

# **Strategic Planning and Environmental Protection**

A Case Study of the Lennox Head Community Aspirations Strategic Plan  
Lennox Head, Australia

## **Study Questions:**

How are sustainability and environmental protection incorporated into the Lennox Head Strategic Plan (LHSP)? How can planning in Lennox Head be improved to deal with future environmental problems?

## **Justification of the Study:**

The way humans use land is the chief source of environmental degradation. In Australia, local governments are responsible for the majority of land use decisions (Farrier et. Al., 1999). The Ballina Shire Council, the equivalent to a county government in the US, is the governing body for the town of Lennox Head and makes these decisions through strategic planning and zoning processes.

In the past, the planning process has created communities that are unsustainable and unhealthy (Wheeler, 2006). Recently, there has been a movement to reform the process and use strategic planning to promote ecologically sustainable development and create livable communities (Shackleton, 2003). As a new and increasingly used tool in the greening of communities, the applications and effectiveness of community-based, environmental strategic planning needs to be reviewed and evaluated.

## **Introduction:**

### **The Purpose of Community/Strategic Planning:**

According to Wheeler in his book, *Planning for Sustainability*, “planning refers to a wide range of systematic activities designed to ensure that desired goals can be achieved in the future.” That means that a plan is “a well supported collection of strategies for achieving desired

results” (Wheeler, 2006). Put into more concrete terms, planning is what allows local authorities and governments to define the operational context, scope and objectives of the laws set by the central government (Bruff and Wood, 2000). The local shire councils interpret the laws of the central government, in this case the government of New South Wales (NSW), an Australian State, before implementing them (Bruff and Wood, 2000). Planning is one way that this happens. Planning also allows a community’s voice to be heard in a meaningful and long-term way. It is the bringing together of the goals of the government and the goals of the community.

Planning has gone through many changes since its beginning and its most recent focus is the area of sustainability. Land use and strategic planning have become the areas where the goals of sustainable development are defined and set out into actions. There are many reasons for this, but the one most relevant to this study is explained below;

Because land-use planning is so closely bound up with environmental change, land-use planning demands the translation of abstract principle of sustainability into operational policies and decisions. Paradoxically, this process is likely to expose the very conflicts that ‘sustainable development’ was meant to reconcile... The planning system is likely to remain a focus of attention because it is frequently the forum in which these conflicts are first exposed. (Bruff and Wood, 2000)

Bruff and Wood go on to say, a favorable aspect of using land use planning to promote sustainable development is that it is already in place and established. If the goal is to ‘operationalize’ sustainability, land-use planning offers governments a place to start instead of waiting for a new regulatory or political system (Bruff and Wood, 2000).

A significant amount of literature is available on the importance of community and environmental strategic planning. Despite this, many local governments are only recently incorporating environmental protection/restoration and community concerns into their strategic plans. According to the Ballina Shire Council website, local government is the key interface between people and their government. “Councils are no longer solely concerned with roads,

rubbish and rates. Community planning is a tool used to help the Council increase its accountability, guide the future of the community it serves and develop effective partnerships with other government and non-government agencies.” (Ballina Shire Council, 2008) The LHSP is the first major piece of planning work in the Ballina Shire to try to incorporate sustainable development into its goals.

### **Planning in the Ballina Shire:**

The Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 (EPAA) is the law that governs planning in NSW (Mooney, 2004). It was expanded in 1993 with the Local Government Act. This law calls on all shire councils to “properly manage, protect, restore, enhance and conserve the environment of the area for which it is responsible in a manner that is consistent with and promotes the principles of Ecologically Sustainable Development (ESD)” (Mooney, 2004). It was amended in 1997 to include the goal of “effective integration of ecological and environmental considerations in the decision-making process” (Mooney, 2004, pg 6).

There are quite a few documents that direct activities in the Lennox Head area. Under the Local Environment Act 1993, the state requires that every council prepare a Local Environmental Plan (LEP) for all areas in the shire (Farrier et. Al., 1999). They are also required to have a Development Control Plan (DCP) that lays out which areas are suitable for development and other development regulations such as building height, lot size, and housing densities (Farrier et. Al., 1999). Documents like the LHSP are prepared to complement existing LEPs and DEPs and in some cases can be used as a guide when preparing new LEPs and DEPs.

The Strategic Services department in the Ballina Shire Council prepares all plans. They consult with the regulatory and civil departments to make sure that regulation is consistent. In

order for work on a new plan to begin, the Council must pass a motion that explains what kind of plan is to be prepared and the purpose of the plan (Rich, Pers. Comm., 2008).

### **Relationship of the Ballina Shire Council and the Lennox Head Community:**

The Ballina Shire is split into three wards or regions. Each ward elects three councilors to represent them at the Council. Lennox Head is in the B ward. These three councilors are also part of a B Ward Committee, that meets monthly to hear the concerns of the residents and a LHSP Monitoring Committee, which meets every three months to monitor the implementation of the plan. Despite all of this Council-community interaction, most decisions are made at the regular monthly meetings of Council. I attended a meeting of the Ballina Shire Council on 24 April 2008 and saw how decisions are made. The Council considered various development proposals and either approved them or made comments on how they should be changed. Residents are allowed to address the Council about the proposals but are not allowed to engage in the discussion. They can only let their thoughts be known if they arrange in advance to address an item already included in the business papers (meeting minutes) (Ballina Shire Council, 2008).

### **Ecologically Sustainable Development (ESD):**

Agenda 21, which was signed by Australia at the Earth Summit in 1992, “outlines the key role of local authorities in delivering sustainable development and requires them [federal governments] to help produce local action plans to meet this aim” (Bruff and Wood, 2000, pg 521). Following the signing of this document the NSW government passed the Local Government Act 1993 which outlined the goals of ESD and required all planning documents to be prepared accordingly (Farrier et. Al. 1999).

The LHSP claims to embody the concept of ESD. The following paragraph is included in the LHSP immediately following the mission statement;

Ecologically Sustainable Development is a concept which is embodied in a variety of pieces of legislation including the Local Government Act, 1993 and the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act, 1979. Sustainable development involves balancing the environmental, economic and social needs of the community and environment in which we live. The LHSP embodies this concept by seeking to balance the environmental, economic and social needs of the Lennox Head community. One of the main challenges in achieving this is addressing the wide range of competing opinions, views and interests within the community. (Ballina Shire Council, 2002)

It goes on to explain ESD as the “three-legged stool model of sustainability” (Ballina Shire Council, 2002). Each leg of the stool represents economic prosperity, community wellbeing, and ecological integrity and the seat of the stool is our living environment. All of the legs must be equal in order for the community to be stable. ESD is about balancing the three objectives (Ballina Shire Council, 2002). This is a fairly new goal for plans in the Ballina Shire. According to previous student work, the ESD concept has not previously been a driving force in decision-making in the region (Shackleton, 2003).

### **History of environmental protection in the Lennox Head Community:**

Despite not having the official goal of ESD, there is a long history of community environmental protection in Lennox Head. According to a 2008 book published by the Lennox Head Residents Association Heritage Committee, *Lennox Head Progresses: With the Aid of Its Progress Associations*, the first meeting of the Residents Association took place in January of 1925. Since that time they have strived to make the voices of the residents heard, particularly on the issues of environmental protection and community infrastructure (ie. community centers, sporting fields, etc.) (Lennox Head Heritage Committee, 2008). In addition to the Residents Association, which includes a Dune Care group that does fence and track maintenance, there is also the Lennox Land Care group. Land Care has been active for over 20 years, restoring damaged ecosystems in the Lennox area. Before the LHSP, all of planting, weeding, fence

building, and track maintenance being done by these groups was occurring without any Council involvement (Milner, Pers. Comm., 2008).

### **Lennox Head Community Strategic Plan:**

In February 2001 the Ballina Shire Council announced that due to “significant community interest” in the planning and development of Lennox Head they were going to prepare a new strategic plan for the region. Many community members think this decision was brought on by the community action taken to stop the Survey Street development in 2000-2001 (Grout, 2001) and the presentation made to Council by the Lennox Head Residents Association on why more council planning was needed in Lennox Head (Goodman, Pers. Comm). In the development of the new plan, community input was sought through telephone interviews and community workshops. The final plan laid out ambitious goals for both community and environmental health. Below are some selections from the final plan that illustrate the goals of the Council and the Lennox Head residents.

**Community Vision-** The seaside village atmosphere and the environmental heritage of Lennox Head will be retained and enhanced as the community works together to provide for the needs of existing and future generations. (Ballina Shire Council, 2002)

**Mission of the Plan-** The Lennox Head Strategic Plan (LHSP) will be a living document which promotes and enhances the sense of community by:

- Balancing environmental, social and economic needs
- Reducing conflict by providing clear guidelines for future development
- Enabling continuing community involvement in its applications

(Ballina Shire Council, 2002)

These are the guiding statements for the LHSP. All policies, actions and recommendations are meant to fall within the spirit of the vision and mission. The LHSP is a long and complex document that consists mainly of sections on the community vision and mission, actions that will

be taken to achieve those goals, and historical background on the community (Ballina Shire Council, 2002).

### **Methodology:**

#### **Lennox Head as a Case Study:**

Lennox Head is located on the far north coast of New South Wales, Australia. It is within the Ballina Shire and is governed by the Ballina Shire Council. A map of the region can be found below.

#### **The Area Covered by the Lennox Head Strategic Plan**



Figure 1.

Source: Google Maps

Lennox Head and the surrounding community is one of the fastest growing areas in Australia (Ballina Shire Council, 2002). During the 1960's, Lennox Head only had a few hundred permanent residents (Lennox National Surfing Reserve Committee, 2008). Now, it is projected that if current growth rates continue, the area will be home to more than 16,000 people by 2020 (Ballina Shire Council, 2002). Along with this, (and maybe because of it) many members of the community are opposed to development and support efforts for increased environmental protection (Grout, 2001). In response to significant community interest into how the Lennox Head area should be developed, the Ballina Shire Council decided to prepare a strategic plan for the region (Grout, 2001). The Lennox Head Community Aspirations Strategic Plan is the result of this endeavor. This was the first ever site-specific plan for the area and the first chance the community had to give their opinions on how Lennox Head should be developed.

#### **Method of Data Collection:**

Data collection occurred through document research, observation and interviews. Most data was collected through interviews with important stakeholders. These stakeholders included Ballina Shire Councilors, Ballina Shire Council staff, consultant planners, community members, environmental organizations and resident groups. These were used to gain perspective on the effectiveness of the strategic plan and to learn about the planning process.

Documents were also a very important source of data. They were the source for most of the interview questions and foundation of the project. All of the comments made in interviews and information gathered at public meetings was compared against data contained in the journals, plans, and informational publications.

Data was also collected by observation. I attended the general meeting of the Ballina Shire Council on 24 April 2008, the monthly meeting of the Lennox Head Resident Association

on 5 May 2008, and weekly working bees (meetings) of the Lennox Land Care group on 23 April, 27 April, 30 April and 7 May 2008. These were useful in seeing how decisions are made and how the LHSP is used in day-to-day decision making.

### **How Data was Analyzed:**

Interviews were analyzed for common themes and ideas. These were compared to council documents and meeting notes to determine the implementation timeline and the effectiveness of the LHSP. Information on how the LHSP can be improved was gathered from outside work done on other strategic and community plans. It was then analyzed and compared to the interview and observation data to determine if the techniques would be effective in Lennox Head.

### **Results\* :**

Information obtained through interviews:

#### **Background Information:**

##### **Malcolm Milner- President: Lennox Land Care**

History of Land Care: There have been groups working on things since the late 80's. It would just be on things that they considered important because there was no plan or comprehensive vision. There has always been a strong community interest in environmental protection- but it does not always translate into action. People tend to support issues but do not come out very often to do the on the ground work.

##### **Peter Cuming- Managing Director: Sustainable Futures Australia**

Environmental Planning in NSW: Planning is a state system with no over-arching federal laws. The center of state planning law is the EPAA. Recently it [planning] has come under some scrutiny for appealing to development and big business.

An important addition has been the concept of ESD. Ecological is the bottom line, not social or economic. If any activity causes irrevocable harm it does not fit with ESD and should not be allowed to go ahead.

The problem is there are much less people working at the state level now than before. They don't have the staff to look into local issues so they make decisions without know the details. There is a general dumbing down of plans.

#### **Creation of the LHSP:**

##### **Karina Vikstrom- Strategic Planner: Ballina Shire Council**

As head planner she provided administrative and technical support to the Community Access Group. She pulled related documents together, wrote the parts of the document that the committee did not write, and made sure everything was according to current planning laws.

The feeling from the community was, 'there is lots of population growth but no infrastructure to support it.' The population was moving from a holiday (vacation) town to permanent residents. There was a lot of

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\* Information from interviews is paraphrased from the original conversation and is not intended to be a direct quotation unless noted

community input on the plan- much more than is usual. Before the LHSP and the following SP, rezoning happened step-by-step for each proposed project. The SP gave rezoning a long term view.

**Fred Goodman and Marelle Lee- Members: Lennox Head Residents Association**

It all started with the residents association telling the Council that they wanted/needed a plan. Councillor Alan Rich started out in the Residents Association and then got on the council and pushed for the plan. There was a lot of community input and interest.

**Brian Smith- Delegate to the Strategic Plan Monitoring Committee: Lennox Head Residents Association**

Lennox was considered a backwoods to Ballina City, but it was growing. The big thing that people thought was important was preserving the community atmosphere.

**Alan Rich- Councillor: Ballina Shire Council**

Lennox Head had been ignored for too many years and development was proceeding in sub-optimal ways. Planning was going on but it was not meeting needs- we needed a site specific approach. There was a strong community force that knew what they wanted. They were addressing the Council at every meeting with concerns about all the new development. When he became a councillor, was dismayed at the amount of medium density housing that had already been approved for Lennox Head. Unsustainable practices were occurring in regard to development.

The LHSP was modeled on planning done in the Noosa Shire. Their goal was to be responsible to the community.

**Implementation:**

**Martha Dotter- Regulatory Services: Ballina Shire Council**

Role of Regulatory Services in the Implementation of the LHSP:

Regulatory services is the department that enforces plans adopted by Council.

DAs come to them and they assess if they are in accordance with the strategic plan and other laws. They are responsible for seeing if development happens according to the applicable law. That may mean that they have to go on site and investigate. They also respond to community complaints about building height, access to sunlight, etc. The goals and development outcomes of the LHSP are incorporated into other planning instruments such as the LEP and the DCP. Then Regulatory Services assess DA's according to these planning instruments. For large scale subdivision developments and other significant development (ie the Lennox Pub re-development or Petrac Pacific Pines Estate) the DA may be referred off to Strategic Services who assess it according to the LHSP.

ESD means doing things in such a way that you ensure you are leaving this world for the next generation and making decisions according to the precautionary principle. But it is important to remember that Regulatory Services must balance that with the needs and rights of the developers.

**Steve Connelly- Consultant Planner: S J Connelly Pty Ltd**

Developers are respectful of the LHSP because there is so much support of the plan.

You have stop much leakage because if you start making exceptions then the plan will mean less and less. There is some leakage with the Pacific Pines proposal- three story buildings are proposed

**Fred Goodman and Marelle Lee- Members: Lennox Head Residents Association**

Wary of the way it is being implemented, it is not as good as it could be. The town has taken a turn for the worst. Marelle- "the developers will try anything to get what they want"

The community has used the plan to check the developers- to say see, this does not fit in with our goals. It is still a struggle to get what we want- always have a keep a watch out

**Brian Smith- Delegate to the Strategic Plan Monitoring Committee: Lennox Head Residents Association**

It comes down to money- we have it all mapped out. We must remember that Lennox is only part of the Ballina Shire. The dynamic of the Council influences what gets done- who is pushing for what.

People are worried about the issues not really the plan. The community was generally satisfied with how they issues were dealt with. Lennox Head needs to retain its boundaries- that should be the focus of considering DAs.

Governments can always change their minds- that is why there must be community groups that watch them.

Role of the Monitoring Committee: It says in the LHSP that the progress of the plan should be monitored. The monitoring committee meets every 3 months. It is not a decision making body- it is a link between the council and the community. The council pays attention to what the committee has to say but they have no legal obligations to the committee.

**James Brideson- Civil Services: Ballina Shire Council**

Most of the Environmental Management Plans (see below) for Lennox Head came out of the LHSP process. We would still have plans even without the LHSP because the significant community interest in this issue. The LHSP gave the work direction and vision.

Environmental Management Plans: They deal with existing environmental conditions, what needs to be done, who should do it, and what methods to use. They are legal documents so all activities must be done according to the plan. The Vegetation Management Plans make recommendations for action and then prioritize them. They are usually 5 to 10 year plans depending on the available resources. It is an evolving process and rarely can you check off all the recommendations as being complete at the end of the lifecycle of a plan. We would need about 1000% more resources to do everything we set out to do. Maintenance is a big issue- you can never really check off a place as complete because it has to be monitored. The community groups that are involved in carrying out the plans are involved during their preparation. It is known when the plan is adopted who will work on what task.

**Malcolm Milner- President: Lennox Land Care**

How has the LHSP helped the work of Land Care?: The vegetation management plans that they work from came out of the strategic planning process. The council was not involved before the time of the LHSP. There needs to be more council involvement. It all comes down to resources. For example, the Lake Ainsworth management plan has pages and pages of priorities but not much has been done. There are heaps of plans but they are not being implemented. "They have planned to the Nth degree," now they need to focus on implementation.

The monitoring committee is not proactive, it is reactive. They look at DAs that have already come in. The committee is managed carefully by the Council and nothing too controversial is ever decided by the committee. There is lots of talk, consulting, and plans but in his opinion the implementation is "desperately failing." An example is the precinct plans, they were prepared for the beach with lots of community consultation. They were really great plans but the Council put them on hold for the last 3 years. It has been so long that now they would have to be redone before they could be implemented.

**What made the LHSP successful?**

**Karina Vikstrom- Strategic Planner: Ballina Shire Council**

The moment that the LHSP shined the most was in the fight against the luxury aged living development on Condon Hill. The DA ended up in front of the Land and Environment Court and if it was not for the LHSP and the following planning work that laid out what the community wanted, the court probably would have ruled in favor of the developers. There will be development on that hill but it will have to comply with the goals of the LHSP.

There were some funds available and that is why they were able to produce as many plans as they did. The funds also allowed them to keep the community updated on what was happening in regard to implementation.

**Steve Connelly- Consultant Planner: S J Connelly Pty Ltd**

The LHSP did three things really well: it had lots of community involvement, had a long gestation period so nothing was decided in haste, and it was backed up by good science.

The problem is that people get upset when they don't see results right away. "The canvas is not always completed quickly, you are looking at only part of the Rembrandt because each part of the village is at a different stage." The community accepts the plan because they were so involved in preparing it.

**Alan Rich- Councilor: Ballina Shire Council**

The research that went into it and the community consultation process.

**Brian Smith- Delegate to the Strategic Plan Monitoring Committee: Lennox Head Residents Association**

The strong point of the LHSP is just the fact that it is there. We have a document that give us a guide. When people want to go away from the LHSP we really have to examine why.

**Environmental Measures in the LHSP:**

**Karina Vikstrom- Strategic Planner: Ballina Shire Council**

The community and the council are generally become more environmentally aware as time moves on. There is always an understanding and a want to protect environmentally sensitive areas but compromise is sometimes necessary. For example, the new road that needs to be built for the Pacific Pines Estate is less than 50m from a nature preserve. You cannot just focus on environmental protection. You have to make sure the economic and social side are functioning as well. Where will all the people work? If an area becomes too expensive for the people who work there to live there then they start commuting long distances. That is not sustainable. If you have population growth you must follow it with infrastructure and jobs but never forget about the environment.

**Steve Connelly- Consultant Planner: S J Connelly Pty Ltd**

The want for environmental protection came from both the council and the community.

In regard to environmental protection measures, they struck a good balance. They knew what they could achieve because they had done their research before hand.

ESD means being “thoughtful of the environment in its fullest sense.”

**Brian Smith- Delegate to the Strategic Plan Monitoring Committee: Lennox Head Residents Association**

There is an Australian wide growing awareness of environmental problems. All the strategic plan did was put it down on paper. It is a reflection of existing sentiment, not a driving force. Developers are aware of this and know it is in their best interest to develop with the environment in mind.

**Alan Rich- Councilor: Ballina Shire Council**

Generally the environmental protection measures are good. The big thing was that the LHSP got an environmental scientist on staff- now they can check the claims made by developers. It is not acceptable to say ‘there is nothing valuable on this land.’ Now if they want to destroy something they have to really argue why- they have to prove that it is for the greater good. The biggest environmental problem now is the trade-offs being made between competing public interests.

**Planning for Climate Change and Sustainability:**

**Karina Vikstrom- Strategic Planner: Ballina Shire Council**

Climate change, in particular sea level rise, was talked about when preparing the LHSP and the SP but they had no idea how to incorporate it. Recently there has been more discussion of the topic internally, especially how it will impact the Ballina Shire.

**Martha Dotter- Regulatory Services: Ballina Shire Council**

From a regulatory sense, it can be used as a reference to refuse development that does not comply with the community values. For example, if a development wanted huge gargoyles it would be rejected, not because we just did not like the gargoyles but because it does not comply with the coastal architecture theme agreed on in the plan. Also, goal setting is important and useful.

**Steve Connelly- Consultant Planner: S J Connelly Pty Ltd**

Incorporating climate change into strategic planning will be difficult. It is a “real and vexing” issue.

**Skye McNamara- Climate Action: Ballina Shire Council**

Her Role at Council: Hired mainly to look at transport emissions but is also involved in community education and involvement. Established a carpool network for the staff and they now have some bikes in their fleet. A Santa Goes Green Project- a program to get people to think about their energy and water use over the holidays. She took a look at their internal purchasing- started with stationary and are moving up to bigger things

Sustainability Frameworks: She works from the Ballina Sustainability 2025 document as a kind of framework for operations. The council put a big focus on getting their goals right. In her opinion this shows a real commitment to sustainability. It is not just having programs here and there it is about the overall vision. It all comes down to funding- we would like to do a lot more There are lots of idea out there- all it takes is resources

Relationship Between Ballina Sustainability 2025 and the LHSP: The Ballina Sustainability 2025 document informs the LHSP. It provides a vision and can guide future planning.

**Brian Smith- Delegate to the Strategic Plan Monitoring Committee: Lennox Head Residents Association**

The Monitoring Committee is conscious of climate change but has put it in the too hard basket. They are not ignoring it- taking tentative steps to deal with the consequences

**Alan Rich- Councillor: Ballina Shire Council**

He is trying to bring the issue to the Council's attention. Not much planning has been done on a 100 year time frame. Will the roads still be there? Alternative transportation routes? Sea level rise is the biggest danger. The Council staff understands climate change much better than the Council. We cannot afford to be as complacent as we are. Plans need to work towards a stable population and local government has a big role to play. They can control the land released for development and use it as a kind of population control.

**James Brideson- Civil Services: Ballina Shire Council**

We are definitely thinking about it. We are already involved in protecting the environment so we are a step ahead. The thought of sea level rise does not stop us from planting in areas that are projected to be impacted. We can still have a positive impact on things like soil stability and restoring ecosystems. It is worth it if we can improve the area, even if it is just in the short term. A lot of these problems are much bigger than the shire. If we were to want to put in habitat corridors for migration that would be a statewide issue. The important thing is, we have to think holistically.

**Peter Cuming- Managing Director: Sustainable Futures Australia**

The first step is to incorporate the concept of sustainability into everything you do, all operations. Then you can bring sustainability into the strategic planning department.

Sustainability has to be a part of how you design towns- it is present in every part of the plan, not just in an 'environment' section. Most importantly, the Council staff must understand 'applied' sustainability. How to incorporate it into all of their activities.

Must engage in sustainability in its largest meaning.

Look at the example of the New Byron Shire Draft Management Plan

Education is really important- you cannot become sustainable if you do not understand what it means.

The complex nature of the possible changes that will come with climate change demands that we use the team approach. It is a bit like the forest ecosystem- everything that come through brings its perspective and knowledge.

We must do things incrementally, we cannot put things off just because we need more information about something else. We need to start with what we know- we know about beach erosion and flooding.

**Environmental Aspects of the LHSP:**

During the community consultation process, the community of Lennox Head indicated that environmental protection was very important to them. This led to a number of strategic actions in the LHSP. There are sixteen in all and most of them have to do with creating management and restoration plans for environmentally sensitive and important areas (Ballina

Shire Council, 2002). Some examples are, a vegetation management plan for the entire Lennox Head area, a detailed plan of management for the Lennox Headland, an environmental restoration plan for significant environments, and the establishment of wildlife corridors (Ballina Shire Council, 2002). There are also proposed actions for creating better access to the beach, providing more educational material about the environment, and encouraging ‘environmentally friendlier’ housing (Ballina Shire Council, 2002).

### **The Implementation of the LHSP:**

The first document to be prepared and adopted by the council after the adoption of the LHSP was the Structure Plan (SP). The goal of the SP is to “provide a framework for the development of new urban release areas in the Lennox Head district” (Ballina Shire Council, 2004). The SP could be also be explained as the document that takes the goals and visions of the LHSP and breaks them down into guidelines for development. It outlines the councils ‘blueprint’ for growth and development but also cautions that “all land is constrained in one way or another...It is only after detailed site specific assessment and design work has occurred that it is possible to determine the actual development potential of any given parcel of land” (Ballina Shire Council, 2004, pg 6). The SP examines twenty one proposed areas for rezoning to urban development and the preferred uses for each area. It also identifies high conservation value habitats, possible wildlife corridors, and visually significant land. A large study of all land in the Lennox Region was done during the preparation of this plan and it was determined that seventeen percent of important habitat resources are currently outside of environmental protection zones (Ballina Shire Council, 2004). This led to re-zoning recommendations for many areas.

**Community Involvement in Implementation:**

During the general meeting of Council on 24 April, the LHSP was not directly discussed. I did observe how Development Applications (DAs) are dealt with, in particular how large-scale projects are considered. There was a DA from a family owned farm that sought to build a second house on the property. After much deliberation, the DA was rejected with advice on how it could be improved and resubmitted for a possible approval. The other project up for consideration was the redevelopment of the Lennox Point Hotel. Because of the large-scale nature of the project, the Council resolved to hold a special meeting for the discussion and possible approval of the project.

According to their notes, the first meeting of the Strategic Plan Monitoring Committee was 14 June 2005. At this meeting a report was given by the strategic services division about the status of the strategic actions in the plan. Most actions were categorized as 'ongoing', meaning that they are happening as part of another action or plan. For example, the action of having educational programs to encourage environmentally sensitive housing is considered ongoing because the completion of the DCP will give it 'context' (Strategic Plan Monitoring Committee, Nd.). Only two of the environmental strategic actions were considered complete- the vegetation management plan for the Lennox Headland and the landscape study of prominent areas. Another progress report was given to the committee on March 2006. All of the actions had the same status as in the report given the previous year (Strategic Plan Monitoring Committee, Nd.).

At the Lennox Head Residents Association Meeting on 5 May 2008, there was much discussion of the LHSP and actions happening/not happening according to the plan. The Residents Association seems to be performing the functions of a watch-dog group for the strategic plan. The general opinion of the community members at the meeting was it is a good

document- they are just frustrated with the speed of implementation. The Residents Association's current activity regarding the LHSP is concerned with the Petrac Pacific Pines development. They resolved to write letters to learn more about the status of the project and to let their concerns about its compliance with the LHSP be known. At this meeting, I also learned that the community heritage study (this is one of the actions of the strategic plan) is complete and up for community review.

The Lennox Head Land Care Working Bees are one of the largest ongoing implementation programs for the LHSP. At the Land Care Working Bee on 27 April, I learned from Malcolm Milner, the president of Lennox Land Care, that at the beginning of each year he sits down with the management plans and works out what the group is going to do for the year. He then informs Council of his plans and they support his group with plants, mulch, fertilizer, tools etc. He works closely with Ballina staff members to ensure proper measures are taken and the ecosystems are restored to what they once were. In many cases, he uses old photographs to determine which types of plants should be planted where. (Milner, Pers. Comm., 2008). Overall the Land Care group is satisfied with the strategic planning that has gone on, but wishes more focus was put on implementation.

### **Current Development Applications:**

According to the informational pamphlet, *Building and Renovating*, available to anyone thinking about building in Ballina Shire, all development must consider flood prone land, erosion, bushfire prone land and removal of native vegetation. For comparison, the Byron Shire (the neighboring shire) requires all of the same actions as Ballina, plus a statement of environmental effects, a BASIX certificate and you must preserve as many existing trees as possible on the property (Lismore City and Ballina Shire Council, Nd.). BASIX is an online

environmental assessment of your building plans. To get a BASIX certificate you must show that the proposed building will use 40% less mains water supply and produce 40% less greenhouse gas emissions (Lismore City and Ballina Shire Council, Nd.). In the Ballina Shire a BASIX certificate is required for all new residential work, alterations and additions where the value of the work exceeds \$50,000 (Lismore City and Ballina Shire Council, Nd.).

There are currently quite a few DAs up for review by the Council. There are two major projects currently being considered and are expected by all parties involved to be approved. The owners of the Lennox Point Hotel, in the central business district of Lennox Head, want to demolish the existing building and build another one on the same site (Ardill Payne and Partners, 2008). According to the law, they must consider all of the criteria explained above, in addition to how their project complies with the LHSP. In their statement of environmental effects, they say there is little to no impact because the site is already developed (Ardill Payne and Partners, 2008). Additionally, the project is said to comply with the LHSP because it is designed to take advantage of solar access, natural light, breezes, views, and it will contribute to the overall community atmosphere (Ardill Payne and Partners, 2008). There is no assessment of the environmental impact of demolishing the building, the new building materials, the impact of sea level rise due to climate change, or an explanation of how the project embodies ESD.

The Petrac Pacific Pines Estate development has been in the works since before the LHSP was prepared. It was always understood that some kind of housing development would take place on the property. In the notes on the adoption of the LHSP, the council said of the project, “council advises the proponents, Planning NSW, and the Minister’s Office that any future Master Plan for Pacific Pines Estate should conform with the Strategic Principles and Actions contained within the LHSP” (Ballina Shire Council, 2002). The latest version of the Pacific Pines DA

included an environmental assessment report that outlined how the project is consistent with the goals of the LHSP (GeoLINK, 2008). This assessment focused on how the project would embody the existing Lennox Head ‘lifestyle’ and ‘village atmosphere’ goals and goes on to say, “the Concept Plan [the proposed development] protects and enhances the natural resources in and around the site.” (GeoLINK, 2008) At the end of the assessment you are lead to believe that this is the ideal kind of development for Lennox Head.

### **Future Plans:**

Ballina Shire Council has a major new plan in the works that could have huge impacts on the LHSP. The NSW government is requiring them to prepare a new LEP. The state is putting pressure on the council to change some of their current building rules for Lennox Head, in order to accommodate more people (Smith, Pers. Comm., 2008). These new rules would be in violation of the LHSP.

Additionally, Ballina Shire has recently begun to prepare plans regarding the sustainability of the Shire. *The People, Place, Prosperity: A Framework for a more Sustainable Ballina Shire 2025* document was adopted in 2006. It outlined the sustainability goals of the shire. It also prompted the General Manager to include a sustainability plan reference for all actions proposed by the Council. For example, the sustainability plan for the proposed alcohol free zones in Lennox Head falls under the resilient and adaptable communities goal of the Sustainability Framework (Ballina Shire Council, 2008).

### **Ways to Improve Strategic Planning in the Ballina Shire:**

There are many ways to improve the strategic planning process to better incorporate sustainability and climate change. Increased community education is often the first solution. Local environmental education occurred after the LHSP was implemented, but it has not been an

integrated effort. The Ballina Shire Urban Garden Guide was released in 2006 and outlines why it is important to consider native flora and fauna when planting your home garden. It has sections explaining water efficient gardening, alternatives to pesticides, the right native plants for your garden and noxious weeds that should be avoided. There are also plans for increased educational material at beach access points on Seven Mile Beach and for programs on how to design/remodel homes to be more sustainable (Ballina Shire Council, 2002).

Educational methods proposed by people in the planning field include carrying capacity (Bruff and Wood, 2000), environmental capacity (Rydin, 1998), environmental capital (Bruff and Wood, 2000), ecological footprint analysis (Wheeler, 2006), and demand management (Rydin, 1998). Carrying capacity and environmental capacity are closely related as they both demonstrate “the idea that there are some absolute constraints to development in a locality, beyond which one cannot go without unacceptable change occurring” (Rydin, 1998). It is considered an educational tool because it gets people to think about how their behaviors may need to change. Environmental capital involves educating people about how the environment is the base of the economy rather than something that exists outside (Bruff and Wood, 2000). It needs to be cared for and protected if human life is to continue. Ecological footprint analysis is a good educational tool because it can show just how big an impact one person or one community has. It is not a perfect tool and can get really complicated really fast, but this should not stop it from serving as at least an educational tool (Wheeler, 2006). Demand management is a way of making people aware of what they require to maintain a sufficient quality of life vs. wasteful consumerism (Rydin, 1998). Many environmental problems are caused by wasteful and unnecessary consumption (Rydin, 1998).

In addition to educational tools, existing planning strategies could be used to better address sustainability if they were made on longer time scales (Wheeler, 2006). Most plans are currently made on a ten year time scale. James Brideson, a Ballina staff member, said that if Vegetation Management Plans were going to try to effectively incorporate climate change, they would need to on time scales closer to 100 years (Brideson, Pers. Comm., 2008). Sustainability indicators and ecological footprint analysis are planning strategies that look at long term impacts but also allow users to see that small steps can lead to big changes (Wheeler, 2006). If people are being educated to think in the long term, planning with have to reflect that. In the new area of sustainability planning, old and new methods will have to be combined. Also, simple changes to existing zoning laws can encourage sustainability. Some examples are putting a limit on lot sizes, more mixture of land use (ie. residential, commercial, etc.), more mixed-use buildings, less mandated parking spaces, and a minimum setback from environmentally sensitive areas (Wheeler, 2006).

Auditing can be a powerful tool in increasing awareness about the supposed sustainability of a proposed action or plan. Bruff and Wood propose a powerful auditing system based on 29 policy directions (Bruff and Wood, 2000). This system allows all plans to be analyzed for their actual sustainable actions, instead of allowing plans to hide behind lofty goals. Development Path Analysis is a similar tool that is gaining popularity. In this auditing framework, development activities are categorized based on their impact on the environment (Wheeler, 2006).

### **Sustainability Frameworks:**

As Peter Cumming said earlier, setting sustainability as a goal is very important, but it is not enough. Sustainability must be incorporated into day-today activities and decisions. An

example of this is the new Byron Shire Draft Management Plan. Management plans are put out by Shire Councils every year and they explain the operations of the council for the next business year (Farrier at. Al. 1999). In the new Byron Shire Plan, they lay out a sustainability framework and discuss how sustainability will be considered in all decisions (Byron Shire Council, 2008). It is an effort to make sustainable thinking second nature to all councilors and council staff, so the operations of the Shire can begin to reflect their sustainability visions.

### **Discussion:**

#### **How the LHSP has been successful?:**

The interviewees gave various answers to this question. The prevailing feeling was the LHSP has been successful because of the amount of community involvement and ownership. Others felt it was successful just because it was there and influencing the amount and types of development taking place in Lennox Head.

#### **Where has it failed?:**

All of the interviewees seemed frustrated with the speed of implementation. More than five years after the implementation of the LHSP, long past the time when most of the actions should have been completed (Ballina Shire Council, 2002), most of the actions are still considered 'ongoing' with no end date in sight. New plans are being made all the time but implementation is not keeping up.

Also, the goal of ESD has remained an abstract concept. Most of the interviewees could give a definition of ESD but it was never in terms of concrete actions and goals. Sustainability must be brought down to day-to-day activities if it is to be effective.

**Environmental Protection Efforts:**

It could be argued that this is one of the areas the LHSP does best. Out of all the proposed strategic actions in the LHSP, the environmental actions have had the most progress (Strategic Plan Monitoring Committee, Nd.). Again, some of the interviewees, especially those directly involved in carrying out these actions, are disappointed with the speed of implementation, but progress is being made. Ecosystem management, protection, and restoration is doing well in the Lennox Head area. The focus must now be turned to sustainability.

**Recommendations for the Lennox Head Community:**

To improve the planning process to better incorporate sustainability and climate change, the Ballina Shire Council should start with education. Education of residents, councilors, and council staff on the science of climate change, their individual and combined impact on the environment around them, and the meaning of the term sustainability. My recommendations for the initial steps of this education process are to calculate the average individual environmental footprint of a Ballina Shire resident and then calculate the footprint of the shire as a whole. Next, determine the carrying capacity of the Ballina Shire and use this figure to inform projections of population growth. In regard to sustainability, the first step should be to perform a sustainability audit. This could take the shape of the one proposed by Bruff and Wood. My preliminary analysis of the LHSP under this framework is, it is strong on built environment and natural habitats/biodiversity actions but weak on energy and air quality actions. Energy and air quality are very relevant to sustainable development but they are not mentioned in the LHSP or following documents.

After education, the council should attempt some long-term and more holistic planning. The old methods of planning compartmentalized actions and this approach will not work for sustainability (Wheeler, 2006). For example, the LHSP is broken up into actions according to

community, environment, housing, etc. To better incorporate sustainability, we have to break down the walls between these sections and think of the whole picture for every action. Instead of making plans that last ten years, the council should be looking 25, 50, even 100 years into the future. Setting goals now for a completely sustainable Lennox Head in 2050 is the first step in making it a reality.

A useful tool to facilitate this new planning process is a sustainability framework. Ballina Shire should look at Byron Shire's new Management Plan for an example of an operational framework for sustainability. Ballina Shire started this process when they created the Sustainable Ballina 2025 document but now need to take it a step further and bring sustainability into all their operations.

According to Philippa England at Griffith University, local governments may soon become liable for their inaction on climate change (England, 2006). This would have huge legal and economic implications for small communities such as Lennox Head, so it is important to start thinking of solutions now. The LHSP does not address climate change mitigation or adaptation strategies. The council staff says they are thinking about it, but they have no idea how to proceed or make meaningful changes. Also, according to the answers given by the interviewees above, climate change has only entered their minds as possible sea level rise and beach erosion. The northern coast of NSW could experience huge changes in climate, coastline, growing seasons, and drought as a result of climate change. Work needs to start as soon as possible on implementing sustainability frameworks and climate change mitigation strategies. Problems will only be solved after we take the first step towards a solution.

**Conclusion:**

The LHSP strives to embody the concept of ESD. To do this it incorporates environmental protection, restoration, education and management. Sustainability is only briefly mentioned, but this concept comes to the forefront of later documents. Due to the wealth of planning documents put out by the Ballina Shire Council after the LHSP and attention to environmental protection and sustainability in Council practices, it would appear that the LHSP strategic planning process has had a positive impact. The LHSP has proved that the goal setting process of strategic planning can be successful and useful, especially in regard to the environment. In the future, more time and resources needs to be devoted to implementation and long-term planning.

The residents, staff and councilors of the Ballina Shire all seeming willing to learn more and take action on climate change. A step towards increased sustainability must begin with education and be followed by a reformed planning process and framework for operations. Climate change is going to have a huge impact on coastal communities and the only way to be prepared in the future is to start thinking and planning for it now.

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