

Shoalhaven Tourism and Economic Development – Response to HWCV questions

Monday 16th October 2023.

Coralie and I welcomed the opportunity to speak with you and we took away the following 4 themes from the meeting. I have collated the following information for you to share with your community group.

1. The importance of Sustainable Tourism / Ecotourism

Council acknowledges that balancing Tourism and Events with the environment is a major consideration. I would like to reassure you that Council does consider environmental impact seriously when planning Tourism and Event strategies. Currently the environment is considered in broader planning processes such as the [Local Environmental Plan \(LEP\)](#) and [Development Control Plan \(DCP\)](#) where our legislated and legal obligations are outlined. These are locally adopted plans and guides for council, developers, and landowners to follow when considering development.

More specifically in regards to Tourism we have [Council's Local Strategic Planning Statement](#) which sets a land use Planning Priority (No.7) to **promote a responsible visitor economy**. This Priority recognises the values and challenges of the visitor economy, including:

- Its contribution to the Shoalhaven's economy and the need to strengthen it to deliver year-round economic outcomes.
- The need to balance the support and promotion of the visitor economy and managing impacts on communities and sensitive locations.
- The rising popularity of holiday accommodation and the substantial increase in visitor numbers to beachside suburbs, impacting on amenity and potentially housing supply.
- The seasonal pressure on transport systems, other infrastructure, and emergency management responses.
- The delivery of infrastructure and assets to manage, support and attract events. e.g., improved public transport, car parking, toilets, playgrounds, and boating facilities.
- Managing other tourist and visitor related land uses.

The Planning Priority (No.7) sets out the work required to create a responsible visitor economy. The key document that addresses these items is Council's [Destination Management Plan](#), which is due to be reviewed in 2023/24 financial year. This management plan outlines council's vision for local tourism and identifies focus areas and actions. We will collaborate with community when renewing the DMP.

Dispersal: Council also encourages the spread of visitors throughout the region so that no one location is constantly overcrowded, and the economic benefits are shared throughout the region. We are conscious of not over promoting various natural wonders. The [100 Beach Challenge](#) is one such example, it is a deliberate marketing strategy where tourists are encouraged to explore the whole region and experience the many surf beaches, bushwalks and villages the region has to

offer. There is a considered effort to not feature locations like Hyams Beach and encourage people to spread out. As you would be aware Hyams Beach, has master plans in place to address overcrowding and this also is an example of sustainable tourism.

The vision for tourism in the Shoalhaven region is:

“To be recognised as a year-round destination, valued for its quality environment and visitor experiences. A strong and vibrant tourism industry will be built on a diverse asset base that contributes to employment, economic benefit and the protection and enhancement of Shoalhaven’s natural environment.”

2. Short term rental accommodation (STRA) – What is the Council doing in this space?

Council is continuing to investigate how short-term rental accommodation (STRA) can be better managed and regulated to assist with housing, while also recognising the important role it plays in our tourism economy.

The current planning provisions related to STRA are set at the NSW Government level and we are currently looking at what opportunities exist to better manage the extent and location of STRA’s ahead of a government review of current controls later this year. It is also not currently legally possible to separately rate STRA properties without a range of interrelated changes to relevant legislation. Council has been advocating, along with other councils and Local Government NSW, for more holistic and integrated changes to enable STRA properties to be better identified and to also allow for them to be separately rated.

It is hoped that the NSW Government’s foreshadowed two-year review of the Short-Term Rental Accommodation (STRA) planning provisions contained in the State Environmental Planning Policy (Housing) 2021 will give Councils and their communities greater ability to set the relevant provisions (number of days and areas) in their areas. It is understood from recent media reports that the NSW Government will release information on this review before the end of this year and Council will consider what opportunities this presents to better regulate STRA.

Please **see the attached** report to Council dated 13 March 2023 which contains a range of additional detail regarding this complex matter. Go [to this link](#), and see item CL23.68.

3. Attracting Events – How can we achieve a balance with the local community?

Agritourism: Council did not support the NSW Government’s proposed agritourism reforms in their current “mandated” form due to significant concerns regarding amenity and other impacts on Shoalhaven’s communities. Council is seeking the opportunity to examine and identify appropriate components of the reform to prepare an appropriate land use planning response specific to Shoalhaven.

Environment: Council has a [Sustainable Events Policy](#) which is publicly available on councils website and it is provided to all visiting event organisers as part of the Event Support Program. This guide is designed to educate people on ways to reduce environmental and social impacts.

Also, it is worth noting that post event reports are a requirement placed on all event organisers that apply to the Event Support Program. This is where the Tourism Events team review feedback on past events and make notes on impacts/complaints so that this information can be factor into the assessing of future events. To keep event organisers accountable, Council also frequently deploys rangers to check compliance and local police are involved in giving feedback for events as public safety is part of the event approvals process.

4. Bushfire Preparedness and Response – What is Council doing?

In response to a Question on Notice from 30 October 2023, Council staff prepared a comprehensive report on what measures have been taken to ensure the city is a prepared as it can be ahead of the 2023-24 Summer season. Significant work has been undertaken by many of the staff at the Council to provide as much protection as possible to the city, its community, and its assets.

In particular, Council has been working very close with the Local Emergency Management Officer, who serves a crucial role in coordinating and managing various aspects of emergency preparedness and response. Local Emergency Management Officer's multifaceted role involves not only internal coordination and planning but also extends to external collaboration and representation at regional levels.

Their efforts are essential in ensuring effective emergency management strategies, preparedness, and response measures are in place to safeguard the community and uphold Council's responsibilities in times of crisis.

The Council is extremely cognoscente of the immense suffering of its community during and after the 2019/2020 bushfires. This suffering continues to this day and Council wants to do all it can to try to avoid such a disaster befalling the city again.

Please **see attached** a copy of the report (which is available via the website) which lists preparedness activities and projects that are being completed by each area of council. Go [to this link](#), see item CL23.458

Once again thank you for inviting Coralie and I to your community meeting and again please accept my apologies for the delay in responding to you. It has been a very busy time here at council.

Kind Regards

Phil Schafer

Tourism and Economic Development