



**MIDCOAST**  
council



**RURAL  
STRATEGY**



**DRAFT**

# **MIDCOAST RURAL STRATEGY**

## Overview

**JULY 2021**





## **OUR VISION FOR RURAL AREAS**

Rural areas of the MidCoast are prosperous and resilient, reflecting the diversity of the landscape and the welcoming character of people who live and work here.

# WHY PREPARE A RURAL STRATEGY?

**Development in the MidCoast is still guided by three different planning frameworks, a legacy of the three former councils.**

We are currently in the process of developing a single, contemporary set of planning controls - including a Local Environmental Plan (LEP) and a Development Control Plan (DCP) - that will cater for our community now and into the future... all the while ensuring we maintain the unique character of our existing towns, villages and rural areas.

The Rural Strategy is the final body of work to be undertaken as part of developing the new, region-wide planning controls. It follows reviews and strategies conducted to date including:

- Housing Strategy
- Recreation Zones review
- Infrastructure Zones review
- Employment Zones review
- Manning Health / Taree CBD precinct plan

The draft Rural Strategy is also informed by the Local Strategic Planning Statement where it was confirmed that rural and environmental land and water resources are critical to the area's liveability, tourism and economic growth.

Rural areas across the MidCoast make up 98.5% of the total geographic area, making them a defining feature of the region. The draft Rural Strategy sets out to achieve four key goals:

**Goal 1: Sustain Primary Production Opportunities**

**Goal 2: Enhance Rural Lifestyles and Livelihoods**

**Goal 3: Protect Natural Landscapes**

**Goal 4: Improve Planning and Plan-making in Practice**

This overview document provides a brief snapshot of recommendations relating to land use planning in our rural areas. For full details, please refer to the draft Rural Strategy..





# WHAT CHANGES ARE BEING PROPOSED?

As part of strategically reviewing rural areas across the MidCoast, a number of changes to the way we currently use these land and water resources are outlined in the draft Rural Strategy.

Some of these are summarised here, however full details can be found in the draft Strategy.

**The strategy does not identify new urban release areas or R5 large lot residential areas** - The urban release areas across the MidCoast have recently been reviewed. Council will be undertaking a separate large lot rural residential study in the future.

**There will be a single rural zone** - The three existing rural zones have different land uses and controls. A single rural zone will mean that all owners of rural land property have the same opportunity to start or expand agricultural activity on their property.

**The 100 ha minimum lot size for subdivision in some rural areas across the MidCoast will be replaced with a new standard of 40 ha** - This means rural land can be subdivided into lots of 40 ha (or more), and provides a consistent lot size across the region. In rural areas where property-owners already have a lot size less than 40 ha, the lot size will not change.





**The minimum lot size for a building entitlement will be 40 ha** - This applies consistently across the region and means rural lots less than 40 ha do not have a building entitlement. While this is the status quo for the majority of our rural land, it is a positive change in areas where a 100 ha minimum currently applies.

**Bundook and Mount George will be zoned villages** - A village zoning will mean land owners can apply to use their property for residential, commercial or industrial uses to provide goods or services to their neighbours and surrounding community.

**Bunyah, Markwell Road and Newell Creek will change from village zones to rural zone** - Currently zoned village, moving to a rural zone will not change the existing use of these properties but will more accurately reflect the rural lifestyle and agricultural activities in these areas.

**Paper subdivisions/non-urban land is not identified for development** - Constraints affecting paper subdivisions in the MidCoast mean that there will be no change to a residential zone, and no opportunity to build a dwelling on any existing individual property in any paper subdivision.

**Aquifer catchments in Nabiac and Tea Gardens will be zoned E3, environmental management** - This will assist in protecting critical water sources for the region, and will mean intensive plant and animal agriculture and other rural industries will not be allowed in these important areas.

**Some areas will be zoned E4, environmental living** - In the MidCoast many rural lifestyle properties are not used for agriculture. Where these properties are next to a national park, sensitive vegetation or waterway, they will be rezoned from rural to E4 Environmental Living which allows a range of small-scale residential, tourist and rural lifestyle activities, but prevents other land uses that would impact on the environmental value of the property or adjoining areas.

**Rural zone land uses will be consistent** - This will mean that all owners of a rural property will have the same opportunity to start or expand agricultural activity on their property. We are also looking to allow some small-scale retail, processing and tourism activities on rural land, so that farmers can diversify and increase on-farm productivity and profitability.





A close-up photograph of a honeybee on a honeycomb. The honeycomb is a golden-yellow color with a hexagonal pattern. The honeybee is positioned in the upper right quadrant, facing left. It has a fuzzy, yellow and black body, transparent wings, and its legs are visible. A white circular line is drawn around the bee. In the lower left, there is a teal circular overlay with a faint honeycomb pattern. Inside this overlay, the text "GOAL 1" is written in large, white, bold, sans-serif capital letters. Below it, the text "SUSTAIN PRIMARY PRODUCTION OPPORTUNITIES" is written in smaller, white, bold, sans-serif capital letters, arranged in three lines.

# **GOAL 1**

**SUSTAIN PRIMARY  
PRODUCTION  
OPPORTUNITIES**



## Objective 1.1: Identify and protect agricultural industries and resources

**Agriculture and associated activities across the MidCoast contribute to our State and regional economy. In order to support these activities, planning for agriculture and related land uses must recognise and address significant challenges facing this industry.**

The State Government is supporting the right of farmers to operate without conflict or interference and there is an expectation for Council planning controls to:

- promote the continued use of agricultural land for commercial agricultural purposes
- protect important agricultural land and the resources on which agriculture depends
- avoid land use conflict
- support economically viable rural industries
- facilitate access to services, infrastructure, processing facilities and markets.

The rural strategy aims to address challenges and identify opportunities within the rural sector. Some of these may include natural disasters and extreme weather events, innovation through new technologies, social change and market forces.

Outcome 1.1.1. Protect established agricultural industries

Outcome 1.1.2. Support emerging agricultural operations and industries

Outcome 1.1.3. Support farm-based efficiency, profitability and income diversification





## Objective 1.2: Improve planning for energy and mineral resource industries

**The very nature of the energy and extractive mineral resource industry means that each operation may be different in terms of its lifecycle, approvals, licences and legislative requirements.**

Renewable energy production is an emerging industry. As new technology becomes available locations in the MidCoast may become viable for energy production. The rural strategy proposes to encourage renewable energy production in appropriate locations.

Given existing State legislation, it is not recommended or necessary to apply land use zones that actively encourage or discourage mining or extractive industries within the MidCoast. Instead, developing and establishing locally relevant planning controls is recommended to identify local opportunities and to manage impacts.

Outcome 1.2.1. Whole-of-lifecycle planning for underground resources

Outcome 1.2.2. Protect established extractive industries

Outcome 1.2.3. Strengthen evidence base for mine and quarry proposals

Outcome 1.2.4. Establish evidence-base for energy production industries







# GOAL 2

ENHANCE RURAL  
LIFESTYLES AND  
LIVELIHOODS

## Objective 2.1: Provide accommodation and services for rural communities

**Rural towns and villages play a significant role in providing social, economic and cultural activities.**

Ensuring there is a wide range of accommodation and services available to support rural residents and visitors is crucial.

In developing appropriate land use planning controls for these areas, consideration should be given to:

- opportunities for different forms of accommodation to cater for current and future populations, and visitors to the region
- the potential for unintended consequences in these areas
- the availability of services to support changes in land use

Outcome 2.1.1. Focused planning for rural village life

Outcome 2.1.2. Enable diverse housing for rural communities





## Objective 2.2: Provide a range of tourist accommodation and experiences

**The contribution of tourism to the MidCoast economy is well-recognised at State, Regional and Local levels.**

Facilitating the growth of rural tourism relies on changes to planning controls that allow for new tourism-related development in rural areas. An assessment framework that effectively supports this growth must consider:

- other planning considerations, such as environmental constraints and agricultural productivity
- complementary initiatives outside the development assessment process such as education, business support, and funding assistance
- improved infrastructure to deliver a positive visitor experience.

Within all rural and environmental zones, it is recommended that tourist and visitor accommodation, events and facilities are permitted only where there is an existing dwelling and facility manager on the site. This ensures that any tourists and visitors unfamiliar with the area and property, can be provided with a great visitor experience during our peak seasons, and a safe visitor experience, even during our worst weather events.

Outcome 2.2.1. Provide opportunities for visitor accommodation

Outcome 2.2.2. Provide opportunities for visitor experiences

Outcome 2.2.3. Risk management planning for disasters and emergencies



## Objective 2.3: Preserve natural landscapes and cultural connections

**The MidCoast area is rich in its natural diversity, with unique landforms and landscape areas of State, National and International significance.**

Council has made a commitment to the ongoing management and protection of these physical environments as well as the cultural significance these areas hold to the people of the MidCoast, recognising their importance in:

- delivering a range of social and economic benefits
- maintaining personal connections of our people with their natural surroundings, particularly in relation to Aboriginal cultural heritage
- leveraging the potential for “game changer” projects nominated within the MidCoast Tourism Destination Plan

Providing clear and consistent mapping of these environments, landscapes and key natural features across the region is an important consideration addressed within the rural strategy.

Outcome 2.3.1. Identify and maintain rural landscape characteristics

Outcome 2.3.2. Protect and maintain Aboriginal cultural heritage

Outcome 2.3.3. Enhance access and experiences in the 'Green Grid'





## Objective 2.4: Strengthen and connect the network of centres

**The MidCoast Region is large and diverse, with 195 town, villages and localities spanning an area of 10,052km<sup>2</sup>.**

Growth and development in the MidCoast relies on improving the transportation networks that connect our communities.

While the majority of the local population live and work within reasonable commuting distance to larger urban centres such as Forster-Tuncurry, Taree, and Newcastle, long-term planning will need to consider how to support our rural communities.

Rural areas tend to be more dispersed and provide fewer employment opportunities, and limited services. Along with improving transport networks and traveller safety to access our urban centres, planning can also address other modes of traffic such as walking, cycling, and horse riding.

The rural strategy provides a review of planning controls using a transport-corridor approach, considering freight, tourism, recreation and day-to-day use by residents.

Outcome 2.4.1. Plan for diverse needs within the transport network

Outcome 2.4.2. Maintain centres relevant to agricultural industries





A scenic photograph of a river flowing through a forest. The river is shallow and clear, revealing numerous smooth, rounded rocks of various sizes and colors (brown, grey, and yellowish) beneath the water's surface. The water is dark and reflects the surrounding trees and sky. The banks are lined with lush green grass and tall, thin trees with dense foliage. A white, curved line frames the upper part of the image. In the lower-left foreground, there is a large, semi-transparent yellow oval with a subtle pattern of overlapping circles. Inside this oval, the text "GOAL 3" is written in large, bold, white capital letters, and below it, "PROTECT NATURAL LANDSCAPES" is written in smaller, bold, white capital letters.

# **GOAL 3**

**PROTECT NATURAL  
LANDSCAPES**



## Objective 3.1: Prioritise planning for ecological health and biodiversity

**Protection of our natural environment has been identified as one of five core values in the MidCoast Community Strategic Plan.**

In recognition of this, placing the region's biodiversity and ecological health at the forefront of our planning practices is crucial.

Within the MidCoast the process of identifying and protecting land will require a mixture of:

- recognising and rezoning land that is already identified in private conservation agreements
- updating areas identified as State significant
- adding areas based on studies, data and agreements.

Due to the desirable lifestyle our region offers we will continue to experience pressures on our environmental and rural land. A land use planning framework that balances the competing interests of development and conservation is considered within the rural strategy.

Outcome 3.1.1. Act on national biodiversity conservation target

Outcome 3.1.2. Support site-based conservation and recovery efforts

Outcome 3.1.3. Maintain a functional network of biodiversity corridors

Outcome 3.1.4. Secure biodiversity offsets



## Objective 3.2: Prioritise planning to protect water quality and resources

**Waterways across the MidCoast support drinking water catchments, natural ecosystems and habitats.**

They also sustain a range of rural industries, including traditional agriculture and aquaculture; and rural tourism such as recreational fishing and kayaking.

The biggest threats to water quality and catchment health, excluding droughts, fires and floods, come from land use and development activities.

Land use planning is just one of several management responses available in protecting the health of our waterways, and is addressed in relation to rural communities in the rural strategy.

Outcome 3.2.1. Maintain or improve waterways within all catchments

Outcome 3.2.2. Protect significant water resources





## Objective 3.3: Manage development within coastal environments

**Much of the growth occurring within the MidCoast is happening in and around our coastal towns and villages.**

In addition to population growth, recreational and commercial demand on our coastal environments is also predicted to grow. It is important this demand is managed appropriately to preserve these unique and diverse environments.

Establishing sound planning controls that work to protect our iconic shores will be crucial.

While the scope of the rural strategy generally excludes urban areas it does provide recommendations for selected locations based on their economic reliance on maritime waters or the existence of infrastructure such as boat ramps and jetties. Some of these include Crowdy Head, Wallis Lake, Smiths Lake and Tea Gardens.

Outcome 3.3.1. Planning for marine-based industries and activities

Outcome 3.3.2. Managing access to and uses within coastal waterways

Outcome 3.3.3. Identify and respond to coastal risks and opportunities





# GOAL 4

**IMPROVE PLANNING  
AND PLAN-MAKING  
IN PRACTICE**



## Objective 4.1: Establish planning controls that reflect long-term outcomes

**Planning controls can determine how growth and change will be managed to maintain the high levels of liveability, environmental amenity and rural character that the MidCoast is renowned for.**

Critically, the work undertaken as part of the rural strategy will not only inform the short-term priority of preparing the first MidCoast LEP and DCP, it identifies the key goals and objectives to achieve our long-term vision for our rural landscape and communities.

It is this comprehensive framework that will assist Council in making decisions, allocating resources and achieving our community's priorities, in partnership with land owners, producers, industry groups and the NSW Government.

Outcome 4.1.1. Apply local planning benchmarks and guidelines

Outcome 4.1.2. Prepare and maintain a local environmental plan for the MidCoast

Outcome 4.1.3. Prepare and maintain a development control plan for the MidCoast



# Rural Strategy Land Use Zone Principles

## Rural Zone selection guide

### RU2 Rural Landscape

Land with broad ecological scientific, cultural or aesthetic qualities that is also generally compatible with commercial primary production, including extensive agriculture, intensive livestock and intensive plant agriculture, aquaculture and forestry. May include waterways outside of the coastal/tidal zone. Where this zoning applies, land will generally be considered unsuitable for urban development and rural residential uses.

**Areas with an existing 100ha minimum lot size will change to 40ha for subdivision and dwelling entitlements.**

### RU3 Forestry

Land owned and managed by NSW Forestry Corporation.

### RU5 Village

Land that may accommodate a broad variety of residential, retail, civic, business, tourist, light industrial and other compatible uses that serve the day-to-day needs of people within the village and surrounding rural areas. It is expected this will be the most appropriate zone for most rural centres in the MidCoast, where there is a recognisable development pattern with community services and facilities as indicated in the MidCoast Housing Strategy.

Depending on local circumstances, additional LEP or DCP controls may be required to encourage non-residential uses to cluster together to improve accessibility and economies of scale for services and infrastructure

## Waterway Zone selection guide

### W1 Natural Waterways

Allows a limited number of low impact uses that do not have an adverse effect on the natural value of the waterway, such as development associated with recreational fishing, boating and commercial fishing industries.

**Only Smiths Lake has been identified as a waterway suitable for the W1 zone.**

### W2 Recreational Waterway

Provides greater flexibility than W1 to accommodate a higher level of water-based recreation, boating and water transport, and development associated with fishing industries, such as natural water-based aquaculture and recreational fishing.

**Generally suitable to all coastal waterways in the MidCoast.**

### W3 Working Waterways

Prioritises commercial shipping, ports, water-based transport, maritime industries and development associated with commercial fishing industries.

May be applied where necessary to ensure water-based activity associated with the marine-based industry is permissible, including waterways adjoining land zoned IN4 Working Waterfront.

**The zone will be applied to two locations - Crowdy Head Harbour and Cape Hawke Harbour at the entrance to Wallis Lake.**



## Environmental Zone selection guide

### E1 National Parks and Nature Reserves

Identifies land and waterways within areas reserved under the National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974 or acquired under that Act.

### E2 Environmental Conservation

Land outside the national parks and nature reserve system that:

- is protected by a conservation mechanism e.g. bio-certification agreements, property vegetation plans, stewardship agreement, native vegetation set-aside area, court rehabilitation requirement;
- has highly significant ecological, scientific, cultural or aesthetic features confirmed through supplementary evidence eg site-based evaluations, state mapping of sensitive vegetation;
- is in public ownership and identified as an environmentally sensitive area under Clause 3.3. of the Local Environmental Plan;
- relies on environmental conservation efforts that are generally incompatible with most other types of land use/development.

Where this zoning applies, land will be generally unsuitable for most kinds of commercial primary production, extractive industries or residential development.

### E3 Environmental Management

Land outside the national parks and nature reserve system that:

- has special ecological, scientific, cultural or aesthetic features including features not associated with native vegetation confirmed through site-based evaluations;
- is in public ownership and in an identified environmentally sensitive area under Clause 3.3. of the Local Environmental Plan; steep land 18 degrees (32%) and above; heavily vegetated, un-serviced and not required for another public purpose;
- is affected by hazardous environmental features or processes;
- **is an aquifer catchment and other identified natural resource areas associated with critical state, regional and local infrastructure;**
- relies on environmental management efforts that are generally incompatible with most other types of land use/development.

May also be applied to provide a transition between areas of high conservation value (consistent with E1 and E2 zonings) and other land uses. Where this zoning applies, land is generally unsuitable for development beyond low-scale and low-impact activities, eg extensive agriculture, residential or tourism.

### E4 Environmental Living

Identifies land with special ecological scientific, cultural or aesthetic qualities that are generally compatible with limited or low impact residential development; visitor accommodation and extensive agricultural uses that are compatible with the environmental sensitivity of the site and surrounding environment.

May be applied where the land is affected by buffers to and/or is adjoining environmentally sensitive areas identified in Clause 3.3 of the Local Environmental Plan; where the primary purpose of the land may be preserving, maintaining or restoring natural attributes of the land.

Additional LEP or DCP controls will likely be required to ensure development does not have an adverse effect on the environmental qualities of the land.

**Rural areas that are identified as suitable for this zone will have a new minimum lot size of 20ha for subdivision.**

## Objective 4.2: Work with communities

**The vision, goals and objectives identified in the draft Rural Strategy have been developed with landowners, community members, industry groups and our partners in the NSW government.**

In doing so, the recommendations for our short and long term planning are aiming to achieve sustainable outcomes for our land and water resources, rural communities, social and economic wealth.

The responsibility for realising these goals therefore rests with everyone. While the strategy sets the direction and purpose for Council, it is our partnerships with other government departments, businesses and community organisations that are crucial in delivering the shared vision for our rural landscape, industries and communities.

Outcome 4.2.1. Localising planning for communities

Outcome 4.2.2. Partner with farmers to develop agribusiness industries

Outcome 4.2.3. Develop rural tourism operators' capacity

Outcome 4.2.4. Enhance resilience in mining-affected communities

Outcome 4.2.5. Support the self-determination of Aboriginal communities





## Objective 4.3: Critically review land in paper subdivisions

**Non-urban land exists for many reasons and in the MidCoast, can be found in various locations including but not limited to North Arm Cove, Pindimar, Bundabah, Carrington and the former gold mining town of Copeland.**

Non-urban lands were created by 'paper-subdivisions' in the 1800s and early 1900s, before the introduction of planning legislation.

A 'paper subdivision' is a term used to describe land containing lots that only have recognition on paper and, in most cases, have no dwelling entitlement, formed roads, drainage, reticulated water, sewer or electricity.

Council is required, under the Local Government Act 1993, to levy rates on all land, whether it can be built upon or not, so non-urban land is not exempt from rates.

Rate funds are used to maintain, improve and provide services and facilities for the whole of the MidCoast Council area. The rates paid may not relate directly to the services, infrastructure or facilities used by each ratepayer, eg not all ratepayers will use parks, a public library or cycle path, but these services and facilities are available to all who live within our local government area.

It is because of these complex and contrary requirements for land owners that Council is committed to providing clarity on the constraints applying to these areas, recommendations for the future use of this land, and options available to land owners.

Outcome 4.3.1 Provide certainty for landowners in paper subdivisions





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