



# Sustainable Environment Plan

2025



**Upper Hunter Shire Council  
Sustainable Environment Plan**

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Please note: Minor accuracy edits, such as typographical or factual corrections, may be amended in this report at the discretion of the General Manager.

# Contents

Upper Hunter Shire	1
Manager Sustainability Message	3
Top 10 Tips	4
Biodiversity	5
Water Quality	7
Water Conservation	9
Energy Conservation & Renewables	11
Waste	13
Air Quality	15



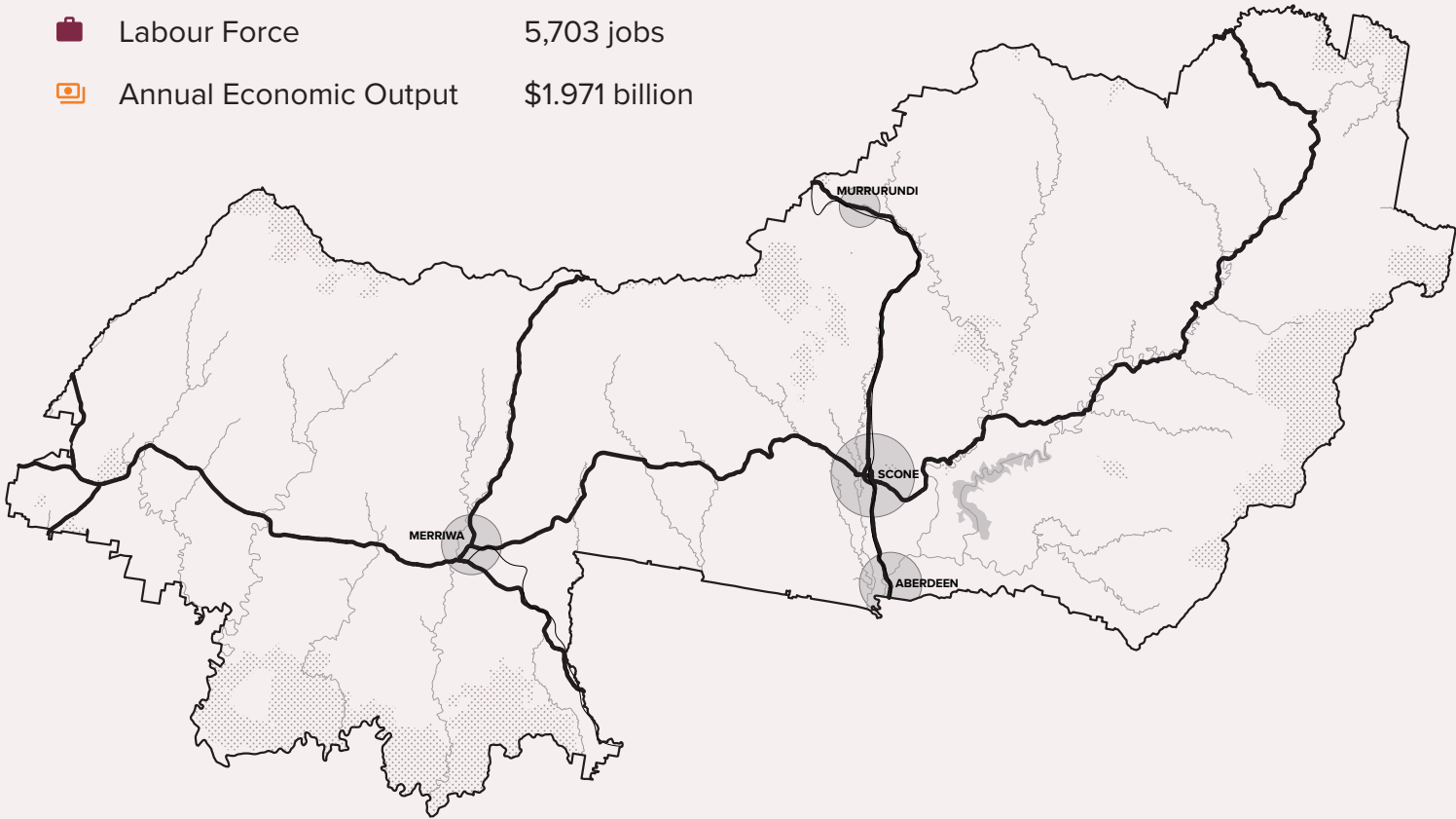
# Upper Hunter Shire

Upper Hunter Shire is located in the Hunter region of New South Wales, about 250 kilometres north of Sydney. It is bound by Liverpool Plains Shire and the Tamworth Regional Council area in the north, Mid-Coast Council and Dungog Shire in the east, Singleton Council and Muswellbrook Shire in the south and the Mid-Western Regional Council area and Warrumbungle Shire in the west.

The Upper Hunter Shire is a predominantly rural area and encompasses a total land area of about 8000 square kilometres, of which a large proportion is national park and nature reserves. The main townships in the Shire are Scone and Aberdeen to the south, Murrurundi to the north and Merriwa to the west. Nestled among our main townships are many local villages and rural communities.

The Shire is a major cattle, crop, goat, pig, poultry and sheep producer, has an increasing number of vineyards, an abattoir which supplies the Australian and overseas markets, and the best and friendliest rural community within easy travelling distance from Sydney and Newcastle.

	Land Area	8,100km <sup>2</sup>
	National Parks	686km <sup>2</sup>
	Population	14,293
	Labour Force	5,703 jobs
	Annual Economic Output	\$1.971 billion









# Mayors Message



**Cr Maurice  
Collison**

Over recent years, Council has taken proactive steps to tackle sustainability challenges in energy, waste, biodiversity, and water. However, we recognise this is just the beginning. Achieving a sustainable future demands an ongoing commitment and a collective effort from Council, residents, and businesses alike. Together, we've embarked on a journey towards a more sustainable Upper Hunter, and now it's time to build on this strong foundation.

Sustainability is about more than just protecting the environment—it's about fostering a resilient, vibrant, and liveable region for all. It's also a smart way to save money, as using less inevitably costs less. The decisions we make today will shape the quality of life in our Shire for generations to come, and Council is dedicated to leading this transformation.

As we work towards becoming a net-zero society, our focus is on delivering practical, local solutions that benefit both the environment and our community. Every action we take—from reducing our carbon footprint to preserving the natural beauty of our region—contributes to a healthier, more resilient future. Whether it's increasing the use of renewable energy, cutting down on waste, using water more wisely, or enhancing biodiversity,

our path forward requires innovation, collaboration, and perseverance.

Council's key areas of focus are outlined in our sustainability plan. These initiatives reflect our commitment to addressing immediate challenges while planning for a future that aligns with the aspirations of our community and the realities of a changing world. By working together, we can ensure Upper Hunter Shire remains a fantastic place to live, work, and visit.



Community Garden, Scone

# Upper Hunter Shire Council's

## Top 10 tips for a sustainable home

### One

Leave the car at home. Walk or ride a bicycle for short or even long trips. This benefits the environment and your personal health.

### Two

Install a AAA rated showerhead. This saves water, energy (used to heat hot water) and your money (the AAA rated showerhead will have paid for itself within 12 months).

### Three

Choose energy and water efficient appliances when making new purchases. The more energy or water efficient the appliance, the higher its star rating will be which equates to lower running costs.

### Four

Purchase Green Power from your electricity retailer. The generation of Green Power results in no greenhouse gas emissions as it is sourced from the sun, wind, water or waste.

### Five

Turn appliances off at the wall when not in use.

### Six

Take re-usable bags with you when you go shopping. While shopping try to choose items with minimal layers of packaging to reduce the amount of waste generated when you get home.

### Seven

Support Council's kerbside recyclables collection by purchasing goods made from recycled materials.

### Eight

Compost your leaves, grass clippings, vegetable and fruit scraps. The compost can then be used to improve the soil in your garden or vegetable patch and reduce watering requirements.

### Nine

Plant local indigenous vegetation in your garden. These species are adapted to the local climate and soils and, once established, will not need to be watered or fertilized. Mulch garden beds to retain moisture in the soil.

### Ten

The stormwater drain is just for rain. Do not tip anything into stormwater drains. Stormwater drains are connected to our local waterways and their contamination destroys aquatic lifeforms and leads to contamination of the Hunter River and ultimately the ocean.



# Biodiversity

Benefits provided include Biodiversity & Climate Adaptation

The planting of long-lived street trees within the centre median of wide residential streets in Scone was an insightful, forward thinking action implemented many years ago. Many magnificent trees remain but gaps have also appeared along the streets where trees have not been replaced, or the species of replacement trees planted have led to a loss of character and amenity. Exotic species of trees planted may provide minimal habitat and food for indigenous species and can look out of place with the historic plantings.

The remaining old native species of trees provide multiple benefits including providing habitat, shelter and food for a range of animals and plants and shading of the roads and buildings on hot summer days reducing the heat island effect synonymous with urban landscapes in built up areas.

## Actions

1

Continue a street tree planting program for urbanized residential areas of the LGA that identifies appropriate indigenous species for planting that compliment / re-invigorate existing historic plantings and provide habitat / food for native fauna and shading of hard surfaces such as concrete and bitumen to reduce heat loads. Take note that the benefits of street tree planting is a long term objective as trees may take 20 to 30 years before beginning to provide environmental benefits such as shading.

4

Promote responsible pet ownership to minimise domestic animal impacts upon local wildlife.

2

Promote community activities (e.g. National Tree Planting Day, National Threatened Species Day, Aussie Bird Count, FrogID Week) that increase awareness about biodiversity issues.

3

Encourage residents to plant indigenous vegetation within their gardens.





Liverpool St  
Trees, Scone



# Water Quality

Benefits provided include Biodiversity, Water Quality, Waste Management (Litter Reduction) and Recreation Opportunities

Intermittent and permanently flowing waterways exist within all of the major urbanised townships in Upper Hunter Shire. For example, Scone has Figtree Gully and Kingdon Ponds, Murrurundi the Pages River, Aberdeen the Hunter River and Merriwa has Witneys Creek and the Merriwa River. These waterways and their tributaries are often neglected, weed infested and collection points for litter washed from surrounding streets or illegally dumped rubbish.

Notwithstanding the above negative aspects, urban waterways are usually reserved and protected from development due to flood planning controls and hence are often an underutilised asset. Significant opportunities exist to provide community connectivity, enhance biodiversity, water quality and recreational opportunities along natural corridors such as the Hunter River, Figtree Gully, Witneys Creek and the Pages River.

## Actions

1

Develop long-term (e.g. 20 year) Masterplans for the rehabilitation of Hunter River (Aberdeen), Figtree Gully (Scone), Witneys Creek (Merriwa) and Pages River (Murrurundi) that include:

- Erosion control / bank and bed stabilization
- Flood mitigation
- Water quality improvements (e.g. gross pollutant traps, wetlands)
- Weed control
- Revegetation
- Identification and management of any significant remnant vegetation
- Litter and illegal dumping management
- Recreational opportunities (walking / bicycle paths, seating, viewing platforms, information / educational signage)
- Fire management
- Community safety

2

To facilitate improved stormwater quality, incorporate Water Sensitive Urban Design (WSUD) into Council infrastructure projects such as streetscape upgrades and stormwater system improvements where feasible.

3

Run an education campaign for mobile businesses (e.g. car cleaning and detailing, car mechanical repairs, handyman services, dog wash) to promote best practice and minimise stormwater pollution.

4

Run community education programs (such as Waterwatch) to emphasise the importance of protecting the stormwater system, creeks and waterways from pollutants.





Pages River, Murrurundi

Towarri National Park, Washpool





# Water Conservation

## Preserving Resources (Water & Energy) and Financial Sustainability

Upper Hunter Shire Council is responsible for directly providing water and sewer services to the local community within the more urbanised parts of the LGA. Directly reducing potable water consumption benefits both the community (reduced consumption results in reduced water bills) and Council (reduced consumption reduces the volume of water required to be produced / treated and pumped through the reticulated water network reducing input costs such as for filters, chemicals and electricity).

Decreased potable water consumption decreases the amount of black and grey water generated and leads to lower sewage treatment and disposal costs.

### Actions

1

Develop long-term water management plans (e.g. 20 year) for the townships provided with a reticulated water network by Council that include:

- Infrastructure to capture data related to annual consumption patterns / supply volumes (e.g. smart meters) leading to improved understanding of water usage and production costs.
- Leak detection and management.
- Uptake within the townships of water saving devices such as showerheads, toilets, taps, washing machines, dishwashers to minimise potable water consumption.
- Substitution of potable water. If a task does not require potable water (e.g. irrigation of sports grounds, washing down vehicles / saleyards) utilise a suitable alternative source of water.

2

Investigate developing a demonstration project to showcase water efficient technologies and practices to the community.

3

Extend effluent reuse to Aberdeen oval.





Lake Glenbawn Dam

Scone Sewer Treatment Plant





# Energy Conservation & Renewable Energy

## Preserving Resources and Financial Sustainability

Upper Hunter Shire Council is responsible for operating a large number of community facilities that consume electricity at significant annual cost to the Council and the community. These include over one thousand streetlights, 13 major sites (each consuming more than 100 MWh of electricity / year) and approximately 140 smaller sites.

To be able to manage Council's electricity consumption effectively requires a thorough understanding of where and when it is being consumed and the associated costs. In addition, having this information on hand when tendering for the supply of electricity places Council in a stronger position to negotiate a better deal for the community.

At a small number of locations Council has installed photovoltaic systems that offset consumption of grid sourced electricity and under some circumstances generate small amounts of revenue via Feed-In tariffs.

## Actions

1

Implement an energy data monitoring system to capture consumption and billing costs across all Council sites.

2

Implement a photovoltaic monitoring system to ensure that where installed, Council's photovoltaic systems are operating to their full potential and maximise the benefits achieved by offsetting consumption of grid sourced electricity and generating revenue via feed-in tariffs.

3

Develop a six-year program to identify Council locations suitable for the installation of additional photovoltaic systems each year, with allocated funding to support the initiative. The goal is for the program to become self-sustaining over time, using the savings generated to fund further photovoltaic or battery installations.

4

Investigate developing a demonstration project to showcase energy efficient technologies and practices to the community.





Existing solar production  
at Scone Admin Building



# Waste

## Preserving Resources and Financial Sustainability

Upper Hunter Shire Council delivers kerbside waste collection services to the majority of residents in the LGA.

Up until 30 June 2022 the kerbside waste service consisted of a red lid garbage bin and a yellow lid recyclables bin with the total waste generated by households in 2021 / 2022 being 4,018 tonnes. Of this total, 806 tonnes were recycled resulting in a diversion rate of 20%.

A third kerbside green lid bin for Food Organics / Garden Organics (FOGO) was introduced by Council in July 2022. In 2022 / 2023 the total waste generated by households increased to 4,737 tonnes. Of this total, 2,577 tonnes was recycled resulting in a diversion rate of 54.4%. The amount of kerbside household waste landfilled in 2022 / 2023 decreased by 1,053 tonnes.

A kerbside bin waste audit undertaken in February 2022 (prior to introduction of the FOGO service) identified that, on average, households placed 1.75 kg of recyclable material into their red lid garbage bins each week. It also identified that the average household also placed more than ten drink containers per week into the red and yellow lid bins that could have been redeemed at a Return and Earn Facility. At ten cents per container this equates to a value of \$5,500 / week or \$286,000 / year across the LGA, with a proportion of this ending up in landfill.

## Actions

1

Conduct a kerbside audit of the three-bin system to assess the impact of the FOGO service introduced in July 2022 and identify if more waste can be diverted from landfill. This audit would help Council understand if residents are using their bins correctly and, if needed, develop an education program to address any confusion about what goes in each bin.

2

Continue to support the provision of the Community Recycling Centre (CRC) for problem wastes at Scone to ensure that items such as oil, batteries, fluorescent light globes, E Waste, smoke detectors and paint do not end up in landfill.

3

Where feasible provide additional services to divert materials such as expanded polystyrene, cardboard, mattresses and tyres from landfill.

4

Investigate the diversion of select plastics from landfill and identify processing options that could allow the manufacture of items suitable for use in Council operations.

5

Undertake community waste education programs aimed at reducing Upper Hunter Shire's total waste stream and decreasing contamination of the recyclables and FOGO kerbside bins.

6

Lobby TOMRA to establish Return & Earn kiosks in Aberdeen and Murrurundi.





Scone Waste Management  
Facility - DrumMaster Program



# Air Quality

## Preserving Resources, Financial Sustainability and Community Health

Due to the unconstrained movement of air, air quality is typically a regional rather than a local issue. Season and weather conditions may also have a significant impact on air quality. Upper Hunter Shire's air quality is impacted by its close proximity to coal fired electricity generators and large scale coal mining activities. The highway and railway lines through the shire provide freight movement corridors that also contribute to poor air quality.

The New South Wales Department of Primary Industries and Environment undertakes air quality monitoring across NSW with local stations in Muswellbrook and Merriwa.

Please scan QR code for daily air quality data:



## Actions

1

At a regional level advocate for a transition to renewable electricity sources.

2

Advocate for improved public transport options between the Upper Hunter Shire and nearby centres such as Newcastle and Sydney to reduce single occupant motor vehicle trips and road congestion.

3

Integrate into local developments sustainable modes of transport such as walking and bicycle riding to make them viable alternatives to motor vehicle use.

4

Purchase and promote the use of low emissions vehicles and develop the infrastructure (e.g. charging points) to facilitate their use.

5

Promote regular maintenance of motor vehicles as a means of improving fuel efficiency and reducing emissions.

6

Encourage the community to minimise particulate emissions to the atmosphere from wood heaters.







