

New England Sustainability Strategy

Executive Briefing



"The future is here. It's just not widely distributed yet." (William Gibson)

Introduction

Armidale Dumaresq Council have contracted a new consortium of leading professionals and organisations – the New England Sustainability Strategy Executive, nicknamed NESSiE (refer Appendix for details) – to develop a whole of community *New England Sustainability Strategy*.

The Strategy work was funded by the NSW Department of Environment and Climate Change and will address sustainability for the Region covered by the New England Strategic Alliance of Councils (NESAC).

Progressing sustainability in the New England requires building capacity and capital – social, environmental and economic. The *New England Community Sustainability Strategy* can provide the basis to strategically position the Region as a leader in sustainability, and assist in attracting people, business and investment interested in this pursuit. So too, the Strategy, by articulating priority directions and objectives, could provide the basis for negotiations with State, Federal and International bodies also working on sustainable development, including applications for funding, programs and services.

A Public Forum on Monday 22 September is the first major step in creating the Sustainability Strategy, and a strategic analysis of sustainability of the New England Region is being undertaken before the Forum to be provided as an information briefing to participants.

The major objectives for this first phase of work are establishing agreement between key stakeholders, analyse sustainability issues and opportunities, and establishing the necessary support and resources for the Strategy.

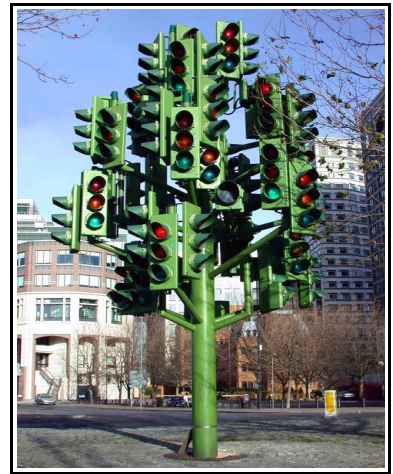
This initiative is being documented as a model for other regions to use, adapt and learn from.

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Why Here? Why Now?

The ancient story and significance of the New England area for the Anaiwan people includes it being a meeting place of higher knowledge. This story is relevant still today, for the Region is distinguished for its learning and innovation. These qualities come with a strength of vision: perhaps due to the perspective gained from the high altitude and big sky, or perhaps being equally spaced between Sydney and Brisbane affords the community space for its own uniqueness to flourish.



Sustainability is one of the major challenges facing humanity today, the New England Region included. Climate change, peak oil, global markets and population/labour/capital movements, production pressures with growing populations plus the emerging new carbon light economy are just some of the pressures and needs to be addressed by the New England Community Sustainability Strategy. While the New England benefits from being situated within an enviable natural environment of gorges, wetlands, alpine through sub-tropical habitat and some dozen national parks, challenges such as die-back and loss of soil/nutrients are significant too.

As a strong educational centre and culture, the New England has a relatively high population of young people, 30% aged 10-24 years compared with the New South Wales' average of 19%¹, creating a clear benefit (and need) to address sustainability for these stakeholders of the future.

Progressing sustainability – social, environmental and economic – requires leadership, innovation, courage and commitment, especially because this is new territory for humanity, especially considering the nature and scale of modern life and lifestyles, population sizes and complexity.

Fortunately, pioneering is something characteristic of the communities of the New England: with world class agricultural products and innovative wool-biodiversity breakthroughs, Australia's first regional University, Australia's first Hydro-Electric scheme and a willingness to set their own determined course perhaps best reflected politically in having both independent State and Federal Members of Parliament.

The New England is a place where nature, communities and economies meet. As a centre of learning and leadership it is well equipped to take leadership on sustainability.

¹ 2001 Census, Australian Bureau of Statistics

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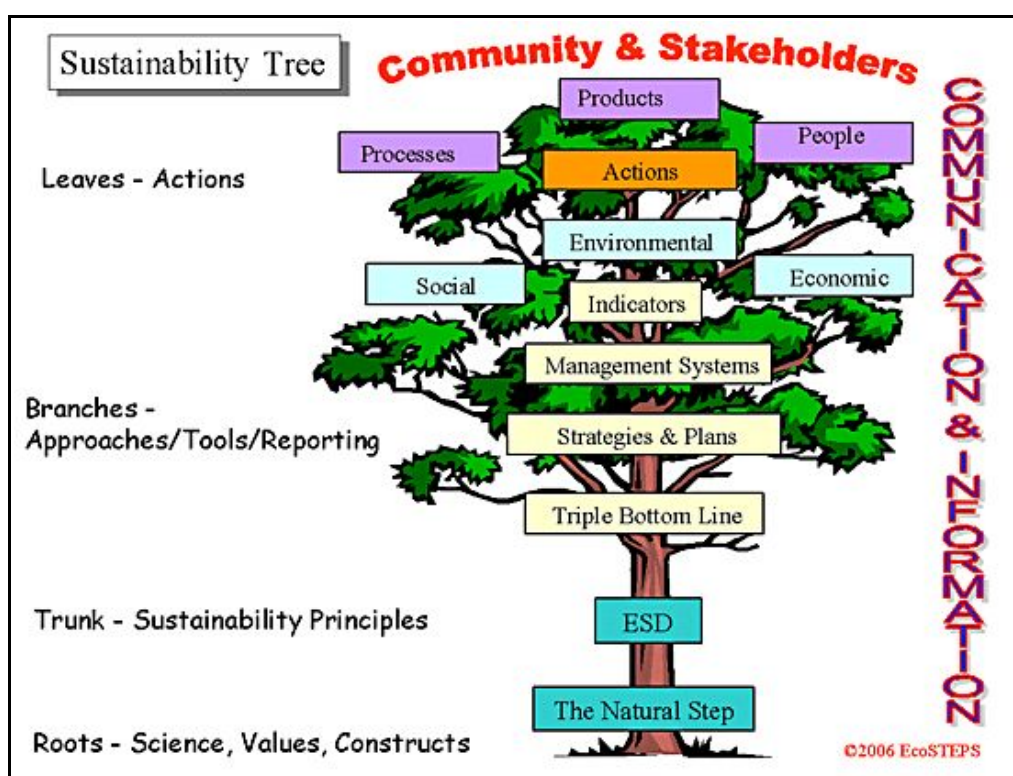
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What is Sustainability?

Sustainability means many things and it is important to create a vision of 'what sustainability means, looks and feels like for the New England Region'.

Wikipedia defines sustainability as meaning that our social, economic and environmental systems can be maintained indefinitely into the future, and the limits of these systems hold challenges to growth, and the nature of growth, in our wellbeing (social, material, emotional, spiritual and so on) than can be achieved without in some way compromising future generations and other flora and fauna.

EcoSTEPS², an Australian arm of the international consultancy The Natural Step, use a conceptual framework which links together the various dimensions of sustainability in a systems approach, drawing on on Australian and international principles of Ecologically Sustainable Development (ESD) and other well known concepts and approaches, including: UN Local Agenda 21, The Natural Step, Earth Charter, Environmental Management Systems (ISO 14001), Ecological Footprint, Natural Capitalism, Life Cycle Analysis and more.

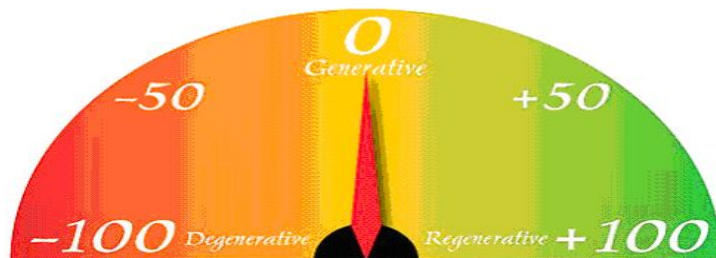


2 <http://www.ecosteps.com.au/>

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Opportunities and Challenges



Great Transition Initiative

Whether the sustainability of the New England Region is regenerative and 'in the green' or degenerative and 'in the red' is a key question for consideration, and answering it requires consideration of local and regional factors together with the national and global picture.

There are clear risks for the Region in delaying addressing the current and emerging social, environmental and economic challenges confronting sustainability, particularly by being more exposed to and buffeted by economic, social and environmental changes – be they local, national or global.

On the upside however, there is a significant opportunity for the Region to accept and act upon these challenges and instead chose to create a future that is more sustainable and in so doing become a leader and centre of excellence in sustainability. This approach would be of benefit to this community and hold real potential as an exportable knowledge base of culture, products and services which could satisfy the increasing global demand by hundreds of other rural and regional communities around the world.

This essence of this approach to sustainability is developing a regional strategy that is also of global relevance and significance.

This work is happening within a broader context of other similar and relevant strategies and projects – for example the Armidale Dumeresq Council Climate Change Mitigation Strategy, Aboriginal Land Council Land, Community and Business Plans, the newly formed Transition Armidale Group and the recent NESAC led consortium which applied for funding under the NSW Environmental Trust Urban Sustainability Program.

The *New England Region Sustainability Strategy* will integrate and enhance the capacity of the many strategies, projects, networks and organisations already working on sustainability of relevance to the Region.

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Sustainability Scorecard

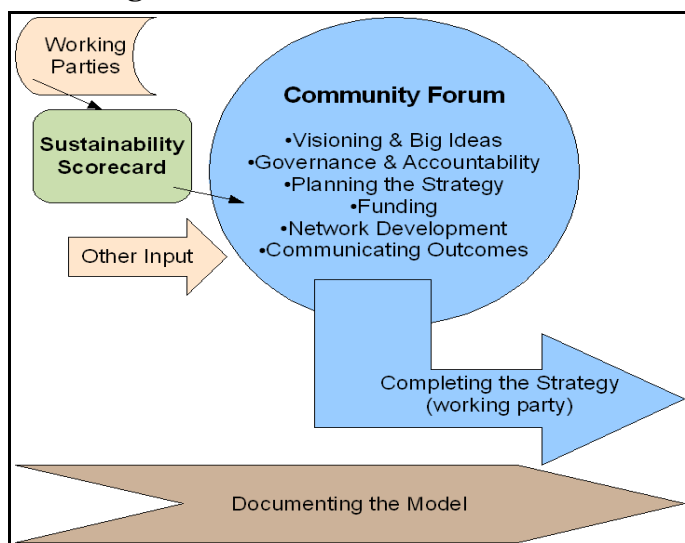
The strategic analysis of sustainability of the New England Region is being undertaken through seven specialised working parties. This analysis will consider the Region's sustainability strengths and weaknesses (past and present) together with opportunities and challenges (looking to the future – current and emerging).

The working parties will assess existing reports and data on sustainability for their specialist area of focus, consult with key experts and organisations, and consolidate this into a succinct and high level summary. In turn these specialised analyses will be consolidated into an overall Sustainability Scorecard for the New England Region, both in written and visual or mind map form.

The seven specialist working parties are: Social; Youth; Environment; Economic; Government; Indigenous and Global.

The Sustainability Scorecard will be available for Forum participants and the wider community.

Planning Process



This is a visual representation of the planning process for the development of the *New England Sustainability Strategy*.

The Community Forum during the Sustainable Living Expo '08 is the first major step of the process. While an open space process will be used to best leverage the knowledge and energy in the Forum on the day, some key themes will be explored including:

- Developing the vision for the strategy (to be facilitated using an innovative art-based visioning planning method evolved from traditional Aboriginal knowledge management practices)
- Big ideas to enhance the sustainability and capacity of the New England Region
- Governance, accountability, resources and funding

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- Creating the plan for the completion of the *New England Sustainability Strategy*, particularly next steps such as communication, network involvement and funding for work beyond the Forum
- Formation of a working party to progress this work

Throughout the entire process a recording stream will take place to document the story and essence of what is being achieved, identified, learnt and the how. This will include critical information for the completion of the *New England Sustainability Strategy*, such as key insights, information and design principles.

The next stages of the development of the *New England Sustainability Strategy* will become clear following the Public Forum. Each working party is also identifying gaps and issues for further work. Key areas of work required already identified include:

- Community cabinet sessions across the New England Region providing public opportunities for the many towns, villages and community centres which make up the Region to comment and give input into the Strategy
- Deeper analysis and development of the Sustainability Scorecards, including consolidation of existing data, research and strategic plans relevant to the Region and sustainability
- Involvement of other key stakeholder groups (such as churches and faith organisations, national and international organisations and networks) and more comprehensive inclusion of young people and schools
- Formal submission process for government, corporate and community organisations to contribute to the development of the Strategy

The objective is to complete the *New England Sustainability Strategy* to with a second Public Forum during the 2009 Sustainable Living Expo, where participants will be able to analyse and refine the penultimate version of the Strategy, which will then be finalised shortly after.

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Strengths of a New England Regional Approach

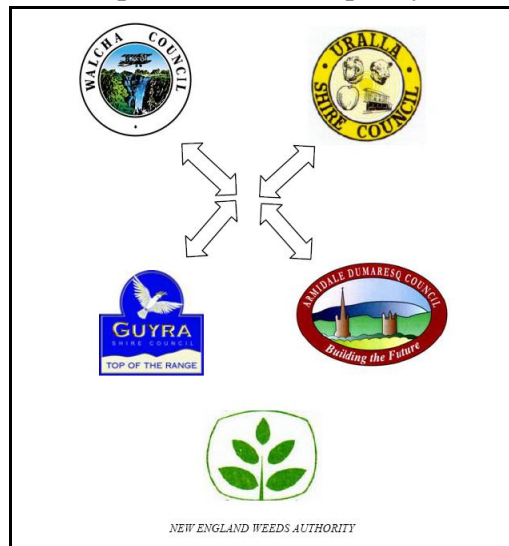
The purpose of the New England Strategic Alliance of Councils is in part to achieve a quality lifestyle that is self-sufficient and sustainable and a vision of a region with vibrant and sustainable communities where all residents have the opportunity to achieve an enhanced quality of life.

Other key stakeholders also work regionally, such as the University of New England, Southern New England Land Care and the Northern Inland Regional Development Board. Most government services, such as State and Regional Development, work regionally too.

Sustainability requires an appropriate bio-region, which the New England Region can to a much greater degree than any of its individual Council districts, to enhance adaptability. The NESAC region encompasses a diverse range of agricultural, economic and social capacities, so too environmental qualities, providing a meaningful scope for adaptability to the likely and significant environmental, social and market changes.

Funding models are more strongly aligned with regional and collaborative approaches, which is especially significant as further funding is essential to the completion of a comprehensive and effective Strategy – as well as implementing of one or more demonstration projects.

The development of a replicable regional model addressing sustainability will also be an exportable product – in Australia and elsewhere globally.



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Collaboration Partners

"Whatever you can do, or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic in it."

– Goethe

The following professionals and organisations formed the collaboration to develop the *New England Sustainability Strategy*.



Creative Edge Facilitators



Department of Premier and Cabinet

ParadigmPlay



tuckandee.com.au

Armidale Family Support Services

