase in knowledge / behaviour change	- Post-event attendee feedback - Spreadsheet of expertise engagement	- EcoNetwork conducted X number of sessions on topics X, Y and Z - EcoNetwork facilitated the engagement of expertise from X to assist with X, Y and Z. - X% of attendees at events reported gaining knowledge and X% reported they will change their behaviour
To what extent has EcoNetwork supported our affiliates to achieve their objectives?	- # and type of affiliates / members - # and type of information distributed - # and type of networking opportunities - # and type of affiliate promotion - % change in EcoUpdate subscribers - % change in website traffic	- Membership spreadsheet - Minutes from meetings - Spreadsheet of networking activities / promotion - EcoUpdate subscribers - Website report	- EcoNetwork has # affiliates, # businesses and # individual members - Affiliates reported an # increase in networks as a result of X activity - Subscribers to EcoUpdate has +/- by % since last year - Web traffic has +/- by % since last year
To what degree has EcoNetwork conducted our organisation with integrity and transparency?	Evidence of feedback from affiliates and key stakeholders	- Survey of affiliates - Survey of stakeholders - Post-event attendee feedback	- X% of affiliates report that the level of meaningful participatory engagement was satisfactory - X% of affiliates report that the EcoNetwork committee operates in a fair and equitable manner