



# Bushland and Biodiversity

## Action Plan



northern  
beaches  
council





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## Executive summary

Northern Beaches Council set clear Aspirations and Commitments about bushland and biodiversity in the Protect, Create, Live – Northern Beaches Environment and Climate Change Strategy 2040 (the Strategy). Council has prepared this Action Plan to identify how it will embed these strategic directions into operations, and support key stakeholders, partners and the community in taking action.

This plan provides a list of actions to be implemented by Council over the next four years to protect and enhance our natural environment. The plan will be revised every four years to retain its relevance and alignment with Council's Delivery Program and Operational Plan.



## Why a Bushland and Biodiversity Action Plan?

Biodiverse, healthy ecosystems provide the foundation for all life to thrive; they clean the air, the water and provide fertile soil. They also distribute fresh water, regulate the climate, provide pollination and pest control and reduce the impact of natural hazards.

Development, pollution and invasive species, both plants and animals, constantly increase the pressures on our local bushland and biodiversity. Climate change impacts, including increased temperatures, storms, floods, drought and bush fires, are predicted to impact our local native species and the resiliency of natural bushland.





## Committed to change

The 'Protect. Create. Live – Northern Beaches Environment and Climate Change Strategy 2040' sets out Council's long-term goals around bushland and biodiversity and a series of aspirations and commitments to help us work towards these goals.


Bushland

Our goal is to protect and enhance the extent and quality of all bushland to preserve its unique value for future generations




Biodiversity

Our goal is to protect our native plants and animals, and restore ecosystems so they are healthy, resilient and valued by our community.



The aspirations set out in the Strategy reflect where we would ideally like to be and aim to accelerate action and inspire innovation wherever possible. In pursuing Council's goals around bushland and biodiversity, we will aspire to:

- Achieve no net loss of bushland
- Maintain our local native plant and animal species, populations and communities

The Strategy also identifies a series of ambitious but achievable commitments relating to bushland and biodiversity protection.

We are committed to:

- Maximising the retention and ecological condition of bushland and key habitats
- Improving the quality of existing bushland
- Improving the connectivity of wildlife corridors
- Improving biodiversity in the urban environment
- Reducing the impact of invasive species
- Balancing bushland protection with the need for responsible bush fire management

This Action Plan provides the framework for working towards the goals, commitments and aspirations set out in the Strategy.







## Our actions so far

**Council is committed to the protection and enhancement of our bushland and biodiversity.**

- In February 2021, Council adopted the Northern Beaches Bushland and Biodiversity Policy to provide a consistent policy approach to bushland and biodiversity management across the LGA.

New biodiversity development 'guidelines' for applicants' have been prepared to support residents in designing development proposals that avoid and minimise impacts to biodiversity.



Over 650 local development applications are assessed each year.



Each year our Bushland Management Team oversee the maintenance and restoration of 1,200 hectares of bushland.



Over the past three years, prescribed burns have been undertaken within 23 hectares annually (on average) across Council's bushland reserves network.



- The Northern Beaches Bush Fire Management Policy was also adopted in February 2021. The policy sets out Council's policy approach to protect life and reduce the impact of bush fire on property, infrastructure and the environment.
- Council has developed the Northern Beaches Local Priority Weed Management Plan to support landholders to manage weeds of local priority and meet their obligations under the NSW Biosecurity Act 2015.

We maintain a network of over 66 kilometres of Asset Protection Zones to protect neighbouring properties adjoining Council's bushland reserves from bush fire.



We have distributed over 70,000 copies of Council's Bush Fire Prevention brochure annually to assist residents with preparing for the Bush Fire Danger Period.



We have finalised the establishment of Ingleside Chase Reserve as a biobank site to further contribute to the availability of local biodiversity offsets.



We inspect and where required maintain over 16 kilometres of fire trails on Council land to ensure that they are passable for firefighters in the event of a bush fire emergency.



We process and respond to over 1,000 bushland and biodiversity customer requests each year.



## Actions to 2024

We will build upon our existing achievements relating to bushland and biodiversity and work towards achieving our goals, commitments and aspirations.

### Focus Areas

- Planning and compliance
- Managing our natural areas
- Protecting threatened species and their habitats
- Reducing the impact of invasive species
- Education, engagement and collaboration





## 1. Planning and compliance

Legislative and policy mechanisms will be harnessed to ensure local bushland and biodiversity assets are protected, and bush fire risk managed. We will:

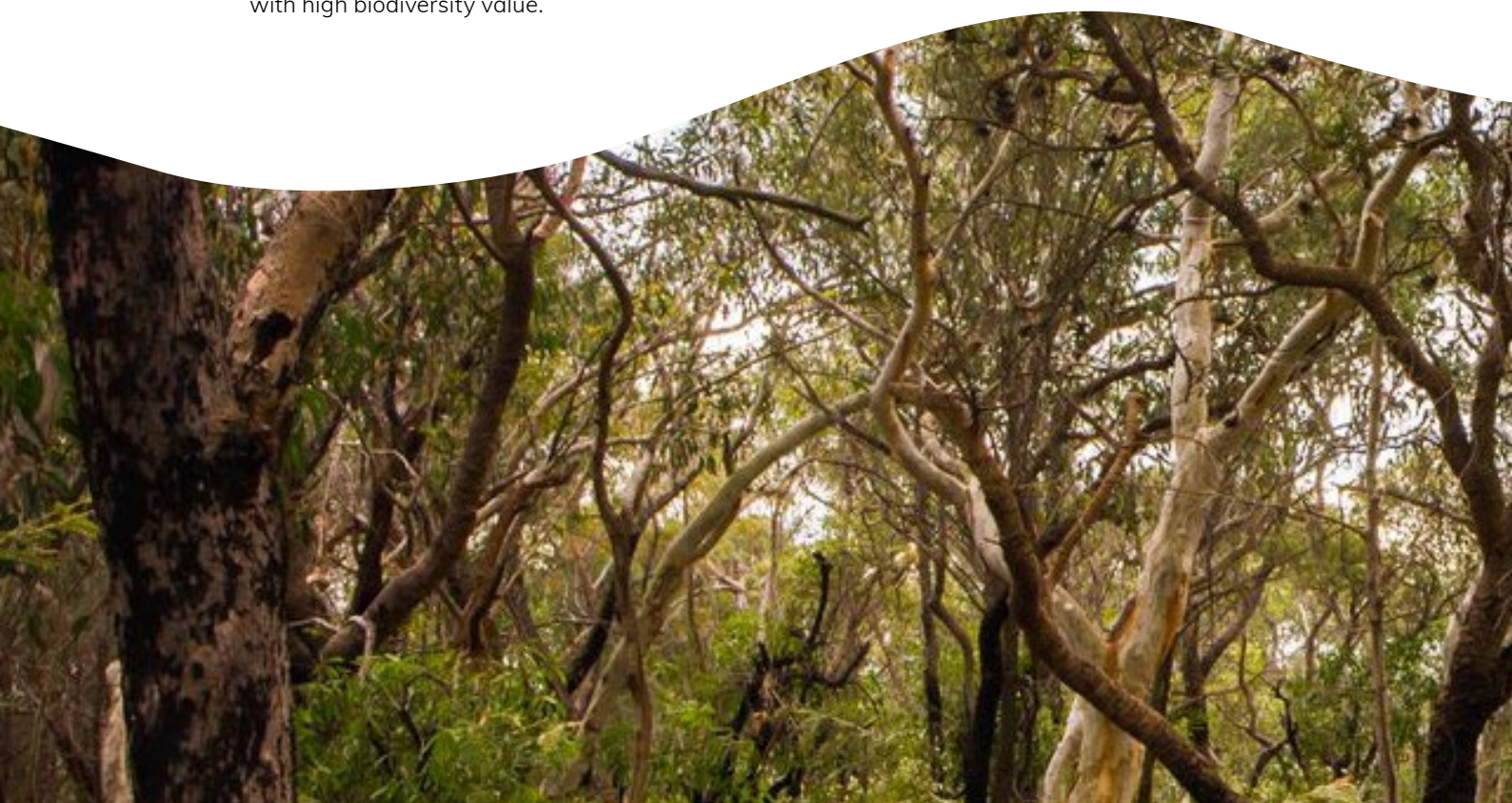
- |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>1.1</b> Update and refine existing biodiversity and bushland mapping to identify important natural assets including core habitats, biodiversity corridors, threatened ecological communities and threatened species habitat.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                 | <p><b>1.5</b> Monitor, measure and report on past, present and ongoing loss of habitat (e.g. native vegetation clearing) to guide management and investment decisions.</p>                                                                         |
| <p><b>1.2</b> Use updated biodiversity and bushland mapping to inform new local planning controls that will protect core habitats, biodiversity corridors, threatened ecological communities and threatened species habitat.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                       | <p><b>1.6</b> Continue to manage bush fire risk within Council's reserves by implementing actions following the Northern Beaches Bush Fire Risk Management Policy, and any Bush Fire Risk Management Plan and Fire Access and Fire Trail Plan.</p> |
| <p><b>1.3</b> Investigate and implement measures to increase the availability of local biodiversity offsets. This may include establishing new biodiversity stewardship sites (formerly known as biobank sites) on Council land where appropriate; incentivising landowners to protect bushland on private land; or increasing credit requirements where development offsets are outside of the Northern Beaches..</p> | <p><b>1.7</b> Reduce bush fire risk and increase resilience through effective land-use planning and building controls, supported by legislation, policy, guidance material and expert advice.</p>                                                  |
| <p><b>1.4</b> Investigate and act upon unauthorised activities that impact upon bushland and biodiversity such as illegal vegetation clearing, unauthorised recreational trails, nuisance animals, weed encroachment and other environmental damage, and support Council's Compliance team to enforce penalties as required.</p>                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |



## 2. Managing our natural areas

Council will continue to manage the 350 local bushland reserves under our care, control and management according to best practice and emerging information. We will:

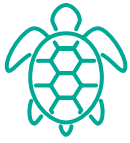
- 2.1 Prepare the Northern Beaches Bushland Plan of Management for bushland reserves under Council's management. This will include a review of the Wildlife Protection Area status of reserves following community consultation.
- 2.2 Continue to manage our bushland assets according to best practice, prioritising weed control and revegetation in areas of highest biodiversity value (such as threatened ecological communities and threatened species habitats) and in line with community preferences and interest.
- 2.3 Identify opportunities to acquire, manage, conserve and restore bushland areas in private ownership with high biodiversity value.
- 2.4 Protect important biodiversity values in Wildlife Protection Areas by addressing and managing threats such as invasive species and roaming domestic animals.
- 2.5 Identify opportunities for sustainable recreational access to bushland, such as mountain bike trails, focusing on preventing impacts to areas of high ecological value.
- 2.6 Enhance wildlife habitat within bushland reserves by installing nest boxes, water stations and other supplementary resources where required.





- 2.7 Monitor identified geotechnical hazards within Council's bushland and coastal reserves to manage risks to life and property, and develop plans and strategies to minimise or eliminate those risks.
- 2.8 Prepare updated Bush Fire Management Plans for bushland reserves under Council's management.
- 2.9 Implement strategic fuel management works, including preparing control lines, so that Council and agencies can undertake prescribed burning in Council bushland reserves promptly in preparation for bush fire seasons.
- 2.10 Incorporate fire ecology principles into bushland management and investigate the use of cultural and ecological burns to emulate pre-European fire regimes.
- 2.11 Maintain and improve our Asset Protection Zones to protect properties adjoining Council's bushland reserves from bush fire.
- 2.12 Annually inspect and, where required, maintain a network of Council fire trails to ensure that they are passable for firefighters in the event of a bush fire emergency.





### 3. Protecting threatened species and their habitats

Council is committed to the long-term conservation of local threatened species, ecological communities and their habitats. Protection of these invaluable biodiversity assets will be prioritised and considered in everything we do. We will:

- 3.1 Deliver targeted protection and restoration initiatives for key threatened flora species (e.g. Caley's Grevillea, Sunshine Wattle) and threatened ecological communities (e.g. Coastal Upland Swamp, Swamp Oak Floodplain Forest, Swamp Sclerophyll Forest, Duffy's Forest Ecological Community).
- 3.2 Continue to partner with key agencies, funding partners (e.g. Saving our Species) and other stakeholders on projects to research, monitor, protect and rehabilitate threatened species such as the Eastern Pygmy-possum, Little Penguin, Powerful Owl, and Long-nosed Bandicoot.
- 3.3 Protect existing threatened species habitat within bushland reserves, such as hollow trees, and provide additional habitat through supplementary resources such as nest boxes, artificial hollows and water stations where required.
- 3.4 Collate wildlife observations through the 'Species Sightings' mailbox and upload reviewed records to the NSW BioNet Atlas to help build a better picture of the local distribution and abundance of threatened species.
- 3.5 Continue to incorporate best practice threatened species protection, monitoring, and habitat replacement measures into our bush fire risk management and tree work programs.
- 3.6 Work with landholders and Council asset managers to value, manage and conserve key habitats.
- 3.7 Work with the RFS and NSW Fire and Rescue to ensure environmental assessments and potential impacts on flora and fauna are considered in burn plans, and to consider and implement ecological burns where appropriate.









#### 4. Reducing the impact of invasive species

We will continue our efforts to reduce the ecological impacts of invasive species. Key actions:

- 4.1 Continue to undertake integrated pest animal control across the LGA, including partnering with NSW agencies and other stakeholders on proactive fox, cat and rabbit control.
- 4.2 Implement and regularly update the Northern Beaches Local Priority Weed Plan.
- 4.3 Continue to educate and engage with landholders and businesses on their responsibilities under the NSW Biosecurity Act 2015 and Regulation 2017.
- 4.4 Prioritise invasive plant control within bushland reserves, particularly where weeds threaten key biodiversity assets.
- 4.5 Investigate and implement innovative invasive species control initiatives such as biocontrol (e.g. Trad leaf-smut fungus) and new survey techniques (e.g. drone and detection dog trials).
- 4.6 Identify and respond to emerging biosecurity threats such as Bell Miners, Sticky Nightshade and Giant Devil's Fig.







## 5. Education, engagement and collaboration

We will work within our sphere of influence to empower the community and support key stakeholders in protecting our local bushland and biodiversity assets. Key actions:

- 5.1 Support residents to enhance urban biodiversity through the Backyard Habitat Program and new initiatives such as Water for Wildlife and other citizen science programs.
- 5.2 Continue to deliver services such as Council's community nurseries and the 'Wildflowers on the Beaches' program to promote and enhance urban biodiversity.
- 5.3 Continue to work with residents and lead agencies (DPIE, NPWS) to address human-wildlife conflict in urban areas. This will include implementing and reviewing our Flying-fox Management Plans and support for targeted research projects where appropriate.
- 5.4 Reduce the impact of domestic animals on wildlife by expanding existing initiatives that encourage responsible pet ownership. This will include publication of updated policies, educational materials, engagement at expos and field days and advocating for legislative change.
- 5.5 Work with the Northern Beaches Bush Fire Management Committee and our partners and neighbours to ensure the community understands bush fire threat. This includes facilitating community engagement in bush fire prone areas so that responsibility for bush fire management is acknowledged and appropriately shared by government, agencies, industry and individuals taking individual and combined actions.

## Measuring, monitoring and reporting

We will measure, monitor and report on what we are doing, to ensure we are always tracking towards the goals, aspirations and commitments in the 'Protect. Create. Live – Environment and Climate Change Strategy 2040. We will:

- Monitor, measure and report on ongoing loss of habitat (e.g. native vegetation clearing) to guide management and investment decisions.
- Map and monitor bushland areas under active management by Council and track any improvements or declines in condition and extent.
- Track the number of threatened species within the LGA and, where required, implement new measures to halt any declines.
- Monitor and report on the number of trees planted on public land each year.
- Track and report publicly on bush fire management activities undertaken within our reserves.

