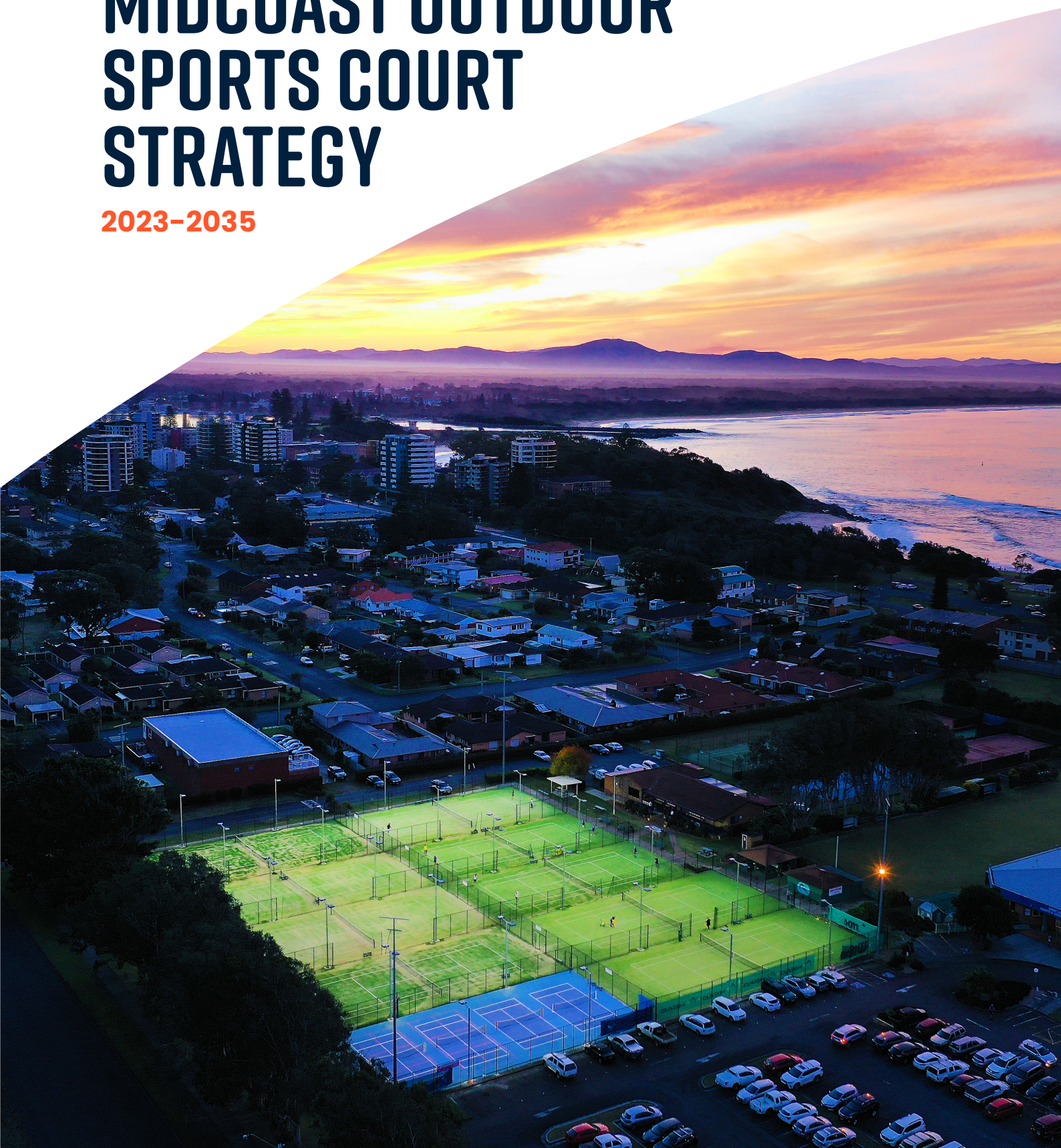


DRAFT **MIDCOAST OUTDOOR** **SPORTS COURT** **STRATEGY**

2023-2035



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Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we work and live, the Gathang-speaking people and pay our respects to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who now reside in the MidCoast Council area. We extend our respect to Elders past and present, and to all future cultural-knowledge holders.

Glossary of Terms

Outdoor Court: a hard standing area specific to individual sports.

Multi-purpose Court: a court that has been line marked so that several different sports can be played on it.

Trends: a snapshot in time, often across several years, that shows the status of participation in specific activities.

Sport Hierarchy: a graduated portfolio of facilities providing for the same sport.

Portfolio: The total collection of different classifications of similar facilities providing for the same activity.

Catchment: The population contained within a given area who will use a specific facility.

Distribution: The location of similar types of facilities in relation to each other.

Court Design: The factors that determine the characteristics of a court.

Synthetic (grass): A man-made material that resembles natural grass which is used on some courts.

Acrylic: A court surfacing material.

Executive Summary

The *Draft MidCoast Outdoor Sports Court Strategy 2023 – 2035* is a critical supporting document to the *MidCoast Open Space and Recreation Strategy 2023 – 2035 (OSRS)*. The OSRS sets out the vision, guiding principles and aspirations for our public open space, how we use it and how we care for it. This Court Strategy is an asset specific planning document focused on one of the components of our public open space, outdoor sports courts.

One of the eight guiding principles we have adopted in the OSRS is *use knowledge and evidence-based management*.

Therefore, the Outdoor Sports Court Strategy has been developed based on a foundation of evidence, and every recommendation contained within the Action Plan is then based on that evidence. This approach will ensure that in the future every sports court that we have will be where it needs to be and provide value based on evidence.

The Strategy highlights that sports courts are provided for several different sports, namely; tennis, croquet, netball, basketball, and emerging sports such as pickleball. Some of these sports have a rich history in Australia and our region. Sports such as tennis and croquet were introduced in the 1800's and many courts were built. You can still see them in our small villages, such as Krimbiki and Killabakh. These facilities were the centre of each community, with picnics and dances being held at the community halls often built right next to the tennis or croquet court. People would travel for many miles to attend these events. There is a legacy with these facilities and the Strategy respects this. The Strategy also looks at more modern sports such as netball and basketball, and most recently pickleball.

The audit that was conducted as part of the development of the Strategy has investigated the 143 different courts that we have, and their condition, their location, and trends that are governing their use. The audit found that we have enough tennis courts and croquet courts. We do not have enough basketball and half courts. We do have enough netball courts, but they are not being used to their full capacity.

The Strategy has a comprehensive Action Plan and the actions contained in it are focused on the upgrading of our tennis court portfolio. In addition, and just as important, the Strategy recommends the construction or conversion of 21 multi-purpose courts. The Strategy highlights that one multi-purpose court can provide for more than four individual sports. We get “far more bang for our buck” with multi-purpose courts. They are good value for money and low on maintenance.

The Strategy also highlights that we need to remove four of our old tennis courts. These courts are one court facilities in small villages where both the decreasing population and the decreasing participation in tennis are seeing these facilities deteriorating. These facilities will cost significant money to upgrade and maintain, with limited community value coming from them. Where the Strategy recommends the removal of these four courts additional tennis courts and multi-purpose courts are recommended in nearby larger population centres.

The Strategy acknowledges that we can't complete all the recommendations. However, the Strategy provides the framework for future planning and provision.

Lastly, this Strategy has a life cycle of twelve years. Each of the recommendations in the Action Plan has been allocated a Short, Medium- or Long-term priority. Therefore, some communities will get new or upgraded facilities in the near term, these have been judged to be the most important, however, where the need is less acute the recommendations have been given medium- or long-term priorities. By the time we review this Strategy we will not have delivered all the recommendations, however, we will be working systematically through the recommendations seeking to give our community high quality experiences where they are most needed.



INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Our sports facilities help our community live healthy and active lives.

During 2022 and the first half of 2023 we developed the *MidCoast Open Space and Recreation Strategy 2023 – 2035*. This is the foundational strategy that guides us on how we manage the extensive public open spaces that we have. The Strategy also provides overarching guidance on the numerous uses of our public open space, including recreation activities, such as sport and play.

Through the development of the *MidCoast Open Space and Recreation Strategy 2023-2035* we engaged with the community to confirm our analysis of our current open space and we identified six key insights. From these, a vision, guiding principles and actions list have been developed. The vision reflects the value that our community places on our open space. The eight guiding principles have been developed to guide us in our management and delivery of open space in the MidCoast region. The actions reflect our understanding of the short-, medium- and long-term needs and aspirations of our community.



This Outdoor Sports Court Strategy is a direct recommendation from the *MidCoast Open Space and Recreation Strategy 2023 – 2035*. The vision, guiding principles and intent of the open space and recreation strategy form the basis of this strategy.

OUR OUTDOOR SPORTS COURT VISION

“ Our community have access to court facilities that help to enhance their lives. Our diverse range of courts are contemporary, inclusive, appropriately located, equitably distributed, sustainably managed and they contribute to our active lifestyles. ”

OUR GOAL

“ Our goal is to provide contemporary court facilities that meet our community’s needs and that are located where they need to be. ”

Background

Home to 96,800 people (2021), the MidCoast region offers our diverse community a wide range of lifestyle opportunities. Located on the mid north coast of NSW, the geographical area covers more than 10,000 km² and extends from the coastline, west to the escarpment of the Great Dividing Range. The Biripi and Worimi people are the traditional owners of the land. The region is well known for its natural beauty and is a key holiday destination that attracts a large number of tourists and visitors throughout the seasons. The area spans from sparkling beaches on the coast to mountains in the hinterland, with expansive national parks and green spaces in between. It includes the Manning River valley, the Wallis, Smiths and Myall Lakes systems, the northern foreshore of Port Stephens, the agricultural hinterland and rugged, forested ranges of the Woko and Tapin Tops National Parks, and the World Heritage-listed Barrington Tops National Park. These natural features contribute to our lifestyles, livelihoods and wellbeing, and protecting and celebrating them is an important focus for our future.

We manage 4134ha of public open space, made up of 826 parks and reserves. There are 94 individual tennis courts, 34 netball courts and numerous types of court facilities spread throughout the region. These play an important role in the overall provision of recreation services to the community and whilst Council acknowledges the importance of these sport facilities to our community, it is keen to ensure our sports facilities, including our courts are managed in the most effective manner for social, economic and environmental outcomes for the community.

To this end, Council has embarked on this strategy to assist it in determining the ‘state of sports courts’ in MidCoast and to ensure it keeps abreast of changing demands, needs and at the same time manages these important assets for current and future generations.

Methodology

In developing this strategy, the following actions were undertaken:

1. Defining and understanding the importance of court activities and trends in sports court planning
2. Auditing all sports courts in the region, including location and condition
3. Determining current and future classifications
4. Making recommendations for future design, management and provision of sports courts.
5. Consulting with the community with regards to their thoughts on the Strategy

This Court Strategy makes recommendations on future court provision and upgrades to existing courts

Why do we need a Strategy?

Court sports, including tennis, netball, basketball and croquet play a significant role in providing health outcomes for our community. Our diverse range of outdoor courts cater for a range of different activities and sports. Significantly, court sports are popular with our older set, with tennis making up both the most court facilities that we have, and the most popular physical activity for older people.

This MidCoast Outdoor Sports Court Strategy is a direct recommendation from the *MidCoast Open Space and Recreation Strategy 2023 – 2035*. The People in Parks section of the OSRS highlighted the importance of structured and unstructured physical activity to our community and the need to bring our court portfolio up to acceptable contemporary standards.

None of the amalgamated councils that made up the MidCoast Council had plans for the provision of outdoor courts. Therefore, this Strategy provides new strategic direction for the development, and sustainable management of outdoor court facilities across the whole region, as well as a comprehensive Action Plan for the future development of the court portfolio.

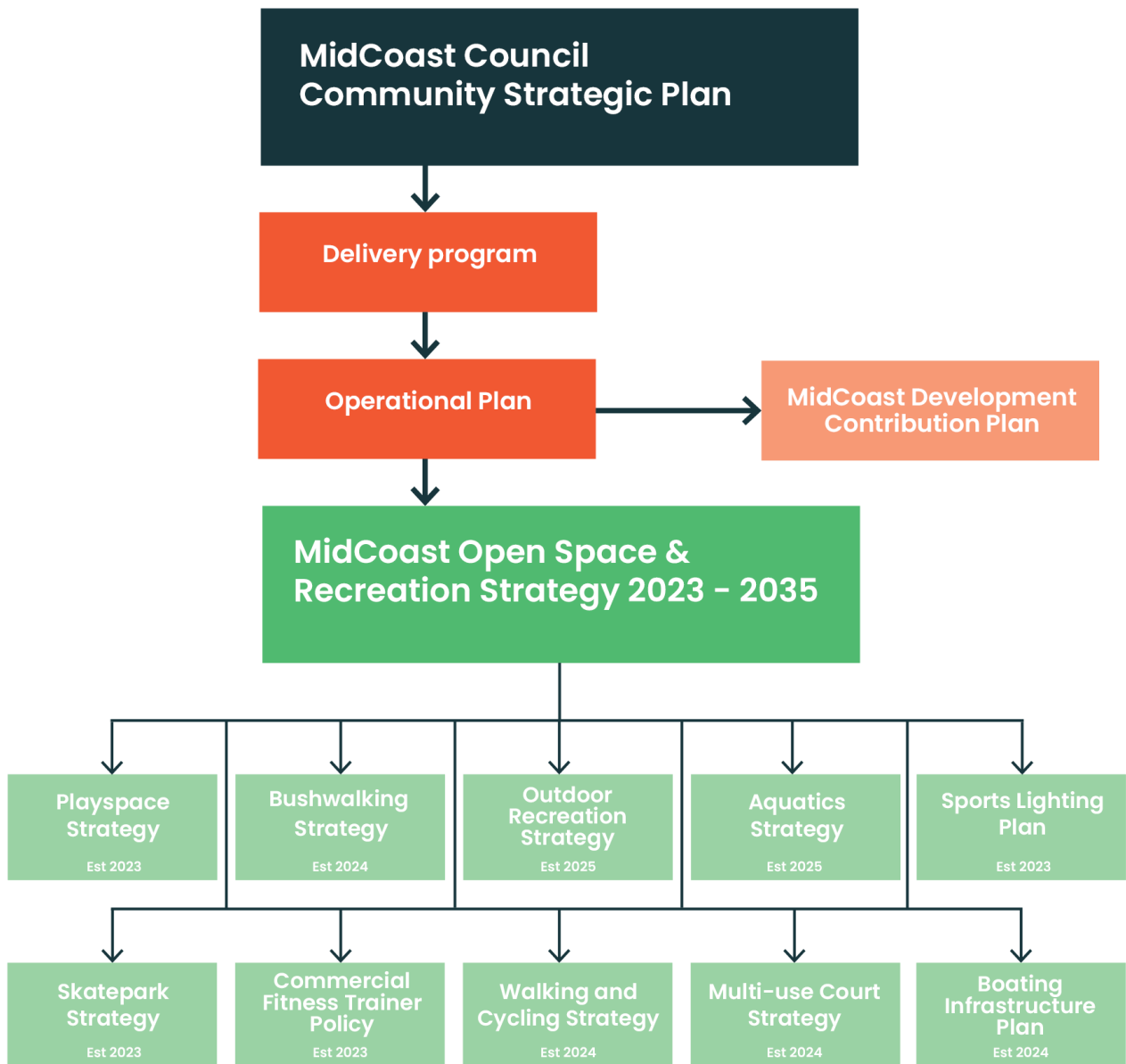
Outdoor courts are significant investments made by Council on behalf of the community. These assets need to be maintained over a 30-year lifecycle and this Strategy provides direction for the management and maintenance of our court portfolio.



STRATEGIC PLANNING

Strategic Planning

This Outdoor Sports Court Strategy¹ is one component of our larger open space planning framework. The framework was identified in the *MidCoast Open Space and Recreation Strategy 2023 – 2035* (OSRS). The OSRS is the source document for all public open space planning documents. Below is the planning framework, as highlighted in the OSRS.



¹ The OSRS planning framework refers to the strategy dealing with sports courts as the “*Multi-use Court Strategy*”. This title does not represent the full court portfolio and so the name has been adjusted to better title this strategy.

Key Principles

The following key principles will direct the provision of court-based sports facilities in the MidCoast region.

1. **Equitable distribution** - Provision of a portfolio of contemporary court facilities that ensures that the individual facilities are located where they can meet the needs of the community.
2. **Diversity** – A court facility portfolio that offers a range of different sport experiences.
3. **Co-location** – Where appropriate co-locate courts with other facilities such as sporting fields to maximise capacity and efficiency of use.
4. **Distribution** – a portfolio of different court facilities that are fairly distributed across the region.

Strategy Objectives

This Strategy has the following objectives:

1. Adopt a holistic portfolio approach to planning for, constructing and managing our court facilities
2. Develop a court portfolio that reflects the community's wishes
3. Aligns with the aspiration and outcomes from the Open Space and Recreation Strategy 2023 - 2035
4. Provides the future planning framework for the delivery of court facilities throughout the region
5. Provides an evidence-based planning approach that justifies each action within the Action Plan
6. Establish the Key Principles for the provision of quality court facilities for the MidCoast region
7. Outline the process for the sustainable management and maintenance of courts

Visibility, Accessibility, Connectivity (VAC)

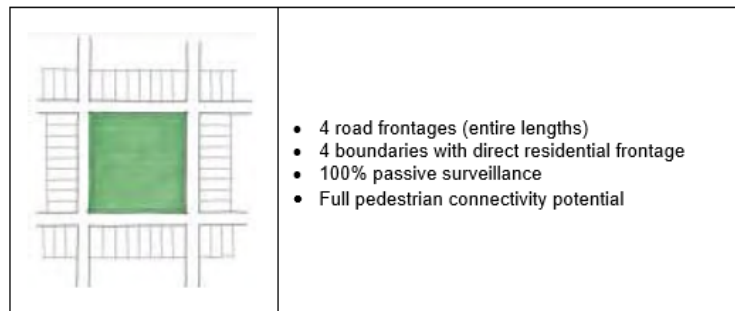
There are several planning considerations involved in the sustainable management of our public open spaces, and the provision of infrastructure, such as our court facilities. They fall under three categories: Visibility, Accessibility and Connectivity (VAC)². A court facility needs to be in a location that has both active and passive surveillance. This is often obtained in a high profile “village green” location or where there is significant passing traffic and is observable from a distance. Passive visibility helps to alleviate anti-social behaviour. Women and girls will avoid exercising at facilities that do not have sufficient passive surveillance.

Second, the facility needs to be accessible, not just for all-ability access but also for the cohort that frequents these facilities. Access to public transport and active transport is critical for the success of facilities that attract youth, such as basketball and multi-purpose courts. Lastly, the facility should be connected to other places that participants wish to be at. This could be a shopping precinct, a beach, or other park facilities.

Unless these planning considerations form the basis of locating a facility not only will the facility not be used by the community, but experience has shown that the general community will not support any new facility that doesn't align with these planning considerations.

² <https://www.parksleisure.com.au/research-portal/resources>

The image below is an illustration of how a well-planned park, and the facility within it, can form the central “heart” of a community. This open space is safe for all, accessible to all and encourages our community to value and visit their parks. Most of our parks are more dynamic than this simple example, with linear parks, coastal parks and parks neighbouring bushland being the norm. However, the concepts of VAC still apply to these parks.



Planning for recreation infrastructure has come a long way, and it is now considered highly desirable to provide large Regional level facilities within each catchment, which serves as the main facility, with Local and District facilities supporting the Regional facility. Regional level facilities are extensive, provide a range of different participant experiences and include amenities such as seating, shade, toilets and youth hang-out spaces. A full breakdown of the hierarchy of facilities and their definitions are provided later in this strategy.

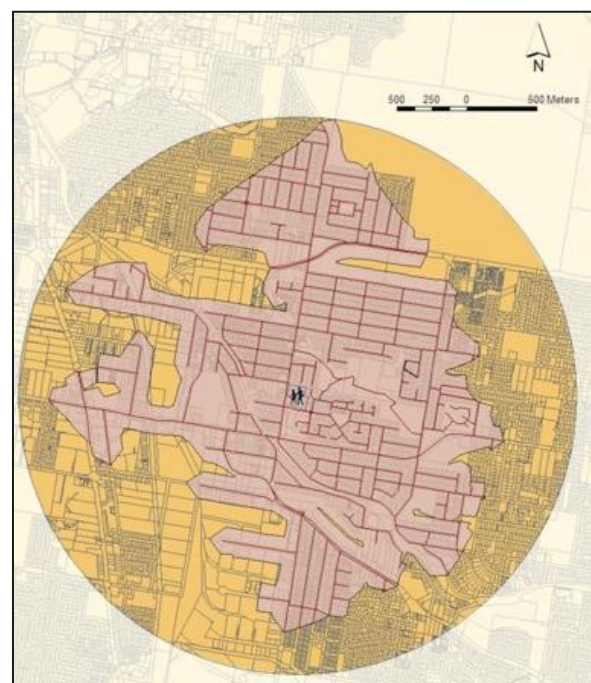
MidCoast has a large portfolio of different outdoor courts. As with sports fields and other recreation infrastructure these courts have been provided over many decades and in some cases hundreds of years. These facilities are in our larger centres but also in our small towns and even smaller villages. In the past these have been provided purely on historic demand.

Catchment

The number of people living in any given area, the distance someone must travel to get to a facility is an important consideration when planning. This concept is called Catchment.

Catchment plays a vital role in planning for the provision of recreational infrastructure for our community. Ensuring that we have a critical mass people that can use a specific facility ensures that are putting our assets where they need to be, but more importantly that we do not put facilities where they do not provide the community outcomes that we seek.

To achieve the optimum outcomes, we consider catchment that will be able to use each of our facilities. The facility hierarchy guides us as to to put where. In the case of our sports courts, people drive to them, so the catchment is increased.



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How people get there is also important. People will normally travel further distances for a higher quality facility. The general rule of thumb is that people will walk for a Local level facility, and drive to a District

or Regional level facility.

Catchments often have irregular shapes because they cover the actual distance travelled, not the straight-line distance. A catchment can be broken by barriers that are in the area. Structures such as major roads, railway lines, overpasses, riparian corridors, and rivers can be barriers to a person walking to a facility. Many of the smaller settlements in the MidCoast area have natural barriers, such as coastal rivers, that greatly influenced the future recommendations in the Strategy's Action Plan.

When we plan to provide a specific facility, we consider how many people live within the catchment of the facility. We then consider the demographic of that catchment. For example, a catchment with a large retirement village in it would give very different requirements for a sports court facility than a catchment with a large primary school or apartment blocks with young families. A court facility within the catchment of a retirement village would necessitate more tennis and pickleball courts than basketball courts. Catchment theory is a companion with the sport hierarchy, which will be discussed shortly.

Our Goal

Our goal is to provide our outdoor courts in our population centres, ensuring a sustainable and well used portfolio of facilities.

Distribution

Like other recreation infrastructure, such as playspaces and skateparks, sports courts are also provided based on distribution. Planning for courts aims to provide for a selection of different court experiences within a catchment radius of most participants in each sport. The Hierarchy is the main mechanism for providing a distributed portfolio. However, the unique geographic nature of our region means that smaller court facilities can provide for a whole settlement. A good example of this is the Wingham Tennis Centre, which has six courts, making it a small District level facility, but which services the whole town of Wingham. There are several of these examples.

MidCoast has hundreds of different sports courts spread throughout our area. As with all our recreational infrastructure these sports courts have been provided in many of our smaller towns, purely on historic demand. Some are poorly located, with very few people within their catchment. Because of a lack of use these courts are often in poor condition and are not providing the value that they should. These facilities represent a major maintenance and economic drain on our resources and to upgrade them to contemporary standards would be expensive and not a good use of public funds. In the case of tennis, we have many singular tennis courts in small settlements that are in poor condition, and where there is less use than in the past.

Our Goal

Our goal is to provide a well distributed court portfolio within traveling distance of most of our community

Recreation or Sport?

Over the last five years there has been a seismic shift away from structured sport to unstructured sport

and recreation. This shift in our community's participation has meant that we need to think differently about what we provide, and where. If people want a quick game of 3 on 3 basketball with their small group of friends, then providing a full basketball court is an example of over provision. If more older people are playing recreational pickleball instead of competitive tennis, then our courts need to adapt to this change in participation.

Identifying whether a specific community wants to play competitive sport, or just have a half-court for their kids is a great challenge, made more challenging by the unique factors affecting the MidCoast region. With people being more "time poor" a quick game of tennis, or basketball or pickleball is all they can do. At the same time we have an aging community, who are wanting to stay active, but may no longer be interested in competitive sport. A good example of this is Old Bar. We currently have synthetic tennis courts, as well as netball courts in Old Bar Park. However, there is strong demand in the community for pickleball and basketball courts. Recommendations in the Action Plan reflect this change in demand.

Many of the actions in the Action Plan of this strategy have a recreation focus, and a multi-purpose focus, to ensure that we provide dynamic facilities that cater for all. We will be removing some courts that were built to cater for competitive sport, especially tennis. They were constructed in locations that no longer have the population catchment, but also at a time when competitive sport was all that people were doing. We also have growing population centres that do not have courts and this needs to change.

Our Goal

Our goal is to provide a court portfolio that meets the community's diverse needs, including sport and community recreation.



PLANNING FOR SPORTS COURTS

Planning for court sports

We don't plan for the provision of courts, rather we plan for what court-based sports people want to do. We then identify what courts we need to provide to meet that need. Therefore, the type of sport plays a critical role in providing sport infrastructure for our community. Just like field sports, where several different types of sports fields are provided, to cater for different field sports, the same applies to court sports.

What types of courts are considered

For the purposes of this strategy the following court types are considered:

- Tennis
- Netball
- Basketball
- Half Courts
- Multi-purpose
- Pickleball
- Croquet
- Futsal

What sports are considered

Having outlined the different types of sports courts a list of court sports is considered. This list is not exhaustive and as new sports are introduced this list would grow.

- Tennis
- Netball
- Basketball
- Futsal
- Croquet
- Pickleball
- Handball
- Badminton
- Volleyball
- Wall ball

What is not considered

Even though most court sports such as basketball and netball can also be played indoors, this strategy does not cover indoor sports facilities.

Facilities

This section looks at our current facilities, provides a benchmark to which we can compare what other councils are providing and then looks at each sport and what their requirements are for their specific sports.

Sport Facilities

All the courts outlined previously are provided for in the MidCoast region. In the table below are the outdoor courts that we currently have.

Category	Local	District	Regional	Total Courts
Tennis courts	23	44	27	94
Basketball	1			1
Netball courts	1	25		26
Croquet	3	2	4	9
Multi-purpose	4			4
Total Courts				143

Benchmarks

Benchmarks are a useful tool in guiding provision of different sport and recreation facilities. In our other strategic planning documents, including our Playspace and Skatepark Strategies we have used a benchmark comparing similar councils in NSW to understand what our council is providing. In the case of courts this exercise would provide limited value. Therefore, we have instead sourced several national sport benchmarks, based on head of population, and then compared them to what we have provided for our population.

Sports Courts Benchmark		
Sport	Benchmark	Benchmark Provision
Tennis	4 per 5,000	76 (MidCoast - 94)
Basketball (multi-purpose)	1 per 5,000	19 (MidCoast - 1)
Netball	2 per 5,000	38 (MidCoast - 26)
Croquet	1 per 10,000	10 (MidCoast – 9)

As can be seen from the basic benchmarking we have more tennis courts than what we need. We also have a fair portfolio of netball courts. Where we are significantly short is in multi-purpose courts, that can provide for recreational basketball, netball, pickleball, badminton and several other recreational sports. The value of multi-purpose courts has increased significantly over the last few years as people have progressively moved away from competitive sport.

What do they look like?

As detailed in the OSRS we must balance the needs of the community with sustainably managing our public open spaces. One component of this sustainable management is ensuring that we do not over-embellish our spaces. We don't want our parks full of infrastructure, especially when the demand for its use is uncertain or low.

Sports courts take up valuable public open space. Having them in our parks means that we can't do other things with that space. Therefore, the amount of space that they take up is an important planning consideration.

Each court sport has its own court dimensions, which we have detailed below. The reference document for all sport facility dimensions is the Sports Dimensions Guide, a Western Australian Government publication³.

Tennis, Basketball and Netball

Court sports are dominated by three court-based sports: tennis, basketball and netball. Tennis is one of the oldest, if not the oldest structured sport still played today. Its origins can be traced back to the 1400's, originating in France and England. Both netball and basketball can be traced back to 1891, with netball being developed to replace the women's version of basketball sometime after. Despite their differences in origin the three sports are played within a court structure laid out on the ground.

Sports Court Dimensions		
Tennis	Basketball	Netball
23.77m Length X 8.23m Width	28m Length X 15m Width	30.5m Length X 15.25m Width
Total area (safety area) 34.77m X 17.07m	Total area (safety area) 30m X 17mm	Total area (safety area) 32.5m X 17.25m

Croquet

Another court-based sport is croquet. A croquet court could just as easily be described as a field, but they are referred to as courts. Croquet does not have the same level of participation that the three main court sports have and is almost exclusively an older person's sport. The sport of croquet was first seen in 1856 in England. Like tennis croquet was played by the royal houses of both England and France, and it was not until the late 1800's that the sport was allowed to be played by "commoners". During the 1800's many sports that were popular in England were brought to Australia. There are still many croquet courts in Australia, and we have nine croquet courts in MidCoast.

Court Dimensions
Croquet
25.6m X 32m
Total area 25.6m X 32m

³ <https://www.dlgsc.wa.gov.au/departments/publications/publication/sports-dimensions-guide>

Futsal, Pickleball and Badminton

There are several other court sports, including futsal, badminton and pickleball. Futsal is a break-away sport from football (soccer) with badminton and pickleball being break-away from tennis. Badminton has its origins in Asia. Most often badminton is played indoors, due to the lite weight of the shuttlecock and so there is little provision for outdoor badminton on our courts.

Both futsal and pickleball are becoming increasingly popular, with clubs being active in MidCoast. These sports do not require purpose-built courts for their sport, but are able to be played on other types of courts, however, ideally, futsal should be played on a purpose-built futsal court with either wood or synthetic surfaces

Court Dimensions	
Futsal	Pickleball & Badminton
42m Length X 25m Width	13.41m Length X 6.09m Width
Total area (safety area) 44m X 27m	Total area (safety area) 15.41m X 8.09m

Half-courts

Another popular form of court are half courts. The use of a half court for basketball and to a lesser extent netball originated in the US. Half-court basketball is designed to cater for a smaller group of players when two full teams are not available, or when two people want to play each other.

Court Dimensions
Half Court
11m Length X 15m Width
Total area (safety area) 13m X 17m

Multi-purpose courts

The final outdoor court that the strategy considers are multi-use or multi-purpose courts. These courts do not have their own dimensions but are built to the minimum that will allow netball, basketball, tennis, volleyball and badminton to be played on them. Each sport is indicated on the court by the use of different coloured lines, the brighter the coloured line the faster the ball of the individual sport moves, with tennis and other racket-based sports having the lighter-coloured lines. These courts are recreational in nature, providing sport opportunities for recreational play. They are not used for competitive sport, where singular sports lining is demanded. For example, you would not see a muti-purpose court, with multiple line marking at a tennis centre.

Court Dimensions
Multi-purpose Court
36.60m Length X 21.35m Width
Total area (safety area) 38.60m X 23.35m

A Court Portfolio

As with all our sport and play facilities we are taking a portfolio approach to the planning and provision of our court facilities. It is important that we consider each facility as part of a larger portfolio, because that is how our communities see them, by choosing one facility for one experience and another for a different experience. The facility hierarchy is detailed shortly, along with the Desired Standards of Provision. In competitive sports, such as tennis, basketball and netball we are seeking to provide a tiered portfolio of facilities that provide a graduated experience. Likewise, where possible, we will seek to provide diversity of experience, in the case of tennis this involves different court surfaces, such as natural grass, synthetic grass, synthetic acrylic and clay.

Where can we put them?

Unlike other sports facilities, such as sports fields, we can locate sports courts in a diverse range of locations. It is not necessary to provide them in our parks, but most often we do. This is because we try and co-locate our court facilities with other sports infrastructure, such as sports fields. In considering this approach we are looking for the best use of our limited public open spaces, as well as having a sustainable approach to provision. Our guiding principles, as outlined in the OSRS, highlight an environmentally sustainable approach to infrastructure provision.

As previously highlighted earlier in this section, the range of different sports courts have their own dimensions. However, they do in effect take up the same area. A single court, say a netball court, takes up approximately 1,000m², or one tenth of a hectare. Therefore, we can get 10 courts in the area normally taken by a sports field. The other factor involved in the placement of sports courts is that they can be “broken up”, to suit the terrain, if a large, flat open space is not available then we can install 4 courts in a suitable site and locate more in another location. This is not perfect, but it does illustrate that there is some flexibility in court placement.

A good case study of this is Old Bar Park at Old Bar. The football fields are located on the prime land, which is flat, and is the right shape, and which provides the total area required. The sports courts, including the tennis courts and the netball courts are located in an area where you could not fit a sports field. This is a good example of co-locating sports facilities, whilst also doing so in a way that makes best use of the whole space.



Trends in court-based sports

Individual sport or activity trend data is an important guide to provision. What Australians are doing should directly influence what infrastructure we provide for them. The last thing that we want to do is spend valuable funds on sports infrastructure that in five years is not being used. Like all things that human beings do, they change. What was popular in the 1800's or even the 1900's is not necessarily what is popular today. Had anyone heard of Quidditch or even futsal in 1990.

This is an important consideration for court sports. As noted previously several court sports developed in the 1800's, such as tennis and croquet, which are not as popular today as they have been. This strategy, and its action plan, therefore, takes trends in participation into account.

Below we have provided the latest trend data for the main court-based sports. This data is from the Ausplay data survey, which has been produced by Sport Australia (Australian Sports Commission) since 2015. The datasets that we have used below are from 2016 – 2018. These years have been used due to COVID19 having a significant impact on both structured and unstructured sport participation data.

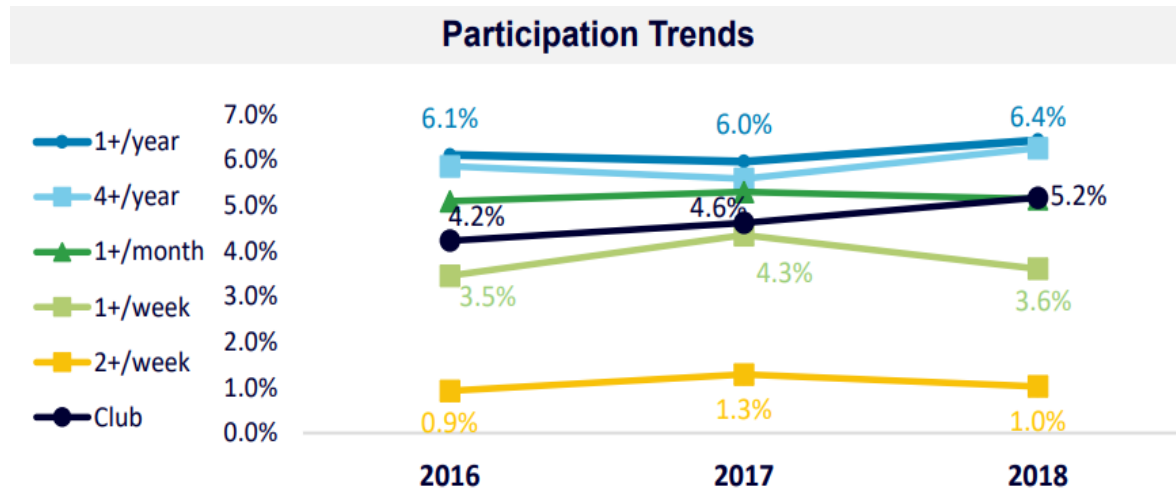
Tennis

In 2022 1,018,899 people or 4.9% of the total Australian population reported partaking in the sport of tennis.

Adult participation was slightly skewed towards males (5.3% of the male population), with males accounting for 57% of participation. However, Tennis participation was also high among females (3.8% of the female population). Two thirds (64%) of adult participation in tennis was organised, with the majority of organised participation (70%) in sport clubs.

AusPlay⁴ estimates that 290,611 children 0-14 participated in organised tennis out-of-school. Children's participation was also skewed towards males (63%). Participation rates for organised tennis were steady from 5-14 years of age, without any noticeable drop throughout childhood and early adolescence. Compared to other sports, tennis had one of the best retention rates past 11 years of age, especially among males.

Although the peak participation rates among adults 15+ were in 15–17-year-olds, tennis was less exposed to the age-related decline in participation experienced by many other sports.



At a time when many sports are losing participants the trend for tennis participation remains solid. This is mainly due to the higher levels of older people who play the sport. It is anticipated that as this age cohort dies they will not be replaced by younger tennis players, therefore, facility development needs to be carefully considered, especially long-term planning for new facilities. This will be evident by actions in the Action Plan.

Basketball

In 2022 838,454 people or 4% of the total Australian population reported partaking in the sport of basketball.

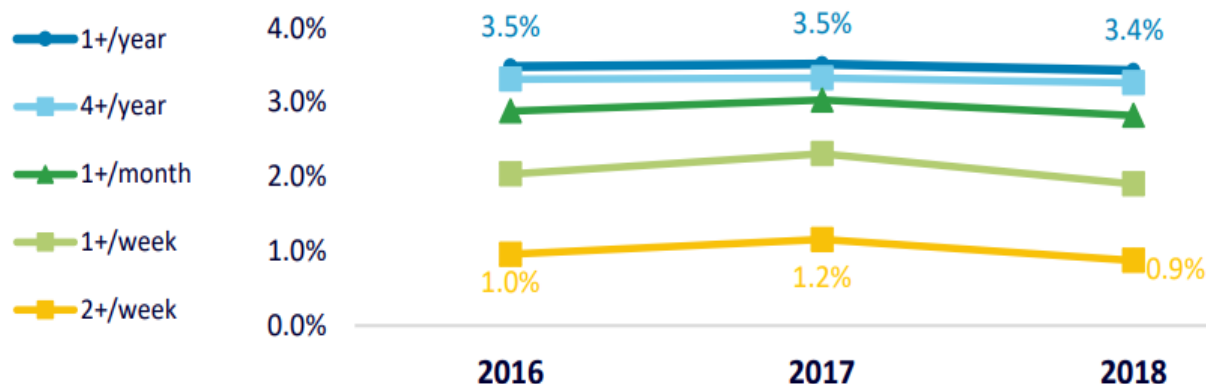
Adult participation was heavily skewed towards males (5.0% of the male population), with males accounting for 71% of participation. Female participation was lower than males but still high (2.0% of the female population) considering the competition provided by Netball.

Around two thirds of adult 15+ basketball participation was organised (65%), with most of organised participation (66%) in sport clubs. AusPlay⁵ estimates that 318,962 children 0-14 participated in organised basketball out-of-school. Boys accounted for 66% of children's participation. The peak participation rates for organised basketball were among children 12-14, however participation rates increased after 8 years of age and remained high through the rest of childhood and even throughout adolescence before decreasing steadily from adulthood onwards.

⁴ https://www.clearinghouseforsport.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0019/762103/State_of_Play_Report_-_Tennis.pdf

⁵ https://www.clearinghouseforsport.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/843049/State_of_Play_Report_-_Basketball.pdf

Participation Trends



As the graph indicates there has been a slight decline in participation over the years. Basketball increased its participation from about 2000 onwards but appears to have plateaued. This aligns with the overall trends of sport activities over the recent years.

Basketball is most popular among children and adolescents. It has a significant drop-off of players as they age, with the participation levels for older Australians being statistically insignificant.

In relation to this strategy a large percentage of participation is undertaken on indoor courts, especially at the organised or club level. Basketball as a recreation is more often undertaken on outdoor courts where unstructured play takes place.

Netball

In 2022 622,105 people or 3% of the total Australian population reported partaking in the sport of netball.

Adult participation was heavily skewed towards females (5.0% of the female population), with females accounting for 89% of participation. A very high proportion of adult 15+ netball participation was organised (90%), with more than two thirds of organised participation (69%) in sport clubs.

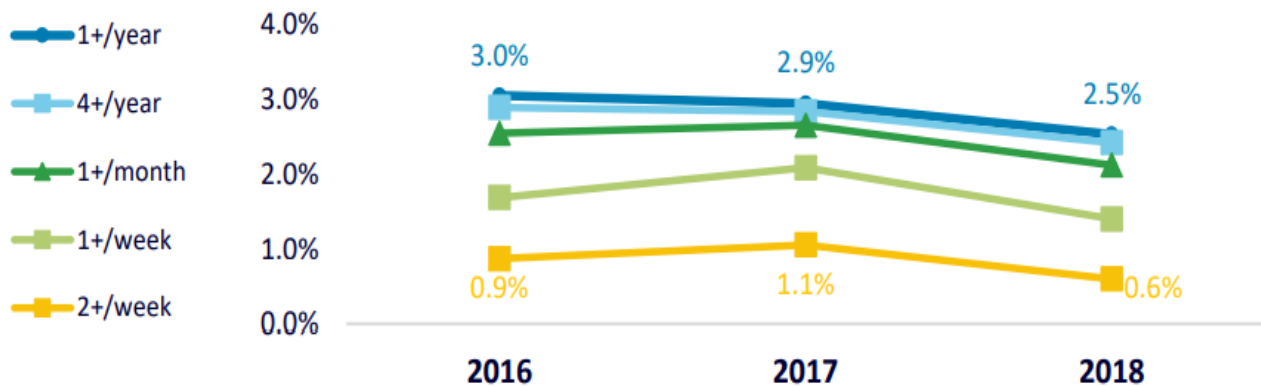
AusPlay⁶ estimates that 331,031 Children 0-14 participated in organised netball out-of-school. The overwhelming majority of participation was from girls, as they represented 97% of all children's out-of-school organised netball participation.

Peak participation rates were among children 12-14 and then participation steadily declined with age. However, compared to other team sports, netball retained players for longer with strong female participation into adulthood up to 18-24 years of age.

Sports dominated by women show a different suite of motivations for participation. The top three motivations to participate in netball were 'Social reasons' (52%), 'Fun & enjoyment' (50%) and 'Physical health or fitness' (45%). The reasons given for participation are unique to female sports in relation to their importance, with males reporting far less societal and more physical reasons for participation.

⁶ https://www.clearinghouseforsport.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/843059/State_of_Play_Report_-_Netball.pdf

Participation Trends



trend graph above indicates an overall decline in participation over the years. This is readily explained by the increase by females in traditionally male dominated sports, such as football, AFL, rugby league and others. This increase in male dominated sports has been at the cost of netball. This trend has a direct impact on infrastructure provision and planning for new facilities. As this strategy covers a period up until 2035 it is important to be able to predict what participation trends are going to be in 12 years times. If there is less netball participation, as recent data is showing, then providing more netball facilities would be a mistake.

Croquet, Pickleball, Futsal

For the other sports, croquet has 30,530 (0.1%), pickleball has 15,000 (0.01%) and futsal has 63,031 (0.2%). With our older average age in MidCoast it would be safe to assume that our participation numbers for both croquet and pickleball are comparable to the national trend data.

Court sport trends in MidCoast

This section follows on from the trends in court sports. Firstly, the amount of usage of our outdoor sports courts is difficult to gauge, at a macro level. We can use data kept by individual sports clubs, such as their membership numbers, to gauge overall use, however, club-based use does not constitute the majority of usage, as community recreation makes up the bulk of usage. By community use we mean unregulated use by individual members of the public. This use occurs at most of our courts, especially if there is not an active club managing the facility, which is the case for many of our courts.

Tennis

In 2020 Tennis NSW produced a snapshot report for the MidCoast region. In this report, which Tennis NSW provided to Council, they reported that both our tennis courts, of which we have 94, and our participation levels are rated as critical. This means that the state of our facilities and the amount of participation that we are seeing at them is so low to be critical. A caveat here is that Tennis NSW has accessed this data from their registered clubs. This means, that like us, they don't know how much activity is taking place that is not through their clubs. However, they have indicated that they believe that about 50% of usage is "social" (see image). Council would support this observation.

The report, available from Council on request, also highlighted the state of our facilities, which is the most important driver of participation, as being at a critical level. The State of Courts audit later in this strategy supports this finding.

Netball

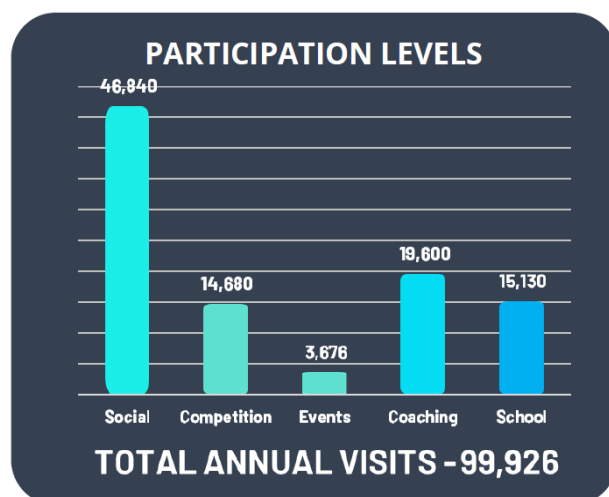
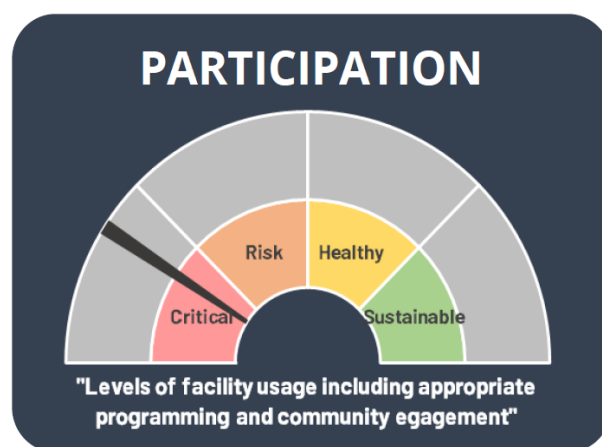
Moving on from tennis, the other main user of our outdoor sports courts is netball. Data indicates high usage at the club level. The Manning Valley Netball Association has five clubs with 491 members in its association. Even though national trends and participation data, as outlined previous, show a significant decline in netball at the national level, the MidCoast is still experiencing good participation numbers. But the national trend of a significant drop-off of participation at the mid-teen age group is repeated at the local level.

Basketball

All club-based basketball participation takes place indoors, at the Taree Recreation Ground indoor centre. However, our multi-purpose courts see high levels of community recreational use, as do the small number of half-courts that we have. Once again, this community recreation usage is difficult to gauge as there is no mechanism that records it. In this case national trend data is the best indicator of what percentage of our population is using our outdoor courts.

Croquet, Pickleball, Futsal

As noted in the national trend data previously, these three minor court sports have a smaller but still significant number of participants, especially in the MidCoast region. Conversations with local croquet and pickleball representatives indicate very healthy participation and use of our courts.



Hierarchy of facilities

Our Council, and the previous councils that made up the region, have worked for many decades to provide infrastructure and services to our respective communities. Local sports fields and other specialist sport facilities have been provided over many years. However, as noted in the *MidCoast Open Space and Recreation Needs Analysis 2022* the portfolio of sport facilities is aging, and the need to upgrade and rationalise the portfolio is pressing.

To provide the right facilities, in the right locations, for the right people, at the right time we use a Hierarchy of Facilities. The hierarchy provide a guide for what should be provided, depending on where the facility fits within the hierarchy. The hierarchy we use has been developed by Dr Ken Marriot, in *Planning for the provision of leisure and recreation in Australia (2010)*.⁷

The hierarchical position of a recreation venue is often overlooked as a planning consideration and planning tool. However, allocating each asset to a position in a hierarchy is an important planning strategy because, as with the classification of assets, it helps with the assessment of what already exists and particularly, of its capacity to meet various types of need in the community. For instance, if the majority of sporting venues were classified as Local, this could well mean that clubs would have difficulty competing at higher standards and/or that they may have to travel away to gain higher standards of competition. Similarly, a Local sports facility, where only one sports field is provided, will not cater to a club that has a growing membership base.

Sport Hierarchy

The hierarchy of sports facilities is:

- Local
- District
- Regional

These different components within the sport hierarchy have definitions and provisions applied to them. See the table below.

Classification	Planning considerations	Definition
Local (Facility that caters for local competition)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lower level local or junior levels of competition sport• 1-2 courts• Selected court surface dependent on local use.• Basic sports lights <80 Lux• Limited or no car parking• None or small amenities• Total area <2000m²	<p>Local recreation venues predominantly serve small rural localities, small townships, and neighbourhoods or suburbs within the urban areas of one council. They are classified as local because:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• They are generally small in size and thus have little or no capacity to serve a whole council or region• They provide opportunities which are similar to those available at a number of other locations and thus do not attract people from far away and do not need to serve people from far away• Their natural or built features are unremarkable and as a result, they do not draw users from a wide area• They have been designed and sited in a way which ensures good access from nearby areas and possibly even, discourages access and use from more distant areas. <p>Singular sports fields, one purpose courts, playgrounds,</p>

⁷ https://www.stategrowth.tas.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/358979/Recreation_Planning_Manual.pdf

Classification	Planning considerations	Definition
		ball sport kick-about areas, small reserves, neighbourhood pathways and local halls are common local recreation venues.
District (Facility that caters for district competition)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Higher levels of competition sport 3-11 courts Selected court surface dependent on highest level of competition being played. Competition sports lights >150 Lux Min 60 car parks Amenities to suit Car Parking Cost of maintenance borne by council Total area <1ha 	<p>District recreation venues serve the total community living in a council area. They are classified as District because:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> They are used by individuals, groups or teams which are drawn from across the whole local government area They are provided by a council, or other bodies for the residents of one council. Other councils provide their own venues for their residents They are often the only resource of their type in the local government area Their natural or built features are sufficiently significant to draw users from across a whole council The size of the land requirements, the higher cost of provision and, for some types of use, the size of catchment needed to ensure viability, mean that no more than one or two venues can be provided by a council They have been sited so as to be accessible to the whole council community. <p>District level recreation venues may include sports grounds, multiple single purpose courts, multi-purpose courts, city/town centre reserves, botanic gardens, walking/cycling trails, indoor aquatic leisure centres, and undeveloped reserves retained to meet future municipal needs.</p>
Regional (Facility that caters for regional competition)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regional levels of competition sport 12-16 courts Selected court surface dependent on highest level of competition being played. Competition sports lights >250 Lux Min 90 car parks Amenities to suit Cost of maintenance borne by council LED lighting Car Parking 	<p>Regional recreation venues serve the needs of the residents of a number of councils. They are classified as regional for one or more of the following reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> They are larger than other facilities of the same type and can accommodate a far larger number of visitors They need a substantial market or service area to remain viable and they need to draw that market from the council in which they are located and its surrounding region The council in which they are based generally has greater drawing power than other councils in the area Their natural or built features are so outstanding; they draw users from a wide area They support either a wide mix of uses or high specialisation of use They are generally of higher quality than venues

Classification	Planning considerations	Definition
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cost of maintenance borne by council Total area >2ha 	<p>which are lower in the hierarchy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> They are generally costly to provide and/or maintain They are often unique to a region They have environmental, heritage, amenity or other special significance There is a low frequency of provision or natural occurrence. <p>Regional recreation venues frequently include golf courses, major sports grounds, large single purpose court precincts, major indoor aquatic leisure venues, long distance trails, and various types of heritage and nature reserves e.g., forests, lakes, rivers, wetlands and waterfalls.</p>

Desired Standards of Provision

The desired standards of provision assist us to identify the capacity and catchment of facilities. They also identify the level of infrastructure required to adequately support the level of sport or recreation activity accommodated at the facility⁸.

Catchment	Local	District	Regional
Accessibility Standard	15 minutes travel time	20 minutes travel time	25 minutes travel time
Netball Courts	Two to four court configurations with lighting to support localised training. Consideration to multi-use opportunities such as basketball configurations where appropriate.	A minimum of 12 courts for centralised competition.	Quantity and standards of courts to be determined in collaboration with Netball
Tennis Courts	One to four courts with lighting and electronic booking systems.	6 to 12 courts with supporting infrastructure including amenities with associated clubhouse.	12 to 16 high quality surface courts with at least 8 courts are required to be the same surface type.
Lighting	Lighting to recommended Australian Standards for training and some amateur competition acknowledging electrical supply may influence feasibility.	Lighting to recommended Australian Standards for amateur competition.	Lighting to recommended Australian Standards for standard of competition.

⁸ <https://www.otiumplanning.com.au/>

Catchment	Local	District	Regional
Amenities	Around 375sqm to 475sqm, located in a highly visible and central location with universally designed and flexible/ adaptable player and official change-rooms, spectator toilets, canteen and storage areas.	The size of district sports amenities is larger than local level facilities and are more than 500m ² . Additional and/ or larger change facilities, and a medical room is recommended.	As per district facilities with consideration to administration space, media capacity and potential co-location with grandstands. Often a number of Local sized amenity buildings are provided around the precinct to meet the need of individual clubs.
Fencing	Site fencing to prohibit illegal vehicle access. Fencing to separate spectators from player areas may be permitted where it does not limit flexible use of spaces. Fencing around Local sports fields can provide for off-leash dog walking.	Site fencing to prohibit illegal vehicle access. Fit for purpose fencing as required by the activity and level of competition.	Site fencing to prohibit illegal vehicle access. Fit for purpose fencing as required by the activity and level of competition.
Supporting Infrastructure	Irrigation systems are highly desirable to enhance field carrying capacity and safety. Seated spectator areas. Car parking to accommodate the proposed use. Cricket nets, athletics throwing cases and long jump pits.	As per local facility. Show-court for tennis and/ or netball. Increased consideration to circulation and spectator areas are required, due to the nature of district level facilities. Drainage systems can be provided at this level.	As per district facility with additional spectator and broadcast infrastructure.

Court design is important

Outdoor sports courts (and indoor) are all about the surface. Regardless of what surface is provided it is the surface that provides the experience, and therefore directs the planning for each facility, and the portfolio of facilities. It is important to note at this point that we are not talking about artificial sports fields, which have very similar components to sports courts, but they have their own systems, mainly different sub-bases. Don't confuse a synthetic football field with how sports courts are constructed.

The base

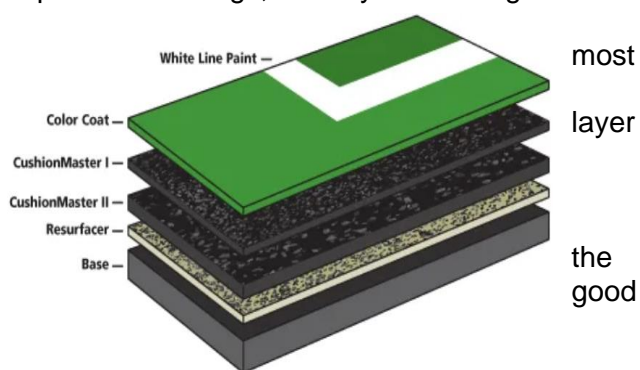
The base of the court is the 100mm sub-base layer on which the surface that we see is supported by. 100mm is the standard, but this can vary greatly depending on the type of sport or even the budget available.

Depending on what surface is being used, and what type of court it is, the base can simply be 100mm of poured concrete, or for higher quality courts it can be multi-layers of different materials. For the simplest

court, with a bitumen surface (right), a concrete sub-base is supplied. You won't see a fully bitumen sub-base court, as this would break up and form cracking very quickly. For more complex courts, designed for higher levels of competition, a multi-layer sub-base is required.

In the case of tennis, which as we have seen, was introduced into Australia during the 1800's, the sub-base of many Australian tennis courts was ant-bed. Many tennis courts were built in our rural and remote areas. They did not want to build courts straight on the ground, so they found an alternative material. Although termites (white ants) are awful pests, their nests or mounds, which dot our landscape, made great tennis courts. The nests were collected, broken down, crushed, rolled out, watered, and rolled repeatedly. Once laid down, the material made a fantastic playing surface. This is a similar surface to Clay, which is very popular in Europe. Many ant-bed tennis courts still exist today around Australia.

For multi-layer sub-bases different manufacturers provide different systems, however, regardless of what they look like they serve two basic purposes, the first is cushioning. The sub-base is designed to provide a cushioning effect for the player, to lessen the impact on their legs, which you do not get with concrete and bitumen courts, and the second purpose is drainage. For a court to be usable for of the time, a good drainage system, that moves water from the top of the system and away, with each of the sub-base playing its part, is critical. The base then is critical for the player experience, especially for facilities that accommodate competition sport, regardless of what that sport is. The lifecycle of sub-base is up to 50 years, in the case of concrete. A multi-layer base will last at least 20 years and in most cases 30 or more years.



The surface

As we have just seen, the sub-base is vital to a high-quality outdoor sports court. But the part that we see all the time is the surface. This is the material that adheres to the sub-base, and which provides the surface on which both the player and the ball, whatever type of ball that is, moves across. Different surfaces affect how the player moves and how the ball moves in different ways.

Acrylic

The material that we see most on the different types of courts, whether they are tennis, basketball or netball, is acrylic. Acrylic surfaces can also be called poured acrylic, colour coat, wet coat or cushioned acrylic. In most cases acrylic surfaces are applied as "wet coats". This is where the acrylic comes in liquid form, often in two parts, is mixed and then poured across the sub-base, which has been sealed, and then leveled to provide a 2mm layer of acrylic when it dries. This then becomes the "system" combining the sub-base and the poured coat into one solid system. The lines of whatever sport is to be played on the court are then applied. On the court below the acrylic surface has had several different line-markings applied, making it a multi-purpose court. It has basketball, netball, futsal and tennis. This is the classic contemporary multi-purpose court that most people will see, and which most councils will provide. The acrylic surface is very high wearing, requires no maintenance and lasts longer than synthetic grass.

This is a high-quality, multi-purpose court, that can be used for several different sports. It is also very flexible, allowing new sports such as pickleball to be played on it. It provides an outstanding outcome for the community. However, this type of court will not be used for individual sport facilities, where only one sport is being played, such as tennis or basketball centres.

Acrylic is also the competition surface of choice for some sports, primarily tennis. If you think of the major tennis facilities, such as Olympic Park in Melbourne, acrylic is the surface on all their courts. In

the case of regional and higher-level facilities there is an extra layer added to the sub-base which provides either a cushioning effect or adds extra cushioning. This type of surface is called a cushioned acrylic surface.

Synthetic grass

Community tennis courts most often have synthetic grass surfaces. The other sports that this strategy deals with do not prefer synthetic grass surfaces.

Synthetic grass, which comes in a matt, is laid over the sub-base and then clued into place. The synthetic “leaf”, the upper layer of the matt, is the synthetic material designed to act as and look like a leaf of grass. It is manufactured at different lengths, depending on what sport is to be played. For tennis, which dominates the synthetic surface arena, the leaf length will be 30mm. These leaves will not stay standing on their own, especially as they age. The most common way to ensure that the leaf remains standing, which gives the surface its character, is by pouring high-quality river sand over the court. The sand then creates a layer which forces the synthetic leaf to remain standing. This then creates the best surface for both cushioning for the player and the movement of the ball. This sand moves around, mostly by the player moving it with their feet. This is why regular maintenance is important for synthetic grass surfaces. Unlike acrylic synthetic needs to be maintained.

Infill

As noted above, synthetic grass surfaces require a material to be installed through it to ensure that the grass leaf remains standing. If the leaf lays over, it cannot be “convinced” to stand upright again. This is why regular maintenance programs are critical for synthetic care.

There are several different infill materials that can be used, and these are highlighted in the section that follows. In short, sand, recycled rubber from car tires, produced rubber granules, and natural materials such as coconut husks are used as infill.

Synthetic Generations

Synthetic surfaces are always being researched, developed, and advanced. There are currently four different “generations” of synthetic sports surfaces. The first to be introduced, Generation 1, is a simple matt without an introduced infill. Synthetic grass with a sand infill is Generation 2. Generation 3 are synthetic surfaces with several different infills, mainly recycled, and produced rubber granules, as well as natural materials such as coconut husk. And finally, General 4, which has recently been introduced to the market. With Gen 4 surfaces development has reached a point where the synthetic matt does not need an infill, and the leaf remains standing on its own. All of these synthetic surfaces have their own cushioning effect, as well as different playing experiences, with the ball moving in different ways and speeds.

As noted, the cushioning effect of a synthetic surface appeals to older tennis players, who prefer the softer and slower surface. As was highlighted in the trends section tennis is one of the most popular sports for older people. The average age of a local tennis club member, with synthetic grass surfaces is older than a club that has acrylic courts. These older players prefer to play on long leaf synthetic courts, because there is less impact on their legs, as well as the surface slowing the ball down. However, younger players, especially those that wish to progress to higher levels, prefer either faster acrylic surfaces or short pile synthetic surfaces. Some clubs install a shorter pile synthetic surface to satisfy both groups.

Our most contemporary tennis facility is the Forster Tennis Centre, which has a long pile sand based synthetic surface on their courts.

As we noted court sub-bases can last 20 – 30 years, or in the case of concrete 50 years. However, the surface will remain viable for much less than that. In the case of synthetic 8-12 years, acrylic 10-15

years. The surface then dictates both the planning, the cost and the replacement and upgrading of the facility. A good sub-base will see 3 or 4 surface upgrades. Most upgrades in the Action Plan will be surface replacements.

The value of multi-purpose courts

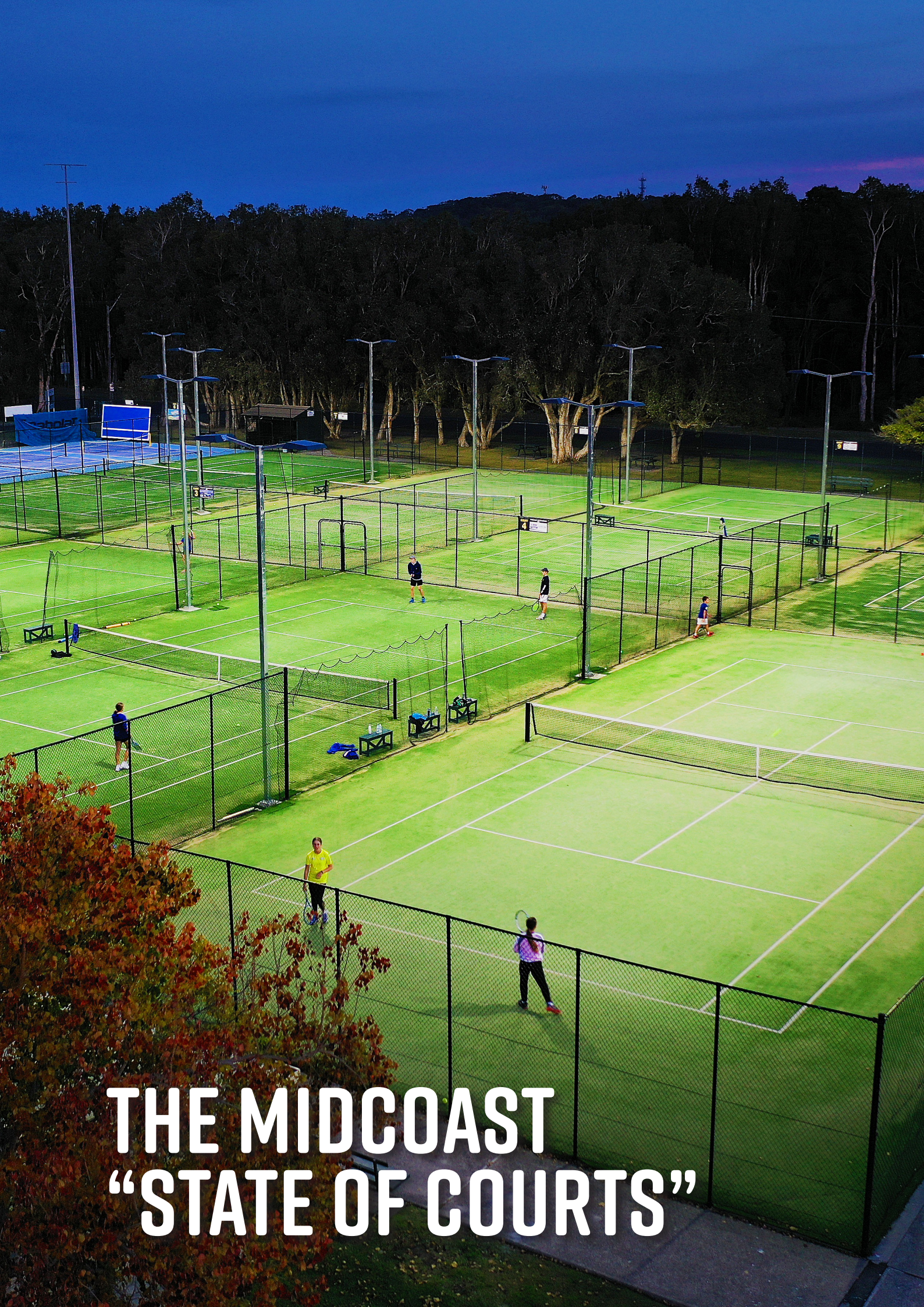
Multi-purpose sports courts are relatively new. A decade ago, they did not exist. Up until that point all court-based sports were conducted on their own specialty courts. As both available land, and limited budgets became a factor in local government being able to provide sport facilities more attention has been on combining sports facilities where possible. Sports fields are now shared between multiple sports, as are their amenity buildings. Some standalone sports still exist, hard-to-place sports such as shooting and trail bikes have their own facilities, but by and large land managers are trying to co-locate sports together.

Another factor driving multi-purpose courts is the move away from structured sport i.e., played with a sports club, to unstructured sport. This is where the game is the same, but it is done as a recreation and not for competition. Several teenagers getting together to throw some hoops is far more prevalent than joining a basketball club.

The provision of multi-purpose courts just makes sense. They can be placed as standalone facilities, with no need to provide several of them in the one location and they cater for multiple sports. They really give both land managers and the community many more options.

The need for multi-purpose courts to have different sports line-marked does create a perception that the courts are “confusing”, with different coloured lines on the court. Compared to a specialist court, that only has one sport’s lines marked, the multi-purpose court can appear confusing. Older people, who play sports such as pickleball on multi-purpose courts complain that the courts are confusing. However, research in the field shows that the brain quickly “blocks out” the lines that do not apply to the sport being played. People don’t notice this when playing, but when standing back looking at the court they continue to describe them as confusing. This is considered to be a minor issue and is outweighed by the value that we all get from multi-purpose courts.

To that end the majority of recommended new provisions in the Action Plan are multi-purpose courts, as well as several conversions of specialist courts to multi-purpose courts.



THE MIDCOAST "STATE OF COURTS"

The MidCoast “State of Courts”

The following chapter looks at the state of court facilities in the MidCoast region. Like the MidCoast play and sport portfolios the MidCoast court portfolio has been heavily influenced by the provision decisions made by the three old councils that made up the MidCoast Council. But just as important is the influence that the unique nature of the settlement distribution throughout the region has had on facility provision. Standalone settlements have heavily influenced what community facilities have been provided, where they have been provided, and to what level.

As with other infrastructure MidCoast has a reasonable supply of courts for the population that we have.

Sports Court Audit

To get a full understanding of the state of court facilities in the MidCoast region an audit of court facilities has been undertaken. In the following tables we examine all the existing courts facilities.

Each of the court facilities has been allocated a category in accordance with the hierarchy as detailed above. However, this classification is arbitrary, and is allocated as a means of identification and to understand the state of the larger existing MidCoast court portfolio, and to ascertain the current catchment for each facility.

In relation to the age and condition of each facility, this has been gauged based on the state of the surface. As the surface is upgraded whilst other components, such as fencing are not.

The following the current MidCoast court portfolio and is displayed with the following metrics:

Key	Description
Park #	Map Reference number
Site	Name of park or reserve
Suburb	Location of the playspace
Courts (Number and type of surface)	Syn – Synthetic surface Bit – Bitumen surface Clay – Clay based surface Gras – Natural grass surface Arc – Acrylic surface Con – Concrete surface
Age	Age of the surface
Classification	L – Local (1-2 courts) D – District (3 – 11 courts) R – Regional (12 – 16 courts)
Condition Rating	Subjective assessment based on physical appearance and general asset condition with a ranking of: E = Excellent condition / Almost New G = Good condition with no major signs of wear and tear F = Fair condition with some signs of ageing /wear and tear P = Poor condition with some or equipment heavily damaged or worn

Tennis

Park	Site	Suburb	Courts	Age (Years)					Classification			Condition			
				< 5	5+	10+	15+	20	L	D	R	E	G	F	P
1	Wylie Breckenridge Park	Black Head	2 (syn)		X				X				X		
2	Bulahdelah Showground	Bulahdelah	4 (syn)		X					X			X		
3	Bunya Community Park	Bunya	1 (syn)				X		X						X
4	Coolongolook Oval	Coolongolook	1 (syn)		X				X				X		
5	Moorrooba Park	Coomba Park	1 (syn)			X			X					X	
6	Muir Park	Crowdy Head	1 (bit)					X	X						X
7	Cundletown Park	Cundletown	4 (syn)	X						X		X			
8	Pacific Palms Community Park	Elizabeth Beach	2 (syn)		X				X				X		
9	Forster Sports Complex	Forster	12 (syn)		X						X		X		
10	Gloucester District Park	Gloucester	9 (clay)			X					X			X	
11	Gloucester District Park	Gloucester	6 (syn)				X				X				X
12	Green Point Park	Green Point	2 (bit)				X		X					X	
13	Esmond Hogan Park	Harrington	2 (syn)	X					X			X			
14	Myall Park Sports Reserve	Hawks Nest	4 (syn)			X				X				X	
15	Killabakh Community Reserve	Killabakh	1 (syn)			X			X					X	
16	Kimbriki Tennis Reserve	Kimbriki	1 (syn)		X				X					X	
17	Leo Carney Reserve	Krambach	2 (syn)		X				X					X	
18	Lansdowne Recreation Reserve	Lansdowne	3 (syn)					X		X					X
19	Hope Andrews Reserve*	Mount George	1 (gras)					X	X						X
20	Nabiac Oval Reserve	Nabiac	2 (bit)				X		X						X

Park	Site	Suburb	Courts	Age (Years)					Classification			Condition			
				< 5	5+	10+	15+	20	L	D	R	E	G	F	P
21	North Arm Cove Reserve	North Arm	1 (syn)	X					X				X		
22	Old Bar Park	Old Bar	5 (syn)	X						X			X		
23	Stroud Showground	Stroud	3 (syn)		X					X				X	
24	Wrigley Park	Taree	7 (bit)					X		X					X
25	Tinonee Recreation Reserve	Tinonee	2 (syn)			X			X					X	
26	Tuncurry Sportsground	Tuncurry	8 (syn)		X					X				X	
27	Wherrol Flat	Wherrol Flat	1 (clay)					X	X						X
28	Wingham Tennis Courts	Wingham	6 (syn)			X				X				X	

* Hope Andrews Reserve in Mount George is not managed by MidCoast Council.

Basketball

Park	Site	Suburb	Courts	Age (Years)					Classification			Condition			
				< 5	5+	10+	15 +	20	L	D	R	E	G	F	P
1	Wingham Sports Complex	Wingham	1 (bit)					X		X					X

Netball

Park	Site	Suburb	Courts	Age (Years)					Classification			Condition			
				< 5	5+	10+	15+	20	L	D	R	E	G	F	P
1	Boronia Park	Forster	12 (arc)		X					X			X		
2	Gloucester District Park	Gloucester	3 (arc)	X						X		X			
3	Old Bar Park	Old Bar	2 (arc)	X						X		X			
4	Palms Sports Complex	Pacific Palms	1 (con)				X		X						X
5	Taree Recreation Ground	Taree	8 (arc)	X						X		X			

Half-court Basketball

Park	Site	Suburb	Courts	Age (Years)					Classification			Condition			
				< 5	5+	10+	15+	20	L	D	R	E	G	F	P
1	Cooperbrook Park	Cooperbrook	1 (con)					X	X					X	
2	North Arm Cove Centre	North Arm Cove	1 (con)					X	X					X	
3	Stroud Showground	Stroud	1 (con)	X					X			X			

Croquet

Park	Site	Suburb	Courts	Age (Years)					Classification			Condition			
				< 5	5+	10+	15+	20	L	D	R	E	G	F	P
1	Black Head Sports Field	Black Head	1					X	X						X
2	Forster Sports Complex	Forster	4					X			X	X			
3	Gloucester Park	Gloucester	1					X	X				X		
4	Myall Park	Hawks Nest	1					X	X				X		
5	Taree Park	Taree	2					X		X			X		

Multi-purpose Courts

Park	Site	Suburb	Courts	Age (Years)					Classification			Condition			
				< 5	5+	10+	15 +	20	L	D	R	E	G	F	P
1	Diamond Park	Diamond Beach	1					X	X					X	
2	Smiths Lake Recreation	Smiths Lake	1			X			X					X	
3	Taree Recreation Ground	Taree	2				X			X				X	
4	Wrigley Park (pickleball)	Taree	1					X		X				X	

Sports Court Audit Analysis

A number of key observations can be made for each of the main sports and their facilities.

1. Tennis

Of the court-based sports tennis dominates. With 94 courts, spread across 27 different locations tennis remains the primary court sport in MidCoast. However, the portfolio of tennis courts is old, and the locations of individual courts is not conducive to good community outcomes. Many of the singular courts are many decades old. The locations were chosen back in the late 1800's or early 20th century and this means that population and community need are no longer aligned with the distribution of the courts.

Several singular courts are in small hamlets where their use is very limited. Decisions whether to continue to upgrade these facilities, including surface replacements and lighting upgrades need to be made. The question we must answer is whether we continue to put money into these single facilities or whether we rationalise the portfolio by removing these facilities and upgrading and enlarging district and regional facilities.

2. Basketball

Most of the competitive basketball is indoors based. This takes place at the indoor basketball centre at the Taree Recreation Grounds. However, trend data would indicate that significant recreational participation is taking place on other outdoor courts. The Wingham basketball court is currently unserviceable, and it is not expected that this is being used. The location is also questionable, as youth tend to partake in youth-based sports such as basketball in youth centres, and the Wingham Sports Complex, being out of town, is not the ideal location. Therefore, a new outdoor basketball court needs to be provided in town.

Overall, basketball is not being catered for anyway in our region. It is recommended that at least one multi-purpose court, which would cater for basketball be constructed in each of our major population centres. See new provision in the Action Plan.

3. Netball

Netball is a regional sport, in that it is mostly played at a regional facility, where all clubs come together for competitive games. In this case that is the netball courts at the Taree Recreation Grounds. There are other smaller netball facilities, and in the case of the Boronia Park netball facility a larger netball precinct. This causes some issues for both the sport and Council, as we need to prioritise where we put new courts. Deciding if we are going to have a fully regional facility, and which centre that will be should guide future provision. At this point in time the current suite of 4 netball centres should continue, with regular upgrades to each of the centres. The Palms Sports Complex netball court should be upgraded to a multi-purpose court to cater for basketball and pickleball along with netball.

4. Croquet

Croquet in the region is in good health. The Forster facility, with its four courts is a regional level facility, as well as being co-located with other sports facilities. The other courts are well distributed throughout the region, and there is no need for another location to be added. Most courts are in good condition, with their respective clubs doing an excellent job of maintaining them. The Action Plan recommends an upgrade to the Black Head facility.

5. Multi-purpose courts

As has been highlighted previously multi-purpose courts are a valuable component of our sports court portfolio. At present we do not have enough. The Old Bar multi-purpose courts are technically netball courts as that is the only line-marking on those courts. Likewise, the other multi-purpose courts that we have, have not been line-marked for multiple sports, and do not have a quality acrylic surface. Three of the four courts are old and are in only a fair condition.



SPORTS COURT ACTION PLAN

Sports Court Action Plan

The following section and mapping provide the future Action Plan for our sports court portfolio. In developing this action plan the existing portfolio has been assessed for its condition, functionality, locations, the distribution of each existing and future catchment and its quantum of different hierarchy.

The future sports court portfolio will tier down through the different levels. It is anticipated that this will ensure that all members of our community have access to sports courts for the activities that they wish to undertake.

The following table and maps show the MidCoast future outdoor sports courts portfolio and is displayed with the following metrics:

Key	Description
Park #	Map Reference number
Site	Park in which the facility is located
Suburb	Physical location of the skatepark
Action	Details the specific action to be carried out for the facility Upgrade - Improve facility, including by replacing synthetic surface Conversion – Convert from current use to multi-purpose New provision - New facility or upgrade through new provision
Priority	Details the priority that the provision or upgrade is to take place. The priorities are broken up as follows: S – Short-term priority. 0 – 3 years M – Medium-term priority. 4 – 8 years L – Long-term priority. 9 – 12 years
Rationale	Brief description that justifies the action. AEOL – At End of Life

Tennis

Park #	Site	Suburb	Action	Priority			Rationale
				S	M	L	
1	Wylie Breckenridge Park	Black Head	Upgrade	X			Upgrade surface AEOL. Convert unused court to multi-purpose court.
2	Bulahdelah Showground	Bulahdelah	Upgrade and convert	X			Upgrade surface AEOL for 3 courts. Convert 1 court to acrylic multi-purpose
3	Bunyah Community Park	Bunya	Remove				Remove AEOL.
4	Coolongolook Oval	Coolongolook	Upgrade			X	Replace surface AEOL

Park #	Site	Suburb	Action	Priority			Rationale
				S	M	L	
5	Moorrooba Park	Coomba Park	Upgrade		X		Replace surface AEOL
6	Muir Park	Crowdy Head	Upgrade		X		Convert to multi-purpose. See multi-purpose #1
7	Cundletown Park	Cundletown	No action				Base and surface upgraded in 2023.
8	Palms Sports	Pacific Palms (Elizabeth B)	Upgrade		X		Replace surface AEOL
9	Forster Sports Complex	Forster	Upgrade			X	Replace surface AEOL
10	Gloucester District Park Clay	Gloucester	No action				Maintain clay surface
11	Gloucester District Park Synthetic	Gloucester	Upgrade	X			Replace synthetic surface
12	Green Point Park	Green Point	Upgrade		X		Install acrylic surface
13	Esmond Hogan Park	Harrington	Upgrade			X	Replace synthetic AEOL
14	Myall Park	Hawks Nest	Upgrade		X		Replace synthetic AEOL
15	Killabakh Community Reserve	Killabakh	Remove				Remove AEOL
16	Kimbriki Reserve	Kimbriki	Remove				Remove AEOL
17	Leo Carney Reserve	Krambach	Upgrade		X		Replace synthetic AEOL
18	Lansdowne Recreation Reserve	Lansdowne	Upgrade	X			Replace synthetic AEOL
19	Marlee Recreation Reserve	Marlee	No action			X	Monitor use. Remove if not being used
20	Nabiac Oval	Nabiac	Upgrade	X			Replace synthetic AEOL
21	North Arm Cove Reserve	North Arm	Upgrade			X	Replace synthetic AEOL

Park #	Site	Suburb	Action	Priority			Rationale
				S	M	L	
22	Old Bar Park	Old Bar	Upgrade		X		Replace synthetic AEOL
23	Stroud Showground	Stroud	Upgrade		X		Replace synthetic AEOL
24	Tinonee Recreation Ground	Tinonee	Upgrade		X		Replace synthetic AEOL
25	Wrigley Park	Taree	Upgrade & Conversion		X		Convert 4 courts to synthetic and 3 courts to acrylic. Upgrade lighting. Replace fencing. New amenity building.
26	Tuncurry Sportsground	Tuncurry	Upgrade	X			Replace synthetic AEOL
27	Wherrol Flat	Wherrol Flat	Remove				Not being used. Potential use does not justify upgrade.
28	Wingham Tennis Courts	Wingham	Upgrade	X			Replace synthetic AEOL

Basketball

Park #	Site	Suburb	Action	Priority			Rationale
				S	M	L	
1	Wingham Sport Complex	Wingham	Remove	X			Wrong location. Not being used. See #18 multi-purpose

Netball

Park #	Site	Suburb	Action	Priority			Rationale
				S	M	L	
1	Boronia Park	Forster	Upgrade			X	Remove wooden poles and re-locate.
2	Gloucester Park	Gloucester	Upgrade		X		See multi-purpose #11. Add 3 new multi-purpose.
3	Old Bar Sports	Old Bar	Upgrade	X			See Multi #5. New line-marking to convert to multi-purpose courts
4	Palms Sports	Pacific Palms (Elizabeth B)	Upgrade	X			See Multi #7. New line-marking to convert to multi-purpose courts

Park #	Site	Suburb	Action	Priority			Rationale
				S	M	L	
5	Taree Recreation Ground	Taree	Upgrade and new provision			X	Remove wooden poles and re-locate. Construct 4 x new courts.

Half-court Basketball

Park #	Site	Suburb	Action	Priority			Rationale
				S	M	L	
1	Coopernook Park	Coopernook	Upgrade	X			Acrylic surface upgrade
2	North Arm Cove Centre	North Arm Cove	Upgrade	X			Remove fencing install basketball hoop
3	Stroud Showground	Stroud	No action				New court. No need for replacement or upgrading for 20+ years.
4	Pebbly Beach	Forster	New provision		X		Installation of new half-court
5	Nabiac Oval	Nabiac	New provision		X		Compliments new skatepark
6	Leone Fidden Reserve	Pindimar	New provision		X		Replace existing skate facility
7	Stratford Recreation Reserve	Stratford	New provision	X			Compliments new playspace
8	Craiglea Reserve	Taree	New provision		X		Recreation activity on western side of city.
9	Shelley Close Reserve	Wallabi Point	New provision	X			This provision provides youth activities for a growing community

Croquet

Park #	Site	Suburb	Action	Priority			Rationale
				S	M	L	
1	Black Head Sports Field	Black Head	Upgrade	X			Upgrade surface
2	Forster Sports Complex	Forster	No action				Surface and facility in good condition. If maintained no need for future action.
3	Gloucester Park	Gloucester	No action				Surface and facility in good condition. If maintained no need for future action.
4	Myall Park	Hawks Nest	No action				Surface and facility in good condition. If maintained no need for future action.
5	Taree Park	Taree	Upgrade		X		Install lighting to extend hours

Multi-purpose Courts

Park #	Site	Suburb	Action	Priority			Rationale
				S	M	L	
1	Muir Park	Crowdy Head	Upgrade & Conversion	X			Disused tennis. Upgrade to acrylic surface with multi line marking. See Tennis #6.
2	Diamond Park	Diamond Beach	Upgrade	X			Replace equipment. Upgrade to acrylic surface
3	Smiths Lake Recreation	Smiths Lake	Upgrade		X		New multi hoops, resurface
4	Taree Recreation	Taree	Upgrade		X		New hoops, resurface
5	Old Bar Park	Old Bar	Conversion	X			See Netball #3. New line-marking to convert to multi-purpose courts. Increases activities
6	Wrigley Park	Taree	Upgrade & Conversion	X			See Audit Multi-purpose #4. Upgrade from pickleball to multi-purpose with the installation of acrylic surface and line-marking. Upgrade lighting. Replace fencing. New amenity building. Increases activities, including pickleball.

Park #	Site	Suburb	Action	Priority			Rationale
				S	M	L	
7	Palms Sports	Pacific Palms (Elizabeth B)	Conversion		X		See Netball #4. New line-marking to convert to multi-purpose courts. Increases activities.
8	Wylie Breckenridge Park	Black Head	New provision	X			Convert un-used third tennis court to acrylic surface multi-purpose court. Compliments skatepark
9	Bulahdelah Showgrounds	Bulahdelah	Upgrade & Conversion	X			See tennis action #2.
10	Coomba Park Foreshore	Coomba Park	New provision			X	Compliments playspace. Consider half-court if a better option for the site.
11	Gloucester District Park	Gloucester	New provision		X		Add three more acrylic multi-purpose courts to existing netball courts.
12	Oxley Reserve	Harrington	New provision		X		Co-located with skatepark. Fence court to allow for futsal.
13	Providence Park	Hawks Nest	New provision		X		Co-located with new skatepark. Fence court to allow for futsal.
14	Myall Park	Hawks Nest	New provision	X			2 new courts co-located with tennis courts
15	Old Bar Park	Old Bar	New provision			X	Add additional court to existing 2 courts.
16	Johnny Martin Reserve	Taree	New provision.		X		Co-located with skatepark. Fence court to allow for futsal.
17	Vincent Fazio Reserve	Tuncurry	New provision		X		Co-located with skatepark. Fence court to allow for futsal.
18	Railway Reserve	Wingham	New Provision	X			Replaces basketball #1. Moved into town from sports complex. Close location with new skatepark at Railway Bridge Reserve. Fence court to allow for futsal.

Changes snapshot

The following table indicates the changes from the existing courts portfolio to the planned future portfolio.

Tennis	
Current	94
Future	90
Remove	4
Upgrade	85
New	0
Basketball	
Current	1
Future	21
Remove	1
New	21 (multi-purpose)
Netball	
Current	26
Future	47
Upgrade	4
New	25 (4 + 21 multi-purpose)
Half-court	
Current	3
Future	8
Upgrade	2
New	5
Croquet	
Current	9
Future	9
Upgrade	1
New	0
Multi-purpose	
Current	4
Future	23
Upgrade	12 (9 x conversion)
New	11

Court removal breakdown

Outdoor sports courts are vital community infrastructure, which provide critical community outcomes. However, they are also very expensive to provide, and they impact our natural spaces. This strategy sets out why we provide these facilities, with a view to providing outstanding community outcomes, but also ensuring that these facilities are where they need to be, and that we can maintain them. As noted previously, synthetic surfaces need replacing every 10-12 years. If the court is no longer providing community value due to its location, where population changes have impacted that locale, then to continue to upgrade the surface is an expense that could be better used elsewhere.

As outlined in the Action Plan there are four standalone tennis courts and one basketball court earmarked for removal. The table below lists those to be removed, the rationale for removal, and what is being provided to replace them.

Park #	Site	Suburb	Type	Action	Priority			Rationale
					S	M	L	
3	Bunyah Community	Bunya	Tennis	Remove				This facility's synthetic surface is old and in poor condition. The run-off area for the court is degraded. The current population does not support the upgrading of this facility. When the surface is no longer fit for purpose, the court should be removed. The upgraded courts at Nabiatic will cater for any use from Bunya.
15	Killabakh Community Reserve	Killabakh	Tennis	Remove				The current court surface is still in serviceable condition. There are still approximately 5 years' worth of use remaining. However, the current usage does not justify its replacement. The lights and fencing will also need replacing, meaning that there will need to be a major upgrade to the facility, which is not supported by current participation data. The Wingham Tennis Centre covers this catchment.

Park #	Site	Suburb	Type	Action	Priority			Rationale
					S	M	L	
16	Kimbriki Reserve	Kimbriki	Tennis	Remove				The current court surface is still in serviceable condition. There are still approximately 5 years' worth of use remaining. However, the current usage does not justify its replacement. The lights and fencing will also need replacing, meaning that there will need to be a major upgrade to the facility, which is not supported by current participation data. The Wingham Tennis Centre covers this catchment.
27	Wherrol Flat	Wherrol Flat	Tennis	Remove				This is a clay surface. The court surface is in poor condition and there are no line markings on the court. The fence is in poor condition and the lighting is very poor. The current usage does not support the significant upgrade to this facility that would be required to bring it up to contemporary standards. The community is currently using the court for ancillary use such as a place to put portable toilets during community events.
1	Wingham Sporting Complex	Wingham	Basketball	Remove				This facility is now in the wrong location. The court is in very poor condition and is not being used, mainly due to its location. The main users of facilities such as this are youth, and so getting to the facility is important, and its location is having a direct impact on how many youths are using it. Providing this new facility in Railway Reserve, where the current skatepark is located, will ensure that it is close to the new skatepark at Railway Bridge Reserve, and being in Wingham township will make it more accessible to youth. This will be a far better outcome for the Wingham community.



MANAGEMENT AND MAINTENANCE

Management and Maintenance

It's no use building it and then forgetting it, you must maintain it. Our community wants well maintained parks and facilities.

Our sports courts do not exist in isolation, but rather they are one component of many different types of infrastructure that are located in our parks and reserves. Therefore, it is just as important that we manage the park that the facility is in, as it is to manage and maintain the facility itself. Unlike sports fields and playspaces it is not imperative that our sports courts are located in our best parks. Because of their construction it is desirable not to construct courts in high visitation parks that families would choose to visit for their natural amenity. We therefore look for areas within our parks where the impact of a concrete structure is less impactful.

In alignment with the MidCoast Open Space and Recreation Strategy 2023 – 2035 (OSRS) we will seek to manage our parks and facilities in the face of uncertainty, created by climate change and increasing impacts from overuse, through the impact assessment model. Maintenance of our ecosystems is by far the most critical component of providing high quality spaces for our community. It is fairly easy to build something, but far more difficult to maintain it.

All of the open space in the MidCoast local government area, and their associated buildings and infrastructure are maintained and managed by MidCoast Council. The high level of visitation to our reserves and the use of any infrastructure in them requires careful management and intensive maintenance of infrastructure and resources. Feedback from the *Draft Open Space and Recreation Needs Analysis 2023* indicated that visitors are generally satisfied with the cleanliness and maintenance of the individual parks and reserves. However, the community expect the assets to be maintained to a high standard.

This section of the Strategy details the services that we provide in managing and maintaining the sites to ensure that they are well maintained and therefore will be available for future generations.

In maintaining and managing our public open spaces the following activities are considered:

Activities and Events: Some of our reserves are also used for 'one-off temporary events' – the approval for events is assessed on the potential impact and time of the proposed activities, detailed under our Use and Hire of Public Open Spaces.

Waste Services: Garbage is collected from individual bin collection areas throughout the parks. Bins are collected by garbage trucks daily, both garbage and recycling trucks enter the neighbouring streets around each reserve. A number of our reserves do not have bins.

Maintenance: We oversee all the maintenance requirements of the individual reserves. Council work crews have a program of maintenance seeing them do routine maintenance on a park roster basis. We are generally responsible for maintaining assets such as turf, gardens, paving, roads, fences, handrails and cleaning. We are also responsible for cleaning any facilities and amenities throughout the reserves. A service level review of all maintenance being provided by us is to be conducted in the short term, with a view of developing a Desired Standards of Service model.

Facility Maintenance: We maintain the facilities in our public open spaces where they are located.

Building Maintenance: Any buildings located in reserves are maintained and repaired by Council

Environmental Services: We are responsible for identifying and putting in place energy, water savings and renewable opportunities within reserves. This includes identifying ways to reduce waste to landfill; encouraging visitors to use sustainable transport options; educating the community on the environmental significance of the area; and preparing for the future impacts of climate change.

Safety and Regulations: Our rangers patrol the individual parks on a regular basis, enforcing regulations to promote safety and equitable access for visitors. Activities that adversely affect other patrons' pleasure of reserves are regulated. On occasion rangers and other Council staff need to manage antisocial behaviour across the reserves. Controlled activities include dog walking, consumption of alcohol, commercial training, ball games, bicycle riding, skateboard riding, use of portable barbecues and littering. Dogs are allowed off-leash in those reserves that have been chosen for the activity. Where off-leash is not chosen dogs must be on-leash at all times. Dogs are prohibited within 10 metres of children's playgrounds and the barbecues. Dog regulation signage is provided where required.

Court Maintenance: Because of the construction material used in outdoor sports courts, mainly concrete, and acrylic, or in the case of tennis, synthetic, there is little maintenance required to maintain. The chosen surface will deteriorate at different rates, with a synthetic surface lasting approximately 12 years. One of the major issues with sports courts is tagging. This is where paint is used to draw on the surface. Having paint applied to the acrylic surface is unsightly and when removed also removes the acrylic surface. Where multi-purpose courts are provided it has been found that less tagging takes place. A regular maintenance and graffiti removal program is undertaken.

The following regulations are enforced in those public open spaces where indicated:

- No alcohol
- No camping or staying overnight
- No un-authorised ball games
- No commercial activities without Council approval
- No skateboards or rollerblades (outside of skateparks)
- No kites or kite activities
- No portable barbecues or open fires
- No smoking on the beach

It is our aim to keep vehicular activity within our parks to a minimum. However, it is necessary for service vehicles to access our reserves. Oftentimes access is gated to individual parks. Vehicles that require access include the garbage truck and staff with utes. Occasional access is required by other agency vehicles. Emergency vehicles may require access to individual reserves. When service vehicles do access parks all care is taken, and public safety is paramount.



FINANCIALS

Financials

Funding for implementing this strategy will either be allocated for future upgrade works (capital works) or maintenance and management. Funding for the management and maintenance is currently provided through our annual budget allocation.

To fund the proposed new or upgrade works, we will set aside capital works funds in future years that will cover a percentage of the proposals in the strategy, which will be combined with any future grant funding.

Council's budget for the strategy is not expected to accommodate all proposals in the short- or long-term plan.

Additional funding options that may be investigated include:

- State and federal grants
- Voluntary planning agreements
- Section 7.11 development contributions
- Partnerships with community groups or businesses.

The amount of funding through these streams is difficult to anticipate as it is dependent on grant programs.

Financial

The sustainable protection of our public open spaces, and the embellishment that we undertake on them to meet community need is expensive. The Action Plan in this strategy represents a significant investment by Council in the long-term viability of our public open space portfolio. The life cycle of this strategy is 12 years, and so the projects identified form a works schedule for that period. All projects have been given a time period priority, based on their importance to the community, and to ensure that infrastructure on our open spaces meet contemporary standards and remain safe and functional.

We do not bare all the financial burden of maintaining world class open space and facilities. Both state and federal governments acknowledge their role in protecting our environment, as well as ensuring that our communities are healthy, happy and active. They therefore provide contributing funds to the provision and upgrading of open space infrastructure. However, ongoing cost (OPEX – Operational Expense) is borne exclusively by us. Therefore, the projects identified in the Action Plan have been well considered and have been driven by feedback provided by the community, on what they want their open spaces to be.

Even though the projects in this strategy are meant to be delivered within the life cycle of this plan, it is anticipated that some may not. In these cases, those projects will be tested in future reviews of the strategy, and if confirmed that they are still needed they will be “rolled over” into future versions.

How did we prioritise the actions?

We used four connected decision drivers to identify both the actions and their priority.

These are listed in the table below:

Decision Driver	Rationale
Evidence approach	Each action has been tested through community feedback, analysis of community need, analysis of current activity trends and its impacts on the environment. The priority placed on each action is a result of analysis of the impact on either the community or the environment if that project is not undertaken.
Equitable provision	Actions were also developed through an equitable lens, in that each location within the LGA was considered for what they have received in the past, how long since that location received a new facility and the feasibility of delivering their individual projects at a certain point in time (e.g., availability of funding).
Asset portfolio condition	As has been noted in OSRS the state of our recreation portfolio is aged, and some of the individual components are no longer fit for purpose. In developing the actions and their priorities the condition of existing infrastructure, and its projected life was a strong determinant in setting its priority.
Financial Sustainability	The prioritisation of the actions in the Action plan, and the ability for projects to progress to delivery in the future, has also been influenced by considering the associated financial operating model and/or the long-term asset management requirements in minimising future financial burdens to Council. This financial planning of actions also includes the consideration of access to future potential funding programs, the funds of which the vast majority of the actions will require.

If circumstances change, such as new funding programs, changes within individual communities, or changes in community participation we will revisit the priorities. This might mean a community comes to us and asks for a project to be brought forward, which, when considered, can be done, we will.

Not all actions listed will be completed in the life cycle of the Strategy. The review process identified will re-consider each action to ascertain its continuing applicability.

Estimated Costs

Even though it is not possible to predict the exact cost of a specific recreation asset, such as a sports court, until after procurement has taken place, it is possible to provide an indication of a price range. This is based on past provision.

In the table below are the estimated cost ranges:

Court Type	Estimated Cost (2023)
Tennis – new court	\$150,000 per court
Tennis – surface upgrade	\$40,000 per court
Multi-purpose court (includes netball, basketball, pickleball and badminton courts)	\$100,000 - \$200,000
Court conversion	Up to \$50,000
Half Courts	\$40,000

Considering these ranges and taking the upper of the range it is possible to estimate the total cost of all the projects indicated in the Action Plan.

The totals of new and upgraded facilities cost are:

Court Type	Number	Cost
Tennis – new court	0	0
Tennis – surface upgrade	85	\$3,400,000
Multi-purpose court (includes netball, basketball, pickleball and badminton courts)	11	\$2,200,000
Court conversion	12	\$720,000
Half Courts	5	\$200,000
Total		\$6,520,000

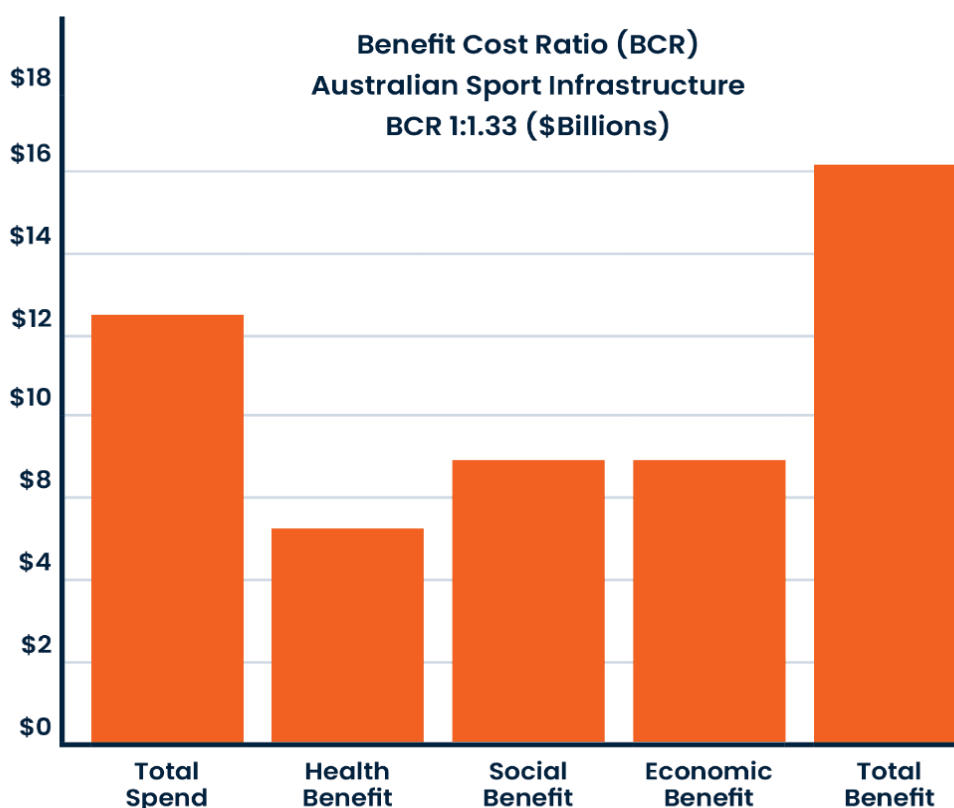
These indicative costs are a guide for planning. As detailed in other places in the Strategy recreation infrastructure, including sports courts, often are not the sole responsibility of Council to fund. There are a number of agencies whose funding programs are designed to provide contributing funding towards recreation infrastructure construction. It is our aim to utilise these funding programs to deliver as many of the new and upgraded skateparks as we can.

Benefit Cost Ratio (BCR) for Recreation Infrastructure

In 2021 the consultancy firm KPMG was commissioned by Sport & Recreation Victoria to produce a report on the value of recreation infrastructure to Australia, called “*The value of community sport and active recreation infrastructure*”⁹ report. KPMG found that in any given year approximately \$12B is spent by all levels of government, and the private sector, on sport and recreation infrastructure in Australia. KPMG estimated that for this \$12B we receive a benefit of \$16B, broken into three distinct categories: economic, social and health benefits.

Infrastructure Australia (IA), the peak government advisory agency, tasked with prioritising infrastructure projects and funding use the Benefit Cost Ratio (BCR) system to identify the value that infrastructure projects bring to Australia, and to decide whether a specific project should or should not be funded. The BCR is a simple equation that shows whether the return from a project exceeds the capital expense of the project. To calculate the BCR they take the total cost, and then divide it by the economic gain from the project. If the BCR is greater than 1.0 then the return is greater than the expense, if the BCR is less than 1.0 then the expense will exceed the gain.

When we input KPMG’s work into the IA’s BCR equation the BCR for recreation infrastructure is 1.33. That means that for every dollar that we spend on recreation infrastructure there is a return, to the community of \$1.33.



Case Study

Council receives a \$1M grant to build a new recreation facility. Council contributes \$1M, giving a \$2M budget. Once the project is completed the entire \$2M has been spent. The value of that project to the community is \$2,266,000.

⁹ https://sport.vic.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0030/155685/Value-of-Community-Sport-Infrastructure-FINAL-REPORT.pdf

Ongoing Costs – Maintenance

Recreation infrastructure is often highly dynamic, technical, innovative and bespoke. Open spaces themselves, unless they are national parks, being preserved in their natural state for ecosystem and diversity protection, require regular maintenance to maintain them to a standard that is acceptable to the community. Our ultimate outcome is for our open spaces to be visited by the community, to achieve that outcome the open spaces must be maintained. However, that comes with costs.

These costs are ongoing and are often referred to as OPEX (Operational Expense). Maintenance forms one component of OPEX, but which is the most visual, with Council staff often seen in our open spaces doing maintenance. These operations come at a cost. Below is an indicative table for general maintenance of public open spaces. It should be noted that MidCoast Council has an open space portfolio of 1600ha (16,000,000m²).

Ongoing Costs - OPEX

Recreation infrastructure involves a substantial upfront cost, commonly referred to as CAPEX (Capital Expense). This is often funded through a combination of state and federal government grants and council contributions. However, there are also significant ongoing costs, commonly referred to as OPEX (Operational Expense). OPEX is always borne by Council, as there are no funding programs that provide grants for OPEX. OPEX can include costs such as ongoing maintenance to the facility, insurances and depreciation. It is the depreciation cost that is the most significant, but which also is the most unconsidered. Depreciation is a figure calculated on the life of the asset. If an asset cost's \$2m to provide (CAPEX) and its life is 20 years, then a depreciation cost needs to be carried by Council's budget for each year of the asset's lifecycle. Many councils do not calculate depreciation, assuming that the money will be found when the asset needs replacing.

The table below shows the depreciation for the standard range of recreation infrastructure.

Sport and Recreation Infrastructure Financial Analysis - OPEX										
Financial	Regional Playspace Upgrade	Local Playspace Upgrade	Sport Amenity Building	District Sports Facility Upgrade	Regional Sports Facility Upgrade	BMX Facility	Skatepark	Sports Lighting	Synthetic	Courts
Cost	\$2,000,000	\$250,000	\$1,200,000	\$3,000,000	\$5,000,000	\$1,000,000	\$750,000	\$500,000	\$2,000,000	\$60,000
Depreciation – future	\$133,000	\$16,600	\$40,000	\$100,000	\$166,667	Nil	\$20,000	\$416,667	\$860,000	\$3,000
Total future costs	\$133,000	\$16,600	\$40,000	\$100,000	\$166,667	Nil	\$20,000	\$416,667	\$860,000	\$3,000
	Assume life @ 15 years		Assume life @ 50 years					Assume life @ 20 years	Assume life @ 10 years	

Project Assessment

An open space and recreation infrastructure scoring matrix has been developed to help assess future projects and inform Capital Works programs. The matrix can be used for two specific purposes, namely, to ascertain if a project should proceed, and to compare one potential project with another. It is not required to be used for projects already endorsed by Council through adopted master plans, developer contribution plans or similar strategic plans. The matrix is an assessment model that details key criteria and includes an associated scoring mechanism. This tool will assist us in comparing one project against another when funding is limited.

Each question has been given a weighting, as some questions carry more importance than others. For example, priority 1 *“Aligns with the Open Space & Recreation Strategy”* carries more significance as projects identified in the Action Plan of the Strategy have been tested with the community, against Council internal priorities and have been considered in our long-term financial planning.

To calculate the weighting on each criterion they have been placed in order of importance, with a percentage weighting allocated to each depending on importance.

Scoring Matrix for Prioritising Open Space and Recreation Facility Projects

Priority	Criteria	Value	Score
Essential	Is project permissible under the Transport and Infrastructure SEPP	Y / N	N/A
Essential	Has Native Title been considered	Y / N	N/A
Essential	If on Crown Land, is it consistent with the Plan of Management	Y / N	N/A
Essential	Is there a current land claim on the land	Y / N	N/A
1	Aligns with the Open Space & Recreation Strategy	Y / N	20
2	Project identified in an individual Strategy	Y / N	15
3	Part of an endorsed master plan	Y / N	15
4	If not addressed, there is a high-risk exposure to Council	Y / N	10
5	Addresses safety and risk management issues	Y / N	10
6	Has lower impact on future Council operating expenditure	Y / N	5
7	Identified as a high need in other Council strategies	Y / N	5
8	Has minimum impact on sensitive environmental or cultural areas	Y / N	5
9	Improves participation opportunities for people with disabilities	Y / N	5
10	Facility is situated within high growth area	Y / N	2
11	Existing facility is at capacity	Y / N	2
12	Improves the functionality of land (drainage, lighting, amenities, parking)	Y / N	2
13	Benefits multiple community user groups	Y / N	2
14	Addresses lack of facility provision	Y / N	1
15	Is eligible for council funding or has high potential of partnership funding	Y / N	1

Note: Pass score is 65. This does not mean that the project will proceed, dependant on funding and approvals

Grant Management

The majority of recreation infrastructure provided on public open space by local government is funded, either jointly or fully, by grants. These grant programs are administered by either the NSW or Federal governments, through numerous funding programs. MidCoast Council does not have the financial resources to be able to fund all projects that need to be undertaken on our public open spaces, and so relies upon grants. Both Council and community groups are often eligible to apply for grants.

Council relies on community groups to not only make us aware of what they want, but also to advocate for it. Community advocates speaking with state and federal MP's can often motivate their representatives to provide grant funding. There are several funding programs that are designed for local MPs to work with the community to identify and then apply for funding. We encourage community groups to be active in this regard.

Review and monitoring

If this strategy is to remain relevant in the future it is essential that its implementation is reviewed on a regular basis to ensure any relevant changes are incorporated. Changes that may need to be addressed include changes in community participation, project priorities, funding resources and new opportunities for future upgrades.

Given that community expectation and requirements change over time, this strategy also needs to have some flexibility to adapt to any changes of circumstance.

It is recommended that the strategy be reviewed in the following sequences and time spans:

- Annually; review progress and delivery of action plan
- Every two years: review management and administration structures and update priorities
- Every five years: do a major review of all analysis and rationale. Review results against survey information, photographic record and register of correspondence.
- Every 10 years: update the strategy.

