



Cowra  
Council

2016–21

# State of the Environment Report

A State of the Environment (SoE) Report is an important management tool which aims to provide the community and Local Council with information on the condition of the environment in the local area to assist in decision-making.

Since 2007, the Councils of the Greater Central West Region of NSW (see map) have joined to produce Regional SoE Reports as part of Council reporting requirements.

NSW legislation means that Councils are not required to produce SoE reports each year, but in the year of the Council election. However, the participating Councils have decided to continue reporting on an annual basis so that they can provide a detailed SoE report that covers trends in the intervening years.

The 2020 Council elections were postponed until 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Being the year of the Council election, this SoE report responds to the requirement in the *Local Government Act 1993* that Councils measure and report on the progress of the environmental objectives or goals in their Community Strategic Plan (CSP).

This report lists Council's environmental strategic directions, identifies appropriate indicators to measure them and briefly reports on trends in these indicators since the last Council election (2016). It also discusses any major environmental impacts on the environmental strategic directions between 2016 and 2021.

## Environmental Strategic Directions

In the Cowra CSP, there are three environmental strategic directions under Strategic Theme 7 – Natural Resource Management:

- N1. Make Cowra a centre of environmental excellence
- N2. Build partnerships with people who work with and care for the land to secure a healthy environment
- N3. Promote practices to encourage Cowra to be an environmentally responsible community

## Environmental Indicators

Over 100 indicators have been identified and used to measure the state of the environment across the Greater Central West region using data compiled over the past five years. The indicators are categorised into five themes:

1. Land
2. Biodiversity
3. Water and Waterways
4. People and Communities
5. Towards Sustainability

The table below shows how Council's Environmental Strategic Directions are measured by the Environmental Indicators detailed in the remainder of the report.

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS	ENVIRONMENTAL INDICATORS
N1. Make Cowra a centre of environmental excellence	Land, Biodiversity, Water and Waterways, People and Communities, Towards Sustainability
N2. Build partnerships with people who work with and care for the land to secure a healthy environment	Land, Biodiversity, Water and Waterways, People and Communities, Gilgandra
N3. Promote practices to encourage Cowra to be an environmentally responsible community	People and Communities, Towards Sustainability

## Trends/Environmental Impacts

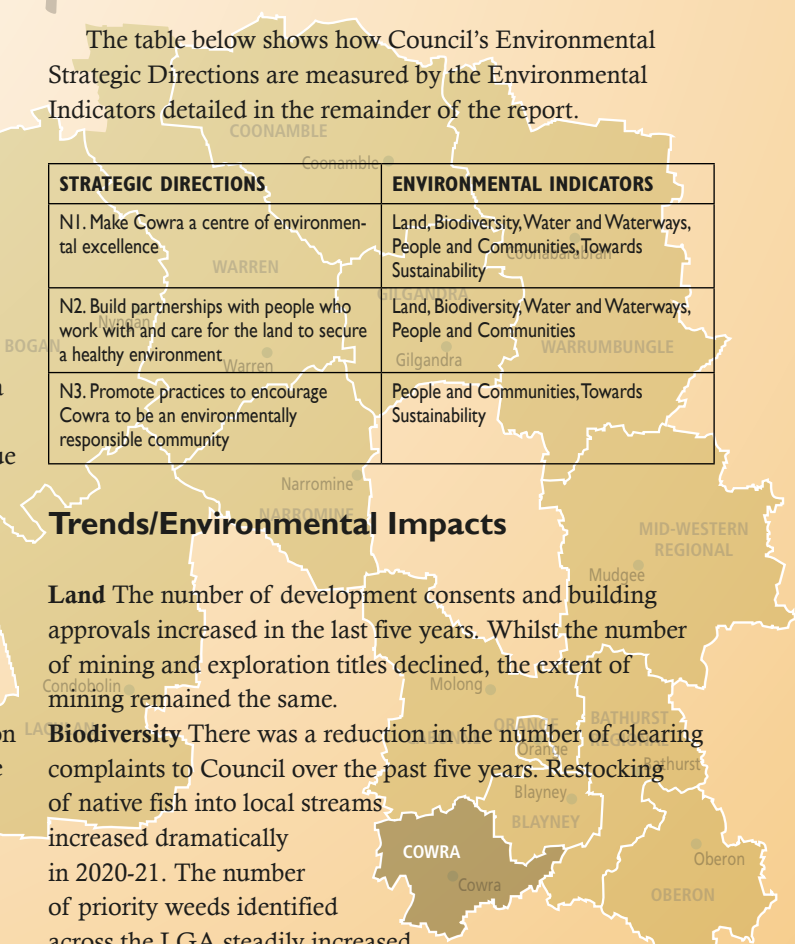
**Land** The number of development consents and building approvals increased in the last five years. Whilst the number of mining and exploration titles declined, the extent of mining remained the same.

**Biodiversity** There was a reduction in the number of clearing complaints to Council over the past five years. Restocking of native fish into local streams increased dramatically in 2020-21. The number of priority weeds identified across the LGA steadily increased.

**Water and Waterways** The number of drinking water complaints declined dramatically in 2020-21. The volume of water permissible for surface water and groundwater irrigation increased over the last five years. The annual metered water use was at its lowest level in 2020-21.

**People and Communities** The number of indigenous sites listed on the AHIMS register continued to rise over the last five years. Council continued to liaise strongly with local indigenous peoples.

**Towards Sustainability** The amount of waste sent to landfill continued to rise over the past five years with the level of recycling declining. However, the amount of greenwaste collected increase, as did e-waste collection. Council's greenhouse gas emissions were lower in 2020-21 than the previous two years and there was a steady increase in the uptake of small-scale renewable energy across the LGA.



# Land

Issue	Indicator	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	Trend
Contamination	Contaminated land sites - Contaminated Land Register (number)	1	1	1	1	1	→
	Contaminated land sites - potentially contaminated sites (number)	14	14	14	1	27	↓
	Contaminated sites rehabilitated (number)	1	0	0	2	0	↑
Erosion	Erosion affected land rehabilitated (ha)	0		0		2	↑
Land use planning and management	Number of development consents and building approvals	228	224	321	288	358	↑
	Landuse conflict complaints (number)	19	15	6	9	2	↑
	Loss of primary agricultural land through rezoning (ha)	0	0	0	0	0	→
Minerals & Petroleum	Number of mining and exploration titles	29			25	25	↑
	Area covered by mining and exploration titles (ha)	103,000	121,000	103,000	103,000	103,000	↑

↑ improvement      → no or little change      ↓ worsening trend

Note - the trend is based on comparing the average of the four previous years of reporting with 2020-21

# Biodiversity

Issue	Indicator	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	Trend
Habitat Loss	Total area in the National Parks Estate (ha)	6,648	6,648	6,648	6,648	6,648	→
	Total area of State Forests (ha)	8,429	8,429	8,429	8,429	8,429	→
	Total area protected in Wildlife Refuges (ha)	4,096			3,999	3,680	↓
	Area protected in conservation reserves & under voluntary conservation agreements (ha)	638	839	722	1,549	622	↓
	Extent of Traveling Stock Reserves in LGA (ha)	799		847	855	700	↓
	Proportion of Council reserves that is bushland/remnant vegetation	15%				15%	→
	Habitat areas revegetated (ha)	0			0	0	→
	Clearing complaints (number)	2	2	1	0	0	→
	Roadside vegetation management plan (Yes/No)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	→
	Roadside vegetation rehabilitated (ha)	0	0	1	0	0	→
Threatened Species	Threatened species listed (number)				114	114	→
	Threatened species actions implemented (e.g. PAS, recovery plans) (number)	0	0	0	0	0	→
	Fish restocking activities: native species (number)	45,000	2,850	34,000	80,000	114,000	↑
Priority weeds and feral animals	Fish restocking activities: non-native species (number)	17,000	6,000	17,000	34,000	32,100	↓
	Number of declared priority weeds	95	95	96	98	104	↓
	Invasive species (listed priority or WONS) under active management	0			1	6	↑



# Water and Waterways

Issue	Indicator	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	Trend
Surface & Ground Water Quality	<i>E.coli</i> remote from wastewater treatment plants (per 100ml)	0	1	0		1	→
Riparian	Riparian vegetation recovery actions (number)	0	0	1	0	1	↓
	Riparian vegetation recovery area (ha)	0	0	1	0	1	↑
Industrial/ Agricultural Pollution	Load Based Licencing Volume (kg)	4,820	6,188	7,786	6,383	4,842	↑
	Exceedances of license discharge consent recorded (number)	1	0	3	3	3	↑
	Erosion & Sediment Control complaints received by Council (number)	4	1	2	3	4	↓
Stormwater Pollution	Number of gross pollutant traps installed	2	2	2	2	2	→
	Total catchment area of GPTs (ha)	276	276	276	276	276	→
	Water pollution complaints (number)	0	0	0	0	0	→
Town Water Quality	Number of instances drinking water guidelines not met	8	6	3	0	0	→
	Number of drinking water complaints	18	28	17	78	7	↑
Dam Levels	Average dam levels	91.0%	77.0%	44.0%	17.0%	58.0%	↑
Water extraction	Number of Water Supply Work Approvals from surface water sources	228			211	218	↑
	Volume of surface water permissible for extraction under licences (GL)	51			38	58	↓
	Actual volume extracted through surface water licences (GL)					10	→
	Number of Water Supply Work Approvals from groundwater resources	1,076			1,170	1,184	↓
	Volume of groundwater permissible for extraction under licences (GL)	44			42	47	↓
	Actual volume extracted through groundwater licences (GL)				25	12	↑
Council water consumption	Area of irrigated Council managed parks, sportsgrounds, public open space (ha)	85	85	85	85	85	→
	Water used by council for irrigation (including treated and untreated) (ML)	55	96	162	107	140	↓
Town water consumption	Annual metered supply (ML)	2,790	3,136	2,880	1,754	1,467	↑
	Annual consumption (Total from WTP) (ML)	2,790	3,136	2,880	1,754	4,461	↓
	Average annual household mains potable water usage (KL)	193.8	194.3	222.6	223.1	184.4	↑
	Average level of water restrictions implemented	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	→
	Water conservation programs (number)	0	0	0	0	0	→

# People and Communities

Issue	Indicator	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	Trend
Active community involvement	Environmental volunteers working on public open space (hours)	350	0	0	0	0	↓
	Number of environmental community engagement programs	3	4	9	1	1	↓
	Number of growers' markets/local food retailers specialising in local food	1	2	2	1	2	↑
Indigenous Heritage	Number of Indigenous sites on AHIMS register	437	438	445	450	475	↑
	Inclusion in DCPs & rural strategies (Yes/No)	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	↑
	Extent of liaison with Indigenous communities (self-assessed from 0 = none to 3 = High)	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	→
	Development approvals on listed Indigenous sites (number)	0	0	0	0	0	→
	Number of indigenous heritage management actions/responses	0	1	5	0	0	↓
Non-Aboriginal Heritage	NSW Heritage Items (number)	4	5	6	5	5	→
	Locally listed heritage items (number)	69	69	68	68	68	↓
	Actions to protect non-Indigenous heritage (including management plans) (number)	0	1	1	0	0	↓
	Heritage buildings on statutory heritage lists demolished/degraded in past year (number)	0	0	0	0	0	→
	Heritage buildings on statutory heritage lists renovated/improved in past year (number)	7	6	7	5	4	↓

# Towards Sustainability

Issue	Indicator	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	Trend
Waste Generation	Total waste entombed at primary landfill (tonnes)	4,069	5,211	5,716	5,551	6,163	↓
	Total waste entombed at other landfills (exc recyclables) (tonnes)	31	71	33	21	0	↑
	Average total waste generated per person (tonnes)	0.32	0.42	0.45	0.44	0.48	↓
	Average cost of waste service per residential household	\$357	\$370	\$419	\$430	\$444	↓
Hazardous/Liquid Waste	DrumMuster collections (number of drums)	5,619	4,032	7,399	5,038	5,686	↑
	Household Hazardous Wastes collected (kg)	2,503	0	7,181	0	8,200	↑
Reduce	Organics collected (diverted from landfill) (tonnes)	1,125	1,062	6	2	1,294	↑
	E-Waste collected (diverted from landfill) (tonnes)	6	19	14	17	19	↑
Recycle	Volume of material recycled (tonnes)	2,116	2,999	6,359	7,218	2,656	↓
	Volume of material recycled per person (kg)	167	236	498	566	209	↓
Littering and illegal dumping	Number of illegal waste disposal complaints to Council	35	20	20	17	2	↑
Engineering, Infrastructure and Civil Works	New road construction (km)	0.64	0	0.32	0	0	↑
	Road upgrades (km)	87	50	81	61	83	↓
Risk Management	Flood management plans/ flood mapping - increase in area covered (ha)	303	303	0	0	0	↓
	Hazard reduction burns (number)	0	0	0	0	0	→
Climate Change Mitigation	Office paper used by Council (A4 & A3 reams)	1,469	1,420	640	676	809	↑
	Council sustainability initiatives	0	2		2		↑
	Council mitigation initiatives	4	1		2	0	↓
Council Greenhouse Gas Emissions	Annual electricity consumption for Council controlled facilities (MWh)	3,963	4,561		4,421	3,880	↑
	Annual natural gas consumption for Council controlled facilities (Gj)	0	0		0	0	→
	Annual bottled gas consumption for Council controlled facilities (L)	0	0		0	0	→
	Total fuel consumption (KL)	562	535	589	559	560	↑
	Proportion of Council's electrical energy demand met from council-owned renewable energy infrastructure	0.7%	0.5%	0.5%	1.0%	0.8%	↑
	Council total operational greenhouse gas emissions (tCO <sub>2</sub> -e/year)	7,459	7,734	8,716	8,872	8,349	↓
Community Greenhouse Gas Emissions	Small scale renewable energy uptake (kW installed)	554	1,261	1,323	2,139	2,194	↑
	Number of solar water heaters and heat pumps installed	12	12	2	3	7	↓



## CASE STUDY: Container Depot Scheme (Cowra LGA)

Cowra Council has been operating the Container Deposit Scheme (CDS), Return and Earn, since December 2017. This scheme was introduced as a litter reduction campaign by the NSW EPA in 2017, as 44% of all litter in NSW is made up of drink containers. The CDS Scheme is for the processing of recyclable materials - all material collected must be recycled. There are more than 500 collection points across the state and the Cowra Material Recycling Facility (MRF) is the only processing plant in the Central West.

From December 2017 to 30 June 2020 Council received over 18,600 tonnes of recyclable material to be processed at the Cowra MRF. This material was delivered in 3,748 truck movements and as a minimum Council receives five truckloads of recyclable material each day from Lithgow, Mudgee, Wellington, Dubbo, Parkes, Forbes, Bathurst, Orange, Young and Cowra.

The material collected to date was made up of:

- 1,154 tonnes of aluminium – cans are usually melted down to make new drink containers.
- 1,162 tonnes of PET plastics – bottles are cleaned shredded and melted down to make other plastic products.
- 9,698 tonnes of glass – the glass when received is broken and a mix of colours is sent off site to be recycled. Over 40% of new glass is made from recycled glass bottles and jars.

The average tonnage processed at the Cowra MRF is approximately 4.5 tonnes/ hour or 29 tonnes/day. The processing is undertaken by five CDS staff members and the operation runs seven days a week in an attempt to keep up with the amount of material brought to the site. The staff receive, sort, process and ship materials, as well as the accounting, compliance and audits. Council has purchased new equipment to be able to process this material, created jobs and installed solar panels to reduce the cost of power consumption associated with the processing.



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