



**Environmental Services  
and  
Programs Review**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Amendment</b>
21/12/10	Sue Calvin	Ver1 – draft
25/1/11	Sue Calvin	Ver 2 –incl. Richard's comments
28/1/11	Sue Calvin	Ver 3 – comments from TC, BC OM
31/1/11	Sue Calvin	Ver4 – incl. Action table
31/1/11	Richard Pamplin	Ver5 – Final

# Table of contents

- 1 PROJECT BACKGROUND ..... 5**
- 2 SCOPE OF THE PROJECT ..... 5**
  - 2.1 THE PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT ..... 5
  - 2.2 THE PROJECT TEAM ..... 6
  - 2.3 LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK ..... 6
  - 2.4 REGIONAL FRAMEWORK ..... 7
  - 2.5 COUNCIL’S FRAMEWORK..... 7
  - 2.6 CHALLENGES ..... 8
    - 2.6.1 Timeframe..... 8
    - 2.6.2 Scope of review ..... 9
    - 2.6.3 Community expectations..... 9
    - 2.6.4 Community engagement ..... 9
    - 2.6.5 Funding options ..... 9
- 3 CURRENT PROCESS ..... 10**
  - 3.1 RESOURCING (HOW?) ..... 10
    - 3.1.1 Team Structure ..... 10
    - 3.1.2 Budget ..... 10
  - 3.2 SCOPE OF ENVIRONMENTAL WORKS (WHAT?) ..... 11
  - 3.3 PROJECT DIRECTION (WHY?) ..... 12
  - 3.4 ENVIRONMENTAL TRENDS IN COUNCIL..... 15
  - 3.5 ENVIRONMENTAL TRENDS FROM OTHER AGENCIES ..... 16
- 4 STEP 3 - ANALYSE PERFORMANCE ..... 17**
  - 4.1 WORKING ARRANGEMENTS ..... 17
  - 4.2 ENVIRONMENTAL WORK ..... 18
  - 4.3 FUNDING..... 19
- 5 STEP 4 - IDENTIFY IMPROVEMENTS..... 20**
  - 5.1 TEAM STRUCTURE ..... 20
  - 5.2 ENVIRONMENTAL PRIORITIES..... 20
  - 5.3 COMPLETE EXISTING PROJECTS ..... 21
  - 5.4 REVIEW CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT PRIORITIES ..... 21
  - 5.5 REF IMPROVEMENTS..... 21

5.6	OPEN SPACE PLANNING .....	22
5.7	SUSTAINABILITY .....	22
5.8	ENVIRONMENTAL RISK .....	22
5.9	ENVIRONMENTAL LEVY .....	22
<b>6</b>	<b>STEP 5 - DEVELOP SOLUTIONS.....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>26</b>

# 1 PROJECT BACKGROUND

---

The aim of work undertaken by Environmental Services and Programs is to protect, enhance and maintain the environment for future generations. The work is a combination of:

- strategic planning (policies, planning provisions, management plans)
- meeting legislative requirements (eg. Review of Environmental Factors, Plans of Management, development assessment, State of the Environment Report)
- enhancement projects (improving environmental “hot spots” such as Cattai Wetlands, RTA Wetlands, Big Swamp and Acid Sulfate Soil remediation sites).

The review of Environmental Services and Programs is examining the work program for what is currently run in three sections – Environmental Management, Environmental Programs and the ecological/sustainability work in Landuse Planning in the Strategic Planning Department. Prior to Council’s re-structure, the Environmental Management team (previously Land Resource Management) was included in the Engineering Section (now known as Asset Planning). In July 2010 this Section was relocated to the Strategic Planning Department.

This change enabled the majority of Council’s environmental planning to be undertaken in one Department - Strategic Planning. This move involved the relocation of staff and resources only. The purpose of this review is to examine in more detail the environmental work of all three sections to determine the appropriate work program, working arrangements, priorities, funding opportunities and any efficiencies.

## 2 SCOPE OF THE PROJECT

---

### 2.1 THE PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT

During 2009/10, Council began a restructure, looking at the services it provides and the appropriate means to achieve it. A review of Councils Environmental Services and Programs was proposed to examine in-detail what services are provided and any improvements that could be made. The purpose of this review as determined by the Executive Leadership Team and Council was to

*... examine Council’s environmental services and management programs and make recommendations to Council that ensure a reduction in general revenue contribution without adversely affecting desirable environmental outcomes.*

The goal being:

*Nil general revenue contribution where there is no contractual agreement that Council contributes.*

In doing this review it was important to:

- understand the “how”, “what” and “why” behind our current practices
- involve relevant staff in the development of this review to not only utilise their expertise but also ensure they have ownership of the outcomes
- look at partnership opportunities with other Councils and organisations such as the Catchment Management Authority (CMA) and MidCoast Water
- examine Council’s environmental priorities
- explore possible income streams and funding options for implementation
- establish a means to measure the success of the review
- make a difference to the environmental quality of the Council area.

## 2.2 THE PROJECT TEAM

The Project Team was selected from key staff involved in undertaking environmental work and included.

Richard Pamplin (Senior Leader)	Brett Currie
Oliver Muenger	Tanya Cross
Sue Calvin	

This team met fortnightly over 6 weeks to develop this review. Given the timeframe was over Christmas many of the Project Team were not available for all meetings.

During mid December 2010, meetings were held with the Hunter-Central Rivers Catchment Management Authority (HCRCMA) and MidCoast Water to discuss both Council’s current environmental performance and partnership opportunities. These discussions are referenced in sections 4.1 and 4.3.

## 2.3 LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

Section 8 (1) of the *Local Government Act 1993* outlines the councils charter; what we as a Council are required to undertake. One of these requirements is:



*“to properly manage, develop, protect, restore, enhance and conserve the environment of the area for which it is responsible, in a manner that is consistent with and promotes the principles of ecologically sustainable development”*

The work undertaken is required to meet or consider the following legislation.

Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999	Protection of Environmental Operations Act 1997
Fisheries Management Act (1994)	Water Management Act 2000
Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979	Marine Parks Act 1997
National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974	Local Government Act 1993
Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995	Coastal Protection Act 1993
Crown Lands Act 1989	

## 2.4 REGIONAL FRAMEWORK

There a number of regional strategies that both influence and direct Council’s environmental work, being:

- Mid North Coast Regional Strategy 2006-2031
- Mid North Coast Regional Conservation Plan (currently on exhibition)
- Hunter-Central Coast Regional Environmental Management Strategy (HCCREMS)

All of these plans have implications for Council in terms of addressing the protection of environmental assets in Council’s future local growth management strategy. These Strategies/Plans require Council to:

- update local vegetation and habitat mapping
- validate regional mapping of priority conservation areas and corridors
- develop a local biodiversity strategy, environmental planning provisions and mapping overlays for inclusion in the LEP.

## 2.5 COUNCIL’S FRAMEWORK

In 2000 Council adopted an **Environmental Management Policy** which identifies environmental aspects that Council will look at in undertaking its planning and works. The objective was to achieve ecologically sustainable development.

In 2006 Council adopted an **Environmental Management Plan**, which brought together all

of Council’s environmental work under one document. It provided around 180 actions for implementation. On review of this plan as part of this project, it was noted that there was not a clear set of priorities or timeframes for completion. Without adequate resourcing many of the actions remain incomplete.

Council also has a number of **Management Plans/Strategies** that require ongoing implementation (or expectation thereof) being:

Wallis Lake Catchment Management Plan	Manning River Estuary Management Plan
Browns Creek Estuary Management Plan	Farquhar/Old Bar Inlet Entrance Opening Management Plan
Coastline Management Plan	Manning River Maintenance Dredging Strategy
Plans of Management (numerous)	Open Space and Recreational Facilities Plan

In 2010 Council adopted the **Manning Valley Community Strategic Plan**, which incorporates the aspirations of the community into future Council directions. The key environmental directions are included in Attachment 1 and have been considered through this review.

In developing the Community Plan, Council surveyed 410 residents and it was found that over 60% of those surveyed were unsure of which environmental issue required action from Council. This showed that Council needs to educate the community not only on the success of current projects, but also the environmental directions for the future.

Council has recently adopted a marketing strategy being “**Manning Valley Naturally**” which promotes the region for its natural assets. Work undertaken by these sections contributes greatly toward this strategy.

**2.6 CHALLENGES**

There have been a number of key challenges that have significantly influenced this review which are identified below. Many of these challenges have been reflected in the actions, showing what additional work needs to be done to make this review more robust.

**2.6.1 Timeframe**

This review was given a very limited timeframe for completion which impacted on the amount



of consultation, the extent of review and provided no opportunity for engagement with the broader community. Given that it was also over the Christmas period meant that it was difficult for key staff to provide input into the review.

### 2.6.2 Scope of review

While the review aimed to improve/refine existing processes and determine whether any efficiency can be made, it provided limited time and resources to consider the “big picture”.

For example:

- Is the work currently being undertaken Council’s priority?
- Have all aspects of environmental planning been considered (eg ecological, land management, water quality, open space, landscape quality, environmental management)?
- What is Council’s current environmental performance?

### 2.6.3 Community expectations

The community has become accustomed to the level of services and programs provided by Council. To enable the changes from this review it will be important to provide the community with the reasoning behind any changes and where possible give them the opportunity to have their say. While the timeframe did not permit this, it needs to be identified in the implementation.

### 2.6.4 Community engagement

With Council moving toward more community empowerment, it would be appropriate to determine what the broader community sees as important environmental tasks that Council should undertake. However, with the limited timeframes and being over Christmas meant the review had to rely on information gathered through the community plan. In the future, consideration needs to be given to how we can involve the community more in both education and prioritisation of environmental projects. The aim being to improve the survey response received in 2009.

### 2.6.5 Funding options

There was a range of funding options considered in this review. While it is recognised that Council is currently subject to a rate increase for the provision of infrastructure, the use of an environmental levy will need to be considered in the future. Environmental levies have been successfully implemented throughout Australia with great results. While it is understood that it would be difficult for Council to apply for an environmental levy at this time, it needs to be considered for future application.

There are also a range of innovative funding solutions being utilised that need to be investigated by Council. Many organisations are moving toward biodiversity and carbon offsets which can achieve a range of environmental outcomes. It is not the case that Council would have to “re-invent the wheel”, just find appropriate management tools that would suit Council’s preferred approach.

### 3 CURRENT PROCESS

The aim of environmental work undertaken by the Strategic Planning Department is

*to protect, enhance and maintain the environment for future generations.*

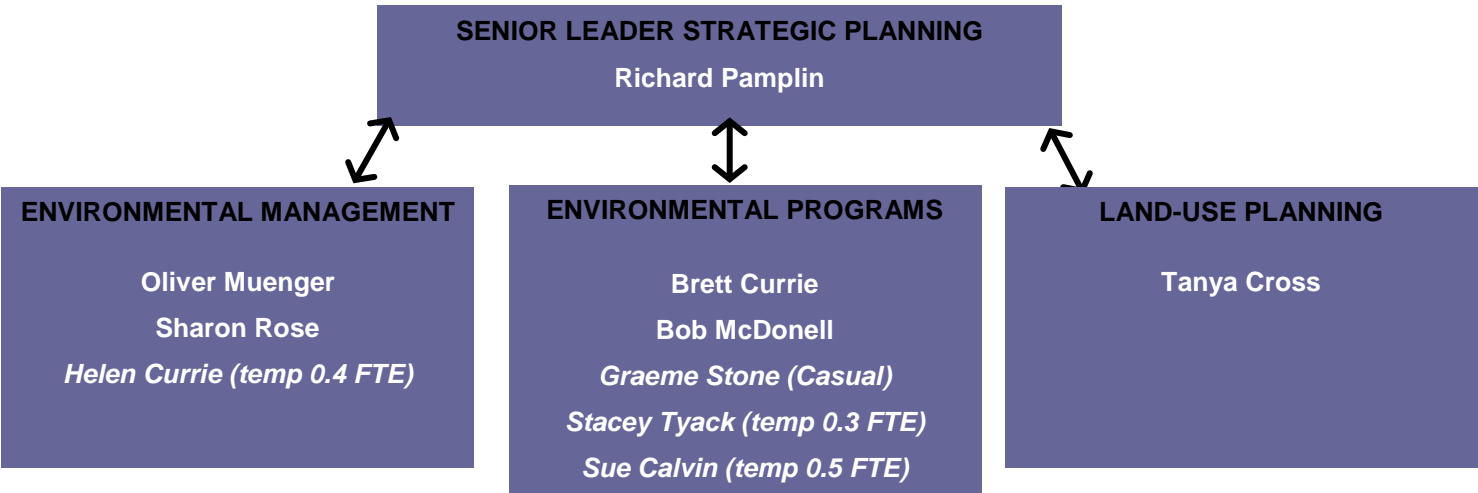
The following looks at the existing situation; how the sections are structured, the extent of current work undertaken and budgets.

#### 3.1 RESOURCING (HOW?)

##### 3.1.1 Team Structure

The sections are currently structured as outlined below. Please note that:

- with regard to the Landuse Planning section, only the environmental officer is shown, there are also planners working within this section
- there are four temporary positions shown which are funded through grants. They are shown in italics
- the staff allocations have varied over the years based on grant funding.



##### 3.1.2 Budget

In addition to wages of permanent staff, the budget for environmental work undertaken by the

Strategic Planning Department is currently \$721,000 for 2010/11 of which \$194,000 is allocated from Councils general revenue.

In 2007 Port Macquarie-Hastings Council undertook a benchmarking process which examined environmental expenditure and resourcing for 3 councils including GTCC. In summary the following was found:

Indicators	Port Macquarie-Hastings	Port Stephens Shire	Greater Taree City
<b>Local Government Area Characteristics</b>			
2003/2004 Population	68,471	61,379	45,761
2006/2007 Population (est)	73,844	66,195	49,352
2003/2004 Population Growth Rate %	2.55	2.17	1.45
LGA Area (km <sup>2</sup> )	3,693	857	3,728
2006/2007 Total Exp Budget (\$1,000's)	\$168,000	\$104,500	\$56,000
<b>Natural Resources*</b>			
Budget 2006/2007 - Exp	\$3,300,000	\$1,395,141	\$751,000
NRM Exp/pers	\$45	\$21	\$15
NRM Exp/km <sup>2</sup>	\$894	\$1,628	\$201
% Grant Income in 2005/2006	15	13	71
Staff Resources (EFT) - Professional	3	7	4

\* *Natural resources included estuary management, floodplain management, environmental restoration projects, natural water quality monitoring, greenhouse programs, education and awareness policy development.*

While this data was collected during 2007, it showed that Councils % expenditure for Natural Resources against total expenditure was minimal and generally consistent (Port Macquarie-Hastings- 2%, Port Stephens - 1.3%, GTCC - 1.3%).

### 3.2 SCOPE OF ENVIRONMENTAL WORKS (WHAT?)

In looking at the work to be undertaken by Council, it is also important to have a good understanding of the “big picture” - what are the environmental aspects that need to be considered by councils and the benefits of undertaking such work? Figure 1 is a representation of the key aspects of the environmental work that needs to be considered by councils.

An indicative estimate has been provided to identify the extent that Council addresses the varying environmental aspects. The priorities for each council area would differ based on their natural features and risks, but this gives an indication of where councils current priorities lie.

The current environmental planning work undertaken by staff is a combination of:

- strategic planning (policies, planning provisions, management plans)
- meeting legislative requirements (eg. Review of Environmental Factors, Plans of Management, development assessment, State of the Environment Report)
- enhancement projects (improving environmental “hot spots”).

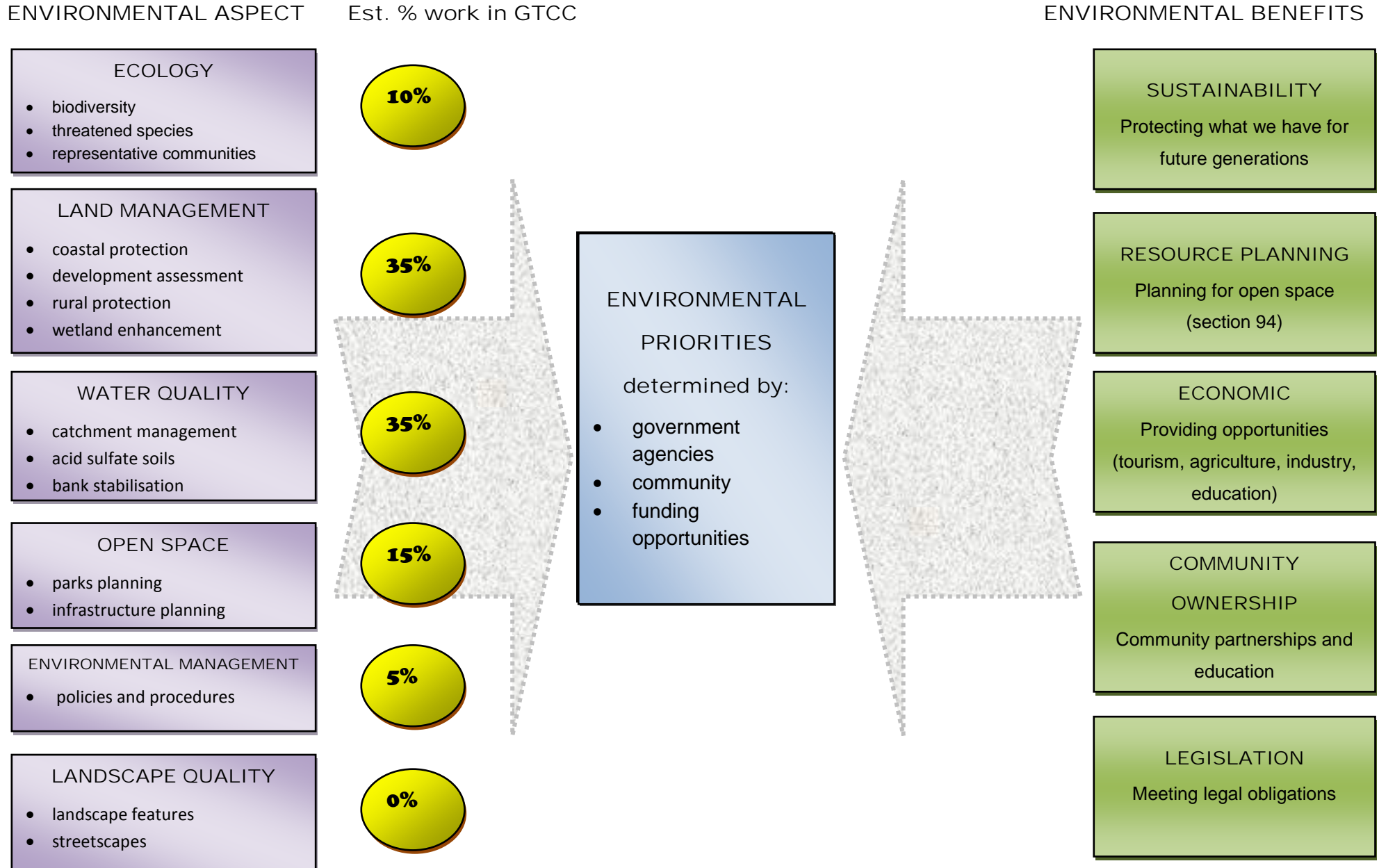
Figure 2 provides an overview of the current environmental work undertaken; showing what is currently resourced and not resourced.

### 3.3 PROJECT DIRECTION (WHY?)

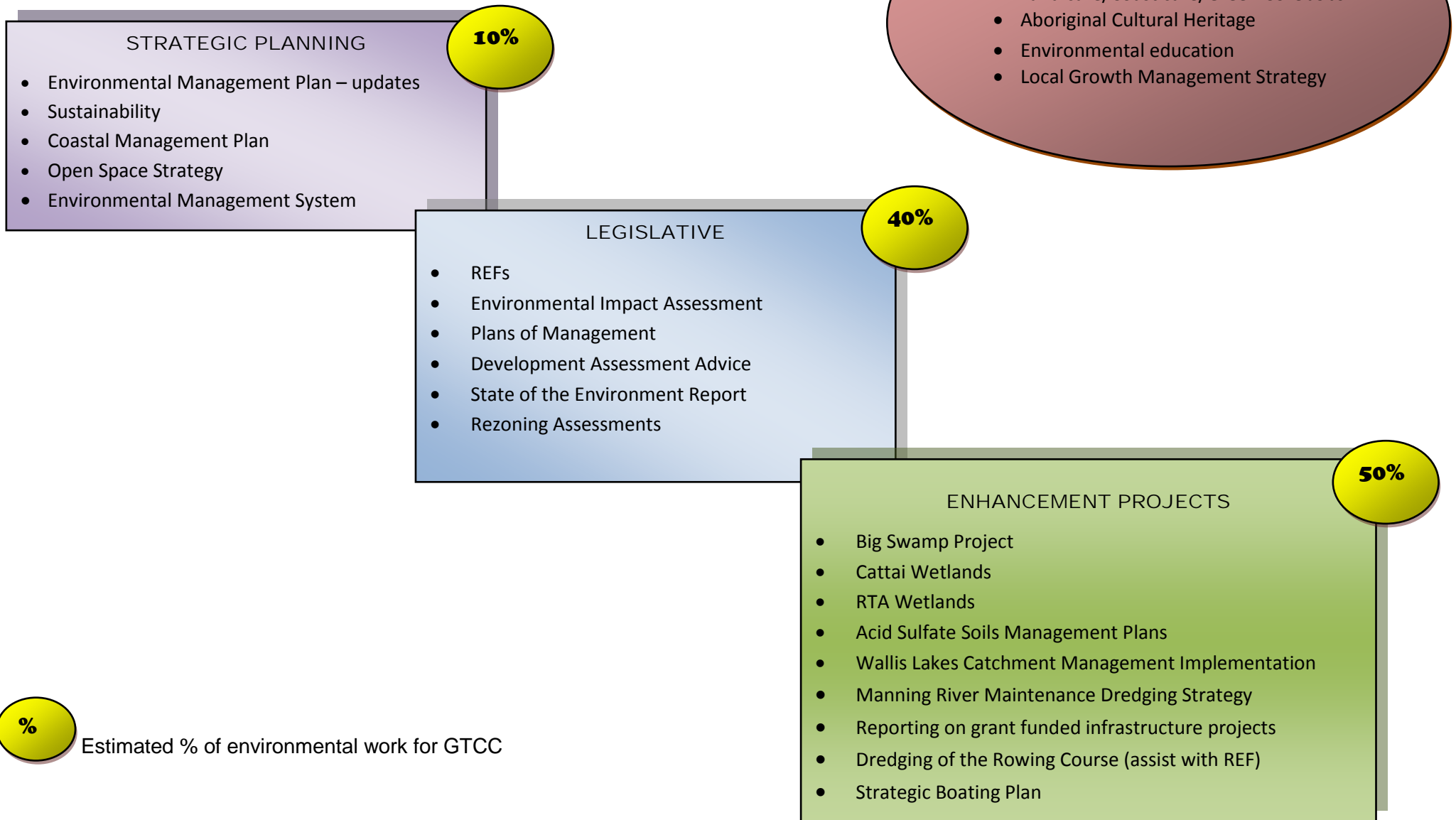
Environmental work undertaken in the Strategic Planning Department has historically grown over time. Much of this work has come about through:

- **state/federal government priorities** – being a local Council the environmental directions have often been established by state/federal governments. They identify a need and require councils to implement. Over the years there have been priorities set from protection of rural lands, koala protection, acid sulfate soils, the protection of species and habitats and climate change. When a direction is set by the state/federal governments there is usually a timeframe established for compliance with their priorities and funds often made available through grants for implementation
- **legislation** – as mentioned above the priorities of state/federal governments are often identified through legislative changes that require compliance by councils. This can range from the need to review the LEP, the incorporation of cultural heritage provisions, undertaking a State of the Environment Report to developing Reviews of Environmental Factors (REFs) for council works
- **community priorities** – often community groups drive councils environmental agenda. Catchment management groups, landcare/bush regeneration and sporting groups have influenced Council work for many years. Recently there has been an emphasis on dredging the river (an asset owned and managed by the LPMA). Again these priorities once established, can become part of Council’s ongoing work program and can continue for years, particularly in the absence of an adopted strategic direction for environmental planning

**FIGURE 1: SCOPE OF ENVIRONMENTAL WORKS**



**FIGURE 2: CURRENT WORK**



- **the review of Council services** – this review has led to work being allocated to these sections to implement from other work areas. Through the restructure, work functions have changed and with some staff leaving and not being replaced, there has been some work that has “fallen through the cracks”. Some of this work has been redirected to environmental services and programs for implementation, with no additional resources. As a result, resources are being “stretched” (eg RCLIP projects).

The issues that arise from this historic approach to environmental work over time have been:

- when the **funding or resources** cease, Council is often required to continue the work with no additional resources
- there is often **no end-date** to work, meaning that there is an expectation that the work will continue
- the priorities have become “blurred”. With the continual addition of projects, resources are being spread too thin. As a result there is **no clear delineation of priorities**.

### 3.4 ENVIRONMENTAL TRENDS IN COUNCIL

Based on discussions with Council staff, the following trends have developed over time. The environmental work has:

- become **reactive** over time. Projects have developed from requirements of government agencies and from community groups that are active. Recent examples include the river dredging and catchment management groups that have influenced the work of Council. Community driven work can sometimes be described as addressing the “squeaky wheel” – work pushed by groups that want their issue addressed. While there can be benefits that the groups are active in the projects and offer resources not available to Council, there can be concern that the environmental issues of the whole community are not being addressed
- become **site specific** rather than strategic. Many remediation works and open space planning have been focussed on site specific outcomes rather than getting an understanding of the ‘bigger picture’. In some cases the benefits of this site specific work has been questioned as to whether a more holistic approach would provide better outcomes by establishing Council’s priorities
- had **limited community involvement** in environmental projects given the poor response to Council’s recent survey for the Community Plan. Of the 410 residents surveyed, it was found that over 60% were unsure of what environmental issue required action from Council. This showed that Council needs to educate and involve the community not only on the success of current projects, but also the environmental directions for the future
- been recently **amalgamated** with Environmental Management joining the Strategic Planning Department in July 2010. This has brought together much of the environmental work into one Department and has provided opportunities for efficiencies in terms of resources and experience sharing, reducing duplication and having an integrated work program
- focussed on working with external land owners and partners, rather than on internal practices and procedures to reduce **Council’s environmental risk**. The development of two aspects of an Environmental Management System during 2010 has identified Council’s poor



performance, particularly with regard to erosion and sediment control. During 2010 there was also the risk of inappropriately impacting on important cultural heritage sites at Old Bar. There is a need to examine Councils environmental risk in more detail to determine appropriate measures to be put in place.

### 3.5 ENVIRONMENTAL TRENDS FROM OTHER AGENCIES

From discussions with other state agencies and councils, there have been some strong trends in environmental planning over the last 5 years which may influence Council's future work. The trends are as follows:

- **Environmental levies** have become an important funding source for many councils, both city and regional. This funding has assisted to develop and implement important environmental policies and projects. In many of the cases, the levy has been used to attract additional funding offered through grants. It has also been an excellent tool to involve the community in environmental planning and promote the successful projects. An environmental levy is currently used by many of the councils in NSW (42% of the councils in the Hunter-Central Rivers)
- increased investment in **sustainability**. All government agencies have increased their awareness of sustainability initiatives. Being sustainable in terms of a councils practices and procedures has become important, along with sustainable practices in planning for the future of the local government area. Sustainability has become important for councils as community leaders and to seek funding opportunities. It is also inextricably linked to climate change. Sustainability is an area where many councils have increased funding and resources over the last 5 years
- **infrastructure planning** (section 94) has been a growth sector for many councils. Understanding the open space standards and needs of the council area has been crucial in the development of section 94 plans. This ensures that new development is adequately contributing to the future open space requirements
- the Department of Planning (DoP) has been increasing pressure on councils in NSW to up-date their **strategic plans**. Many of the plans are based on information undertaken 10-15 years ago and new directions have been established through regional plans. The increased growth of coastal areas has meant increased pressure on the natural assets. In terms of GTCC, the DoP have stated that they will not accept any additional rezoning applications until the local growth management strategy is undertaken. There are also a number of actions from the Mid North Coast Regional Strategy and Regional Conservation Plan that need to be implemented by Council that would be aligned to work required for the local growth management strategy
- **biodiversity offsets** are a growing trend that is being implemented by councils nation-wide. In doing so councils need to know what assets are available , what opportunities exist and the priorities that are available
- **increased community empowerment** in environmental projects. Many councils use the community to identify priorities. Encouraging active involvement of the community through volunteer groups can assist in improving environmental hotspots
- many government agencies are undergoing funding cuts and have looked to **partnerships** as a means to supplement funds. Partnerships can be with other councils, agencies such as

Catchment Management Authorities, service providers (MidCoast Water) and private enterprise.

All of the trends are relevant to GTCC and should be planned for in the review.

## **4 STEP 3 - ANALYSE PERFORMANCE**

---

Given the limited timeframe to undertake this review, the analysis of performance has been limited to discussions with Council staff and some key stakeholders.

The analysis focuses on three functions being working arrangements, environmental work and funding.

### **4.1 WORKING ARRANGEMENTS**

When Environmental Management joined the Strategic Planning Department the structure of the teams remained unchanged to enable an easy transition. However, this review has determined that this structure has limited the integration of the environmental work. Currently the work is spread across three sections which can lead to some duplication and lost opportunities for prioritising and aligning work programs and sharing resources.

Both the Environmental Programs and Management sections have effectively used grant funding over the last couple of years to supplement the workforce. This has provided a cost effective means to utilise grant funding with reduced impact on the permanent staff. Another key learning from this analysis was the effective use of partnerships. Recent partnerships with Great Lakes Council, the Catchment Management Authority and MidCoast Water have provided great on-the-ground outcomes where there have been common goals. The current partnership with Great Lakes Council and MidCoast Water in the Urban Sustainability Program has provided Environmental Trust funding to implement significant changes. The success of grants can often be reliant on such partnerships.

However, it is important to review and update these partnerships over time. In 2004, Council developed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Great Lakes Council to undertake joint work on the Wallis Lake Catchment Management Plan. Over the last 6 years this has worked effectively, however there is a need to review Council's catchment management priorities to provide a similar approach for the Manning River Catchment which covers over 2/3 of our Council area. Similar MOUs may be required with the 6 councils that influence this catchment.

MidCoast Water identified the working arrangements of Council's environmental planning as

one of its strengths in terms of Council's detailed knowledge of the environmental issues at the local level, the skills and experience of its people and Council's ability to implement projects once the funds are provided.

## 4.2 ENVIRONMENTAL WORK

In general it has been roughly estimated that the breakdown of environmental work is:

- strategic planning - 10%
- legislative requirements – 40%
- enhancement projects – 50%

Over time it appears that the enhancement project work has increased while the strategic planning has decreased. This is a typical cycle for strategic planning work which transitions between developing strategic plans over a 2-5 year timeframe and implementing the plans (2-5 years). Given many of the environmental policies need review, it is appropriate to move towards increasing the strategic planning work. This would align with other Council work required for the development of a local growth management strategy and review of the section 94 plans.

The imbalance of work toward enhancement projects in recent times has also arisen partly as a result of the restructure with work falling “through the cracks” and being allocated to these sections. Given that the Strategic Planning Department's primary role is to plan for the future growth of the area, it will be important to re-align work back to “planning” rather than “doing”.

Figure 1 provided a general breakdown of the environmental aspects currently addressed by Council. It was found that the focus of the environmental planning work has been on addressing land management and water quality, being around 70% of the work undertaken by Council. It was generally felt that this apportionment of work has been historical and needs to be reviewed to determine Council's priorities. A greater understanding is required of Council's performance with regard to all of the environmental aspects to enable an informed decision on Council's priorities.

Determining Council's environmental priorities will refine Council's environmental work program. Ad-hoc projects that are currently resource intensive (eg. Dredging, Big Swamp project) will be reduced and the use of resources focussed on Council's priorities. This was supported by MidCoast Water who stated that “it is important that not only are projects delivered well, but that Council prioritises and chooses the most important projects”.

The REF role within Council has been a focus of concern over the last 6 months with the

increased number of projects requiring REFs. The REF process has been recently reviewed as part of the development of Council's EMS. The review identified process improvements which will improve the development of REFs and will be implemented over the next 6 months. Through the review, the option for outsourcing the process was discussed. The opinion of Council officers is that the in-house knowledge, expertise and process would provide better value for money for processing small-medium complexity projects than outsourcing to consultants. With the move toward a better project management approach for infrastructure projects, having this knowledge in-house will be more efficient from a cost and time perspective. It was, however, recognised that with the recent increase in the number of projects, outsourcing of major projects may be required to meet the project timeframes and to meet the aspirations of the Asset Planning Department (to have REFs completed up to 2 years prior to work commencing).

### **4.3 FUNDING**

The general observation was that the environmental planning work has provided 'good value for money'. The budget (excluding permanent staff) is around \$721,000 for 2010/11 of which only \$194,000 is allocated from Council's general revenue. This is minimal when considering these sections are planning for around 80% of the Council's area (being non urban areas).

The Cattai Wetlands program demonstrated that providing initial funds can assist with generating grant funding, with the \$178,000 cost to Council providing \$612,418 funds through grants and other sources over the last 6 years.

As mentioned previously, grants applied for in partnership with other councils and stakeholders have proven very beneficial over the last 2 years, a recent example being the Urban Sustainability Program which has provided over \$100 000 to Council to identify improvements and implement them through an EMS.

MidCoast Water is willing to continue with similar partnerships where the projects are consistent with their business objectives. Some common areas being:

- cleaner drinking water through catchment management
- better utilisation of recycled water in lieu of disposal to the environment
- greenhouse gas offsets
- biodiversity impacts.

The Hunter-Central Rivers Catchment Management Authority (HCRCMA) expressed a similar view to explore opportunities for partnerships and funding. Again, any projects would have to be aligned with their Catchment Action Plan for this region.

In this review it was acknowledged that the limited funds have limited the extent of

environmental work undertaken. Both Great Lakes Council and Port Macquarie-Hastings Council have achieved excellent environmental results from having an environmental levy. Great Lakes Council have reported over the 5 year period 2004-2009 that they generated an additional M\$9.7 funds from the M\$3.4 provided from their environmental levy (total expenditure M\$13.1). Without access to similar funds GTCC can not compare to the level of service provided by these neighbouring Councils.

## **5 STEP 4 - IDENTIFY IMPROVEMENTS**

---

A brainstorming session was undertaken to generate improvements based on the information that was gathered. The key objectives being to:

1. Complete existing projects (particularly ad hoc and site specific projects)
2. Determine Council's environmental priorities
3. Increase strategic planning work to meet these priorities
4. Continue to undertake legislative requirements

The improvements were grouped under the following 9 headings and the key elements for consideration were listed.

### **5.1 TEAM STRUCTURE**

Combine all environmental planning work under one section in the Strategic Planning Department. This will provide a more efficient team structure in terms of reporting, monitoring and implementation. This would reduce the "silos" and ensure common goals are established and achieved.

### **5.2 ENVIRONMENTAL PRIORITIES**

It is important to re-establish Council's environmental priorities to ensure the work program is aligned to achieve the priority projects. In identifying priorities Council will need to achieve a better understanding of its environmental performance for all environmental aspects, to determine where the environmental risk is greatest. Establishing the Council priorities will reduce Council's exposure to ad hoc projects which can be resource intensive.

This will build-on the work undertaken for the Community Plan. Community involvement in this process will be important to ensure they have ownership of the priorities and to increase the level of understanding of Council's environmental works (which was established as low through Council's survey for the Community Plan). This will also assist to direct the community's volunteer involvement. Volunteer work (eg Land Care, Coast Care, Green Core Jobs) will be focussed in the priority areas.

### **5.3 COMPLETE EXISTING PROJECTS**

It will be important to finalise some of the current projects over the next 12 months. This includes completion of:

- the Plan of Management for Community Land in May 2011
- the Open Space Strategy in May 2011
- the Coastal Management Plan in June 2011
- Acid Sulfate Soil Management Plans in September 2011
- dredging the rowing course in June 2011
- the Strategic Boating Plan in May 2011
- the Urban Sustainability Project in September 2011
- reporting on a number of infrastructure projects with external funding including:
  - improvements to Old Bar sport fields (June 2011)
  - bikepaths at Harrington and Old Bar (June 2011)
  - the raised walkway at Wallabi Point (March 2011)

In July 2011 there will also be a re-assessment of the Big Swamp Project. If funding is not available, this project could be placed on hold until priorities are established and funding available.

The Cattai/RTA Wetlands need to be reviewed to determine the sustainable management of the wetlands over the next 4 years. The Plan of Management needs to be reviewed to explore the long term use and management of the sites. Given the extent of work undertaken on these projects to-date and the ability to generate revenue from existing funds, there may be an opportunity to reduce Council's expenditure in the short to medium term.

### **5.4 REVIEW CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT PRIORITIES**

As mentioned previously, Council has had an MOU with Great Lakes to undertake joint work on the Wallis Lake Catchment Management Plan. There is a need to review this MOU to establish a similar process over the Manning River catchment which covers over 2/3 of our Council area. This work will be dependant on the establishment of Council's priorities as identified in section 5.2.

Any savings from this review are likely to be directed into a catchment management project for the Manning River.

### **5.5 REF IMPROVEMENTS**

Implement outcomes of the recent review of REFs to improve the efficiency of the process (eg. templates, training, process improvements). This work is likely to be completed by September 2011. Identify more complex REFs that can be out-sourced by Asset Planning

## **5.6 OPEN SPACE PLANNING**

The completion of the generic Plan of Management (PoM) in May 2011 will streamline the legislative requirement for having PoMs over Council lands. There will be a need for this PoM to be updated regularly to ensure the information remains relevant.

The completion of the Open Space Strategy will also assist in the on-the-ground implementation of open space requirements. Environmental planning work will be required to engage with the community on the strategy and implement the actions.

Additional resources may be required to implement the strategy in the review of the Section 94 plans and the development of the local growth management strategy. Ensuring that development requirements are clear for future growth will ensure parks and their infrastructure are adequate in the future. While some of these costs will be built into the section 94 plans, the actual cost recovery is only achieved in the long term. As such, up-front expenditure is required for the work undertaken on these plans.

## **5.7 SUSTAINABILITY**

While there is no proposal to change the sustainability projects at this point in time, it is expected that there will be an increased demand for sustainable policies, practices and projects in the future. This may be determined through the establishment of Council's environmental priorities outlined in section 5.2.

## **5.8 ENVIRONMENTAL RISK**

As mentioned previously, Council's due diligence has been questioned over the last 12 months with regard to Council works impacting on cultural heritage and erosion and sediment control. If the environmental risks are not identified and addressed, Council could face significant fines. This work should be undertaken in conjunction with Councils overall risk assessment to ensure a holistic approach is applied.

The current work to develop an Environmental Management System focuses on 2 work processes only and has been undertaken through grants which will cease in September 2011. Funding for ongoing work will be required.

## **5.9 ENVIRONMENTAL LEVY**

An environmental levy has been highlighted as the most effective means to fund environmental works in councils. While potentially not available for the next couple of years, it will be important to review in more detail the process, benchmarking, and implementation.



Establishing the community’s view on this funding option could be undertaken as part of the consultation for establishing council’s priorities (section 5.2).

## **6 STEP 5 - DEVELOP SOLUTIONS**

---

The table below identifies the actions required to implement the improvements. Timeframes, expected savings and responsibility for these actions is also provided.

Action	How	Savings	Who	When
<b>Action 1</b> Amalgamate environmental staff under Strategic Planning	Have one 'Environmental Services' section within strategic planning, eliminating separate teams of Environmental Programs and Environmental Management. Job functions within the Department will not alter.	Efficiency gains in regards to staff management and resource sharing to complete future work program activities	ELT endorsement. Senior Leader implementation	2011/2012 (when Acting SL Community Wellbeing back)
<b>Action 2</b> Complete existing project commitments where possible with no extensions/new projects until action 3 completed	Refer to Section 5.3 for list of existing projects proposed to be completed, thus reducing Environmental Services General Revenue requirement in 2011/2012	\$62,300.00	TL Environmental Services	2011/2012 budget
<b>Action 3</b> Develop Council strategic plan for prioritisation of future Environmental works	Undertake community and stakeholder engagement to develop priorities for Council regarding environmental works. By engaging other stakeholders in this process will enable Council to focus future efforts on those actions directly responsible for Council, while identifying other stakeholders as the lead agency in actions not directly related to Council	Will ensure any future projects are high priority with community support thus ensuring best value for money.	TL Environmental Services	2011/2012 Operational Plan
<b>Action 4</b> Restructure work program for Cattai and RTA projects to minimise the general revenue component for maintenance activities. Any new works under these adopted PoM's to be externally funded.	Utilise interest from Property Vegetation Plan (without eroding the capital) to reduce the general revenue component for the management of the Cattai Wetlands and use a greater component of the RTA capital to implement works across both sites.	\$45,000.00	TL Environmental Services	2011/2012 budget
<b>Action 5</b> Review content of MoU with Great Lakes Council to widen scope of works.	Propose review of MoU to continue commitment to delivery of priority actions in the adopted Wallis Lake Catchment Management Plan, however propose to withdraw specific budget allocation from being specific to this sub-catchment, allowing adequate resourcing to assist in priority projects in the Greater Taree LGA, (thus including, but not limited to this sub-catchment)  Initial 2011/2012 budget proposed to resource <b>Action 3</b> above.	Greater delivery of future projects across entire LGA, not just 1 sub-catchment.	TL Environmental Services	2011/2012 Operational Plan
<b>Action 6</b> Continue implementation plan	Continue development and implementation of templates to streamline REF preparation.	Efficiency gains in the preparation of small to	TL Environmental	On-going

Action	How	Savings	Who	When
for REF improvements program	<p>No change proposed to current approval process.</p> <p>Outsource larger REF projects as part of design and construction briefs to reduce 'tying up' of resources, thus allowing a greater number of small to medium projects to proceed more rapidly.</p> <p>A partial 'cost recovery (transfer)' model could be adopted whereby operational projects are required to budget for, (and pay) for the staff time to prepare REF documentation. This income could be recorded as an income to Strategic Planning to partially offset the general revenue towards the staff resources used to prepare the REF.</p>	<p>medium REF's and not preparing large REF's in-house.</p> <p>Potential for partial cost recovery of staff time spent on preparing REF's for operational activities</p>	<p>Services</p> <p>ELT to determine cost recovery option - Responsibility of SL Strategic Planning to manage.</p>	<p>2011/2012 budget if supported.</p>
<b>Action 7</b> Review of Open Space Planning and Plans of Management	As previously discussed, actions have been implemented to meet legislative requirements for management of Councils open space. Additional work will be required to annually review the strategy/generic PoM, as well as develop the site specific Plans of Management where required and assist with policy/action planning for open space to provide guidance to Service Delivery for the daily operation of areas	No change	TL Environmental Services	On-going
<b>Action 8</b> Continued implementation of sustainability projects	Acknowledge trend towards importance of implementing sustainability projects through Councils 'Sustainability Team' which results in delivery of a range of projects to improve Council's environmental performance and reduce costs, such as electricity savings, thus having an indirect positive impact on Council's general revenue.	No Change (anticipated savings as a result of changes implemented but not quantified at this time)	TL Environmental Services	On-going
<b>Action 9</b> Address issues of Environmental Risk	As mentioned in section 5.8, Council has significant exposure to a number of issues that have the potential to adversely impact on Council through fines. Governance should ensure environmental risk is considered as a part of Council's broader risk management, and future improvement projects undertaken to mitigate identified high risk. <i>This may have budget implications</i>	None. May require additional resources to implement identified improvements	TL Environmental Services	Implement if actions identified & budgeted.
<b>Total Savings identified</b>		<b>\$107,300.00</b>		

## 7 CONCLUSION

---

In summary, by implementing the actions proposed above:

- efficiencies are expected in terms of delivery of work programs by better working relationship across staff
- improved processes such as the REF review to improve work processes
- significant reduction in general revenue expenditure of \$107,300.00 next financial year.
- improved strategic direction of identification and delivery of environmental programs aligning community expectations with Council's priorities
- reduced risk of 'ad hoc' projects adversely impacting on work programs through sound planning and prioritisation of activities which will align with future operational and delivery programs.
- Identification and management of environmental risks to reduce Council's liability.
- more strategic direction/input to open space planning and management rather than resources being absorbed into smaller site specific plans.