

Submission to NSW Department of Planning in regard to the Draft Central Coast Regional Plan 2015

by

Save Wyong Trees

Preamble:

Save Wyong Trees is a community group formed in response to Wyong Council discarding tree protection policies that has resulted in on-going destruction of trees across the Wyong Shire. Members and supporters come from a wide spectrum of the community including education, health, environmental law and a concerned arborist and tree services contractor.

Our key objectives are:

1. Reverse Wyong Council's tree destruction policy adopted in April 2015, and reinstate the old tree protection policy
2. Promote wider pro tree policies and activities in Wyong LGA that:
 - Protect existing trees and other native flora
 - Establish or regenerate and manage native flora providing safe and healthy urban tree canopies.

Introduction

As stated repeatedly in various ways within this plan, the Central Coast can be differentiated from other regional areas by its natural assets. The natural environment and beauty is the primary attraction that entices people to want to live, work and play in the region. So the Central Coast Regional Plan must genuinely prioritise the natural environment to attract and sustain development. It must acknowledge that the stated goals *of growing and diversifying the economy to create local jobs, creating thriving, liveable centres and delivering greater housing choice* are all totally dependent upon rely on the protection and nurturing of a healthy diverse natural environment.

While we are generally supportive of this Draft Central Coast Regional Plan, our submission addresses a number of existing issues on the Central Coast (and particularly in Wyong Shire) that if not adequately addressed in this strategic plan will lead to a further decline in "The natural environment is the defining feature of the Central Coast and its most important asset." *Draft Plan, P5.*

Issue 1: Wyong Council Tree Policy that allows unrestricted removal of any trees on most private residential land.

In April 2015, Wyong Shire Council amended its tree management policy to allow individual landowners to remove trees without seeking Council approval where the land size was less than 1500 square metres. This allowed individual landholders to remove thousands of safe, healthy trees in Wyong Shire for any or no reason. The character of the neighbourhood was considerably degraded. Neighbourhoods have become tense. Police have been called to help settle disputes.

Recommendation 1:

That the NSW Government states unequivocally in this Strategic plan 2016, that it will rely on Councils to manage tree removals and land clearance so that approval to remove a tree will be a mandatory function of the local government.

We recommend that the Central Coast Regional Plan includes the statement that the NSW Government will require Central Coast Councils to actively manage trees and vegetation within the region including retaining the responsibility of being the consent authority for the removal of existing trees.

Issue 2: The absence of a Wyong LGA Streetscape plan that includes a diversified tree canopy

While we support the plan's intent to ensure the maintenance of wildlife corridors and isolated reserves, it is not enough as the health of the whole Central Coast environment (including its residential areas) relies on the maintenance of a rich biodiversity and the avoidance of heat islands in residential areas.

In particular, the maintenance of biodiversity includes having native bushland permeating the residential suburbs and fringing all of the waterways. Trees cool and filter the air. Their root systems protect against soil erosion and filter water flows. Native trees sustain native birds and animals. Suburban beauty and amenity is improved with trees.

Many suburbs in the Wyong LGA have very few trees either on residential land or in the streets. It is well known that the planting and maintenance of appropriately positioned and selected species are an important asset to the individual, the community in general and also to local government authorities. Cost benefit analysis has repeatedly shown in US Dept of Agriculture studies that the tree maintenance costs are far outweighed by the benefits of extended life of infrastructure such as road and footpath paving, reduced water runoff into lakes and the ocean, and decreased energy consumption for heating and cooling and other health benefits. Further, well planned and maintained urban canopy effectively provide an extension to the existing wildlife corridors.

Recommendation:

That this NSW State Government-sponsored Central Coast Regional Plan either require or strongly influence Councils to continue to be actively engaged in the planned, coordinated management of trees and foliage on both council and private land for the benefit of the region and the total environment.

Conclusion

The Draft Central Coast Regional Plan aims to “create great places to live”. The management of issues that influence orderly neighbourhood behaviour is essential to this goal. No plan can succeed if any of the factors that contribute to its success are not managed and especially if they are left subject to rampant self-interest.