

# a region of contrasts

## chapter 3

### 3.1 The Region

The Central Coast is the traditional land of the Darkinjung people. The region with its outstanding natural beauty and central location between Sydney and Newcastle covers an area of 1,854 square kilometres. The Central Coast comprises two local government areas: Gosford City and Wyong Shire, and combines city advantages with the amenity of open space living in a unique variety of villages, towns and locations – the best of both worlds.

### 3.2 A Region of Contrasts

The Central Coast is a region of contrasts – not only does it face difficult challenges (and continued decline if action is not taken); it is also a story of success.

### 3.3

The Central Coast is called home by many more people than it was three decades ago. (The estimated residential population at June 30 2001 was 297,592). In providing these homes much of the infrastructure of the region has been upgraded and residents enjoy life against the backdrop of the region's picturesque natural environmental features (including beaches, waterways, valleys and bushland). The regional economy is important both as a market for goods and services and as a supplier of labour to the Sydney metropolitan area.

### 3.4

The success has been that a lot of the region's natural environment, especially the hinterland, coastline and ridge-tops have been protected from development in spite of the rapid rate of population growth and urbanisation. Against this success, some of the social and economic problems faced by the region have proved intractable and the natural environment has declined in many ways.

### 3.5

The major catalyst for population growth on the Central Coast over the last thirty years has been improvements in transport infrastructure: the electrification of the railway and the construction of the freeway to Sydney; the cost of home ownership pressures in Sydney; Australia's immigration intake and natural growth rate; and attraction of coastal lifestyles.

### 3.6 Social Changes

The major improvement in ease of access to Sydney has resulted in many social changes in the region:

- a shift from being a retirement and holiday area to being a place with a more mature socio-economic relationship to Sydney;
- being identified as a major supplier of affordable housing for the greater Sydney region;
- the absorption of some small coastal villages and settlements around the waterways into larger suburban masses; and
- a steady increase in the number of residents who commute to Sydney for work;

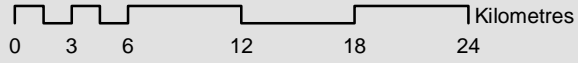
### 3.7

Many new residents have moved to the region where they are isolated from their informal and extended family networks. This has meant a community with a higher than average need for support services. Compounding this further there is a backlog in the provision of community facilities, human services and access via comprehensive intra-regional public transport. 9.48.234

# CENTRAL COAST LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS

SINGLETON

NEWCASTLE



CESSNOCK

LAKE MACQUARIE

HAWKESBURY

WYONG

GOSFORD

Ocean

Pacific

South

HORNSBY

PITTWATER

WARRINGAH

KU-RING-GAI



PARRAMATTA

RYDE

WILLOUGHBY

MANLY

## Legend

-  Central Coast Local Government Areas
-  Other Local Government Areas

N



### 3.8 Economic Changes

Although the Central Coast has been attractive for residential living over the last thirty years, it has not had the same success in attracting businesses. The regional economy depends heavily on the retail and construction industries (with proportionally higher employment than the state average) and has a smaller demand for labour, particularly in highly skilled occupations (in June 2002 the Central Coast's unemployment rate was 7.2% (Gosford City 5.7% and Wyong Shire 9.3%) compared with 6.1% for NSW). The gap between the need for work and the number of local jobs has been a chronic problem over the last three decades.

### 3.9 Environmental Changes

The environmental qualities of the Central Coast are important to people's sense of place. Water features (beaches, lakes) have been a focus for settlement in the region and much of the vegetation on the coastline and coastal plains has been cleared. This habitat loss means a loss of biodiversity. In addition, the impacts of urban stormwater, agriculture and forestry have brought about major changes in the region's waterways and aquatic ecosystems.

### 3.10 Sustainability and Intergenerational Equity

Sustainability is a key theme of the Action Plan. Sustainability is essentially concerned with maintaining or improving the overall quality of life for inhabitants at a local, regional and global scale and to ensure that the next generation inherits a socially, economic and ecological place to live.

### 3.11

The Intergovernmental Agreement on the Environment 1992 identified intergenerational equity as a key principle of sustainable development i.e.

*The present generation should ensure that the health, diversity and productivity of the environment is maintained or enhanced for the benefit of future generations.*

### 3.12

When referring to quality of life this plan takes an all-encompassing view that looks at: "schools and parks; the state of local lakes; the quality of neighbourhoods; the kinds of jobs the local economy generates; the level of participation by local residents in voluntary activities; the degree of trust they have in their neighbours". (Swinburne University of Technology - National Citizenship Project, 2000)

### 3.13 Balancing the Competing Agendas

From a systems perspective economic, social and ecological factors are inextricably linked. It is impossible to attempt to address economic, social and ecological issues in isolation because of the impacts of any actions across all three dimensions. The Action Plan has recognised this integration and has determined the actions based on their ability to have the most positive impact on at least one and preferably two more dimensions of sustainability.

### 3.14

Analysis of the cause and effect relationships between the three dimensions of sustainability illustrates the complexity of the linkages. As an example, financial stress (from low employment and wage levels) may underlie many (but by no means all) of the region's social problems (including low educational attainment). On the other hand, lack of employment is in turn (at least partly) a contributor to low participation in education.

### 3.15 The Region's Growth

State Government's Greater Metropolitan Strategy, 'Shaping Our Cities', foreshadows a continuation of rapid population growth on the Central Coast. (Approximately 80,000 additional people are expected in the twenty years to 2021). Despite some regional calls to resist population growth, in a democratic country such as Australia people are generally free to settle where they like. Population growth is inevitable because the Central Coast is, and will remain, a great place to live and, as Sydney continues to grow, the Central Coast will accommodate some of that increased population. The challenge is not how to stop growth, but how the region can best plan for this growth to maintain existing and future residents' overall quality of life. 8.41.205

### 3.16

The major growth areas within the region over the next twenty years have been identified as: Warnervale (40,000 additional people), the Peninsula (10,000), The Entrance (6,000) and Gosford City centre (5,000). The remainder of the growth is concentrated across the region in numerous urban centres. Projections estimate that the overall population of the Wyong Shire will be larger than that of Gosford City's after 2014.

### 3.17 Growth Benefits

The Central Coast's high growth rate has resulted in a robust construction industry, as well as supporting enhanced retail and entertainment opportunities within the region. Future growth on the Central Coast will require an ongoing assessment of infrastructure requirements balanced against the desire to conserve the region's natural environmental features. Rapid population growth focuses political attention and resources on the region however, the opportunities that may accompany growth need to be carefully managed.

### 3.18 Growth Pressures

The growth of the Central Coast region places considerable pressure on physical and social infrastructure, the economy and the natural environment. These pressures necessitate a regional approach to managing the growth and its impacts.

### 3.19

Continuing rapid population growth – unmatched by sufficient resources to address social, economic and environmental challenges – will see the people of the Central Coast face declines in key attributes of the quality of life they currently enjoy.

### 3.20 Physical & Community Infrastructure & Services

Over the past three decades there have been significant gains in the provision of physical public infrastructure (roads, water, sewerage, drainage, recreation) and private infrastructure (shopping centres, clubs etc). Much of the region's growth and development has occurred at the expense of the environment and the social fabric. Certainly, the lesson from the past is that the focus on hard infrastructure alone is not enough.

### 3.21

The Action Plan recognises the critical role of the region's physical and community infrastructure. During its preparation an Infrastructure Assessment was commissioned to assess the current and future levels of the region's physical infrastructure. The findings of the Infrastructure Assessment Report have been used to develop supporting actions related to physical infrastructure requirements. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

### 3.22

Whilst an assessment of the current and future levels of service provision across the region was also considered as important by the primary partners, such an assessment was not completed as part of the Action Plan. It was considered appropriate, due to the complexity of this type of research, for individual service delivery agencies to undertake their own assessments. This is dealt with in more detail in Chapter 8 in the Communities and Social Capital section. In the Chapter on Regional Governance an action point has been included that focuses on tackling the social challenges of the region. 9.48.234

### 3.23 The Opportunities

At the regional level a focus on improving the Central Coast's economic prosperity (measured by income and employment) to a level equivalent with the rest of the Greater Metropolitan Sydney Region would result in an automatic improvement in the region's social indicators and the ability to fund the activities essential to turn around environmental indicators.

### 3.24 No Easy Answers

To address the broad range of issues impacting on the existing and future residents of the Central Coast, commitment to provide additional, ongoing funding is required from all levels of government. The Action Plan identifies that there are no quick fixes and that the actions are all steps towards the vision, contributing incrementally to building the future we want. We can only make a difference if all parties (the community, private sector and government) commit to working together in a collaboration of equals over an extended period of time.

### 3.25

A sustainable approach acknowledges that our economic, environmental and social futures are intertwined. The Action Plan recognises that it is the cumulative impact of many complementary actions that will allow us to build the future we desire.

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- Dawson John, **Sustainability in Wyong Local Government Area** presented at CCCEN Forum November 2001
  - Department of Urban Affairs & Planning **Shaping Our Cities: The Planning Strategy for the Greater Metropolitan Area of Sydney, Newcastle, Wollongong and the Central Coast** 1998
  - GHD **Central Coast Infrastructure Assessment Report** 2002
  - Swinburne University of Technology **National Citizenship Project** 2000