

*Draft Manning Valley Local Strategy*

27 May 2016



### Issue History

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**Cover image - Aerial looking towards Taree**

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# 1. Introduction

The Manning Valley has much to offer; the coast, forested landscapes, fertile farmland and mountain backdrops. Made up of towns, villages and rural communities - every lifestyle is catered for. We need to plan to keep this diversity, to protect what we love about the Manning Valley, but also facilitate growth to enable sustainable change to occur.

A local strategy is the blue-print for how growth can be managed in the Manning Valley, consistent with the regions and local goals. The regions goals are determined by the State Government in the *North Coast Regional Plan* (spanning from Tweed Heads to the Manning Valley). We are also guided by the *Hunter Regional Plan* (spanning from Forster to Swansea and west past Scone) given our strong ties with the Hunter Valley. Our local goals are set in the *Manning Valley Community Plan 2010-2030*.

Once our planning priorities are set in the local strategy, we need to align Council's planning documents to achieve that vision. The key planning documents are the *Greater Taree Local Environmental Plan 2010* (referred to as LEP 2010) and the *Greater Taree Development Control Plan 2010* (referred to as DCP 2010). The delivery of key infrastructure, tourism, open space and community facilities also needs to align with the local strategy to ensure that the future needs of the community are met.

## 1.1 What planning has been done?

The Manning Valley has undergone a transformation over the last 20 years. Since the late 1990s, plans were put in place to accommodate the high growth of our coastal towns. Plans included:

- the *Harrington Development Strategy 1998* laid the foundations for Harrington Waters which has seen the population grow by over 1,300 people, with a new shopping centre and facilities to meet the needs of residents
- the *Hallidays Point Development Strategy 2000* promoted the four villages of Black Head, Red Head, Diamond Beach and Tallwoods, separated by green corridors, which is seen on-the-ground today. Since 1996 the population has tripled, increasing by over 2,100 people
- the *Old Bar Development Strategy 2003* has taken longer to come to fruition, but has already achieved a population increase of over 1,500 people since 2001. An additional 2,500 lots are still planned for Old Bar along with a new shopping centre and a network of parks and paths.

Inland, a number of important plans were released which include:

- the FIGTREES on the Manning master plan was released in 2010, which was aimed at activating important riverfront land in Taree. The plan allows 500 residential units, an open space network along the riverbank, a marina, mixed use development to incorporate cafes, restaurants, shops, offices and motels/hotels. It is an exciting opportunity to live close to the river and travel along a foreshore path to the Taree CBD

- the new town of Brimbin was rezoned in 2015, to house 22,000 new residents and provide jobs in over 100ha of employment lands and a new town centre. The next stage will see the creation of a master plan for the future communities of Brimbin.

## 1.2 What needs to be done?

### The local economy

The local economy is driven by employment. Without work and education opportunities, young people and families have moved from the Manning Valley. While there has been an increase in health and tourism jobs there have been significant reductions in manufacturing and agricultural jobs, with a net decline overall. We need to look at ways to offer more employment opportunities. Targeting employment lands close to the Pacific Highway, identifying catalyst sites like the Manning Rural Referral Hospital, exploring tourism and rural opportunities will all improve our local economy.

### Housing and lifestyle choices

Our population is changing. By 2036 well over  $\frac{1}{3}$  of our population will be over the age of 60 and around  $\frac{2}{3}$  of our households will be couple-only or single-person. Different styles of housing will be needed in response to these changes. Currently only 16% of our housing is made up of townhouses, units and retirement housing which are all in high demand. The state goal is for multi-unit housing to represent 40% of all new housing.

The diverse range of lifestyles on offer attracts people to live and stay in the Manning Valley. We need to maintain these choices so that people can live at our beautiful beaches, in our country towns or villages, in rural settings or nestled amongst the mountains and valleys.

### The natural environment

The natural environment is one of our greatest assets. While the Environmental Levy continues to target water quality, coastal erosion and bushland regeneration, more information on biodiversity is needed. Identifying important habitats and their connections, will guide future development by enabling well-informed decisions. It will also create a framework for targeting future investment to restore important habitats.

### Rural lands

Historically rural industries like dairies, beef, poultry and timber production have been the backbone of the Manning Valley. We need to consider the needs of these industries when exploring opportunities for our rural lands while also catering for a growing rural lifestyle trend which has begun to fragment the landscape and replace these industries in more recent times. As a consequence, planning for rural lands needs to consider the potential conflict between farming and lifestyle use, as well as maintaining flexibility so that diversity in rural land uses is able to be encouraged.

## 1.3 The vision

*“We will capitalise on the diversity and opportunities provided by our natural environment, rural lands and proximity to major urban centres (Sydney/Newcastle), to build a robust regional economy and provide a range of lifestyle choices across the Manning Valley that are celebrated by a vibrant and diverse community.”*

To achieve this vision, four goals have been set.

<i>GOAL 1: Grow our local economy</i>	The Manning Valley's proximity to growing markets in Sydney, the Hunter Valley and Port Macquarie is an opportunity to be captured. Economic precincts will offer accessible and affordable options for new businesses. Our natural setting will continue to attract visitors, supported by our vibrant town centres
<i>GOAL 2: Encourage a range of housing and lifestyle choices</i>	The Manning Valley will have an array of lifestyle choices in country towns, coastal and rural settings. Communities will have access to a range of housing opportunities and jobs. Access to services, shops, recreation, entertainment and cultural activities will deliver quality living
<i>GOAL 3: Protect and connect natural environments</i>	The Manning Valley's natural environments will continue to attract residents and visitors alike. Important vegetation and habitat connections are to be protected and enhanced to ensure they are available for future generations to enjoy
<i>GOAL 4: Explore opportunities to optimise the use of rural lands</i>	The dairy, beef and poultry farmers of the Manning Valley will continue to offer quality produce. A range of rural zones and lot sizes will be introduced to provide more flexibility for a variety of rural pursuits as well as recognising the demand for rural lifestyle opportunities.

A number of directions explore how these goals can be met, with priorities assigned accordingly. Three levels of priority have been applied in order to implement the strategy over a four year period:

- Priority: High**

  - changes to LEP 2010 and DCP 2010 in place by September 2017
  - high level of ongoing facilitation
  - key infrastructure prioritised
  
- Priority: Medium**

  - changes included in a comprehensive review of the LEP 2010 and DCP 2010 to be in place by December 2018
  - facilitation as required
  - seek funding for key infrastructure
  
- Priority: Low**

  - update LEP 2010 and DCP 2010 as site specific precinct plans are undertaken between December 2018 and June 2020
  - facilitation as required
  - infrastructure achieved through infrastructure contribution plans (Section 94 plans)

## 2. Grow our local economy (GOAL 1)





The Manning Valley offers employment across a diverse range of industries. Traditional sectors such as manufacturing and agriculture remain important, however, health and tourism jobs are driving employment growth at present. As our population ages the demand for health services will continue to increase. Our natural setting and close proximity to Sydney is likely to drive future tourism growth, facilitating employment in food services, accommodation and retail.

At present the average annual spend on overnight and domestic daytrip tourism is \$159M and the number of visitors is over 699,000 per year. **Figure 1** below provides details on visitors to the Manning Valley. Future planning for tourist facilities and services is required to continue to grow our tourism sector from a place to visit families and friends to a stand-alone destination.



**Figure 1 - Manning Valley Visitor Statistics**

Manufacturing and niche agricultural sectors also have the potential to establish and grow as the cost of land in major metropolitan markets continues to increase, forcing businesses to relocate elsewhere. Our proximity to Sydney and the Hunter Valley, combined with affordable land, access to good quality services (the NBN, water) and an available labour force, are all strong attractors for business. The Manning Valley lifestyle and climate are an added bonus.

Over 56ha of vacant employment land is available for prospective businesses to relocate to the Manning Valley. Planning is underway for an additional 110ha at Brimbin and 74ha at the Northern Gateway Transport Hub.

### **Direction 1.1 Establish strong economic precincts**

To plan for economic growth we need to ensure employment lands are located and serviced appropriately to meet future business needs and trends. These include:

- reliance on road freight for manufacturing. Today a key locational factor for manufacturing is good access to the Pacific Highway
- traditional industrial estates located close to town centres and residents are being transitioned into business parks; revitalised with commercial and 'cleaner' activities
- we are shopping more frequently and expecting a range of experiences. Main streets have more of an entertainment focus; they are a place to meet friends, have a coffee and browse the shops; supported by residents living nearby in units
- offices are more mobile. With today's technology and access to the NBN, people can work from home or hire an office space by the hour

- hospitals are a drawcard for medical and support services. The benefits of co-locating are significant, resulting in major transformations of activities around hospitals
- we are travelling more for sporting and cultural events. Major hockey tournaments, rowing regattas, powerboat events, triathlons and music festivals contribute millions of dollars into local economies
- growth in multi-purpose or co-located activities rather than a sole purpose activity. Greater synergies are created from grouping like uses together. This is the basis of precinct planning

Seven key economic precincts are proposed to encourage further growth and prosperity across the Manning Valley. These precincts are listed below:

- Northern Gateway
- Taree Medical
- Manning River Drive
- Muldoon Street
- Sporting / Cultural
- Taree Regional Airport
- Taree Central Business

Some of these precincts benefit from a core economic driver such as the Manning Rural Referral Hospital or the Taree Regional Airport while others have a locational advantage such as that enjoyed by the Northern Gateway and Manning River Drive. Where these drivers do not exist it is intended to improve opportunities by encouraging new uses that match the demands of the business community.

Importantly, there will be a specific focus on enhancing Taree as the regional centre for the lower Mid North Coast, with the central business district (CBD) offering a range of retail and commercial services for Manning Valley residents. Everyday and specialised shopping will be catered for, along with a full range of government service providers.

### 1.1.1 Northern Gateway Transport Precinct

#### Priority: High

Planning for this precinct is well underway. **Map 1** shows the extent of the precinct. The catalyst for this transport hub was recognition that the site is four hours driving time from Sydney, which is approximately a third of the trip for road freight between Sydney and Brisbane. This driving time allows a maximum eight hour round trip which helps to reduce driver fatigue and increases opportunities for drivers to live in the Manning Valley. With another hub located around Grafton, the road freight transport network between Sydney and Brisbane would be enhanced and safety improved on the Pacific Highway.

Over time, this hub can be connected to air transport related industries from the adjoining Taree Regional Airport. Expected uses include freight transport facilities, truck depots, transport depots, warehouse or distribution centres and industries that are largely reliant on freight transport.

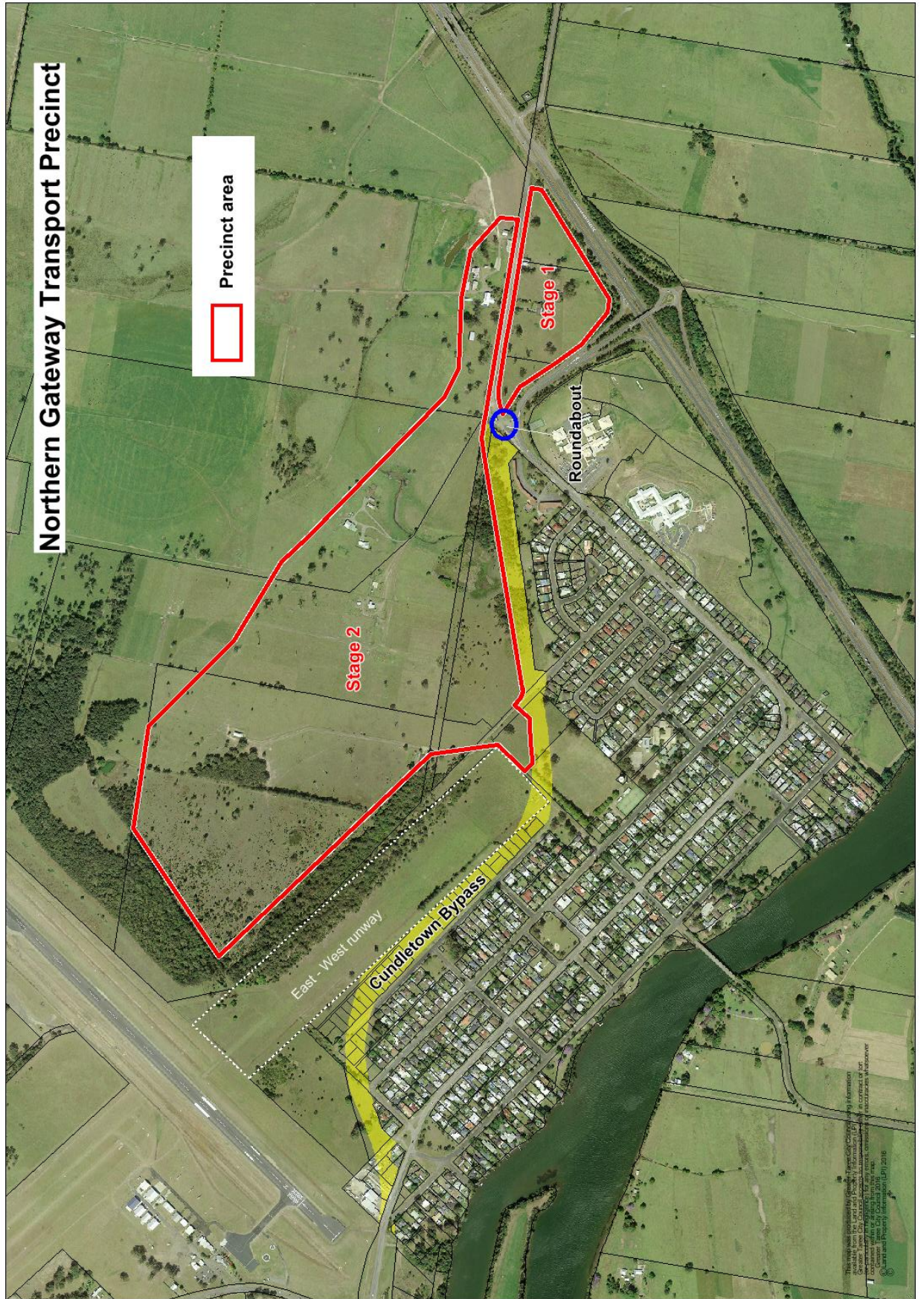
Stage 1 involves the establishment of Jim Pearson Transport and it is expected that the transport depot will be operational in 2017 (example of a depot is shown in **Figure 2**). It is estimated that Stage 1 will contribute \$42 million into the regional economy and remove 700 truck movements from local streets each week.



**Figure 2 - Jim Pearson Transport depot**

Planning for Stage 2 of the precinct has commenced with the preparation of detailed environmental studies and is likely to be completed by late 2017. It is estimated that once Stage 2 of the Northern Gateway Transport Hub is complete it will add a further \$200 million into the regional economy and create an additional 119 jobs.

A key infrastructure requirement is the establishment of the Princes Street and Emerton Close roundabout in Cundletown. Funding options for this infrastructure are currently being explored.



Map 1 - Northern Gateway Transport Precinct

### 1.1.2 Taree Medical Precinct

**Priority: High**

Hospitals are historically a drawcard for medical and specialist services including surgeries, imagery, chemists, accommodation and educational facilities. This is evident around the Manning Rural Referral Hospital depicted in **Figure 3**.

The health sector is a growth employer in the Manning Valley, providing an additional 551 jobs from 2006 to 2011. **Map 2** shows the extent of a proposed medical precinct and the location of existing medical facilities.

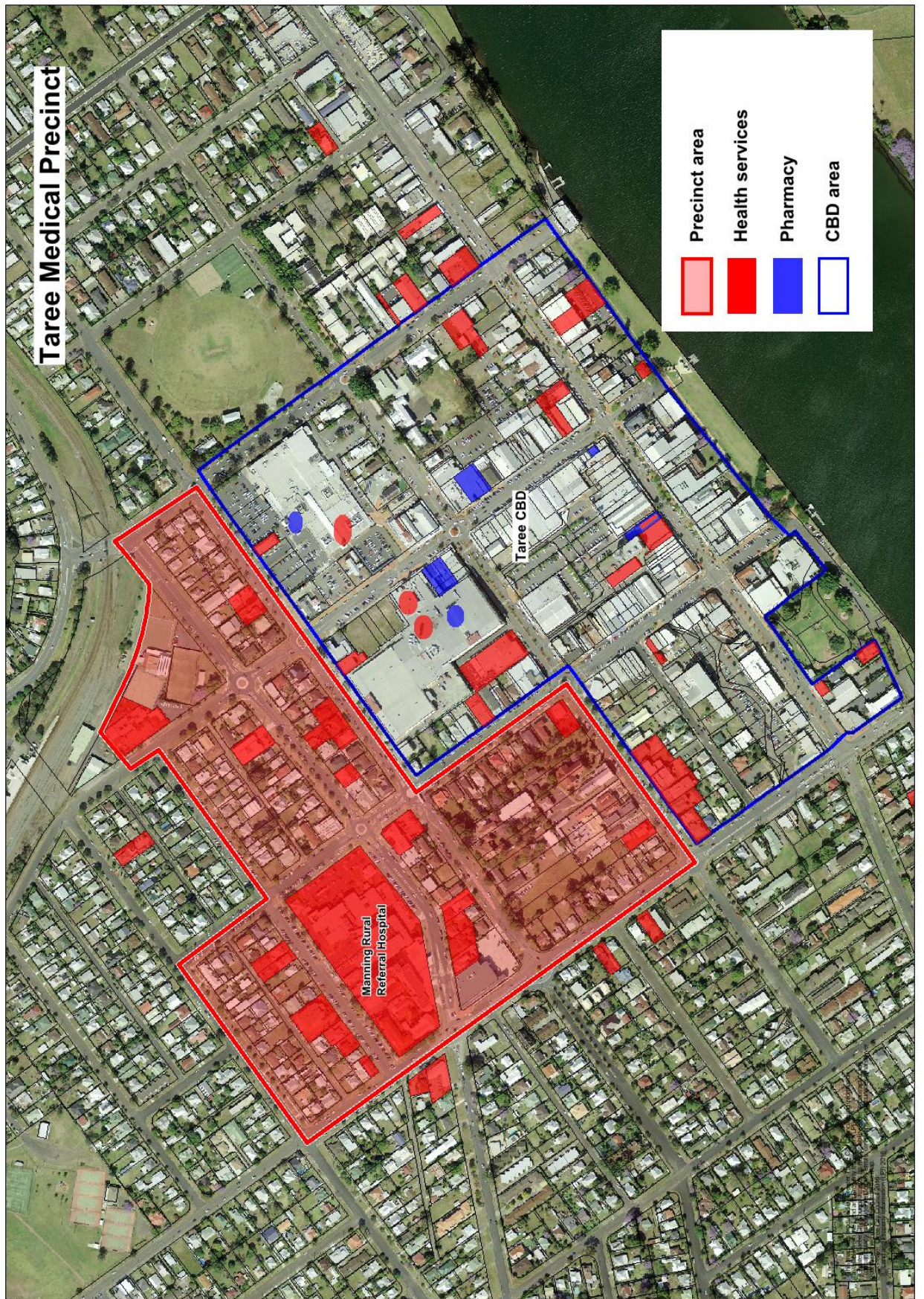


**Figure 3 - Manning Rural Referral Hospital Taree**

Land around the hospital is currently included in the R1 General Residential zone, which restricts uses and the size of any new building to that of a house. Opportunities are required in this precinct for:

- medical centres that accommodate a range of professions - specialists, physiotherapy, radiology, community health, dental, pharmacies, counselling and pathology centres
- educational facilities like the University of Newcastle's Department of Rural Health in High Street, which facilitates student placements in the hospital
- accommodation for nurses/doctors training in the hospital and for patients/families needing to be nearby the hospital
- cafes that can offer a place to eat outside the hospital for both staff and visitors

Future planning controls for this precinct will accommodate this mix of uses, offer a built form up to four storeys and ensure adequate parking is provided on-site. Links to the Taree central business district (CBD) will be improved in terms of footpaths and lighting. In the long term, the High and Commerce Street intersection will be improved.



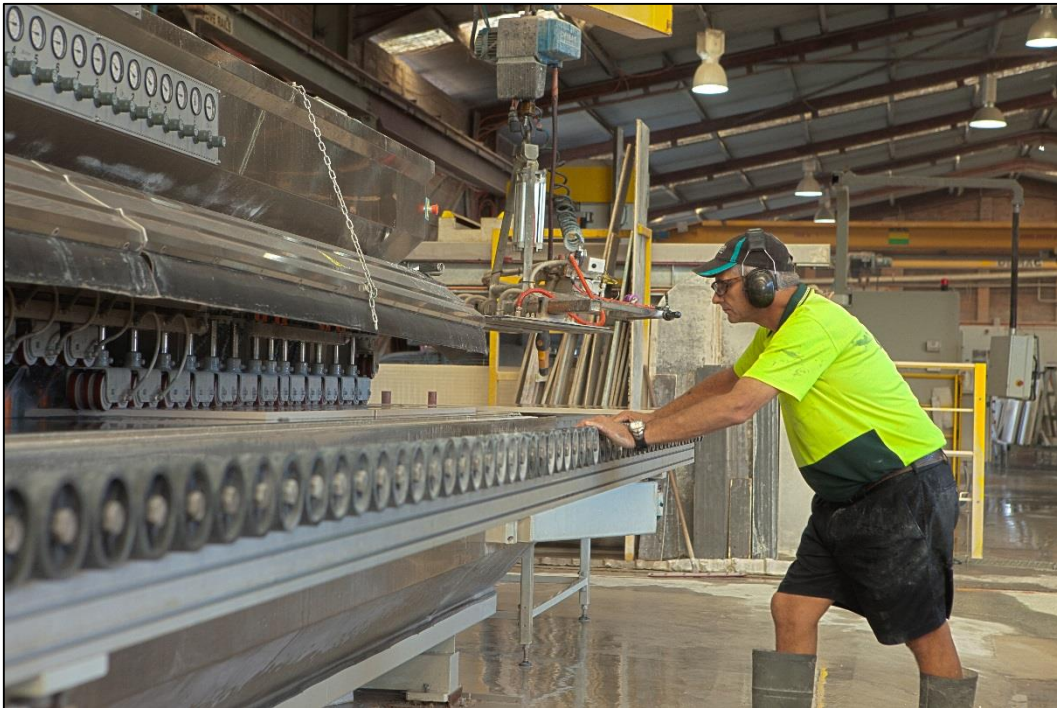
Map 2 - Taree Medical Precinct

### 1.1.3 Manning River Drive Precinct

**Priority: High**

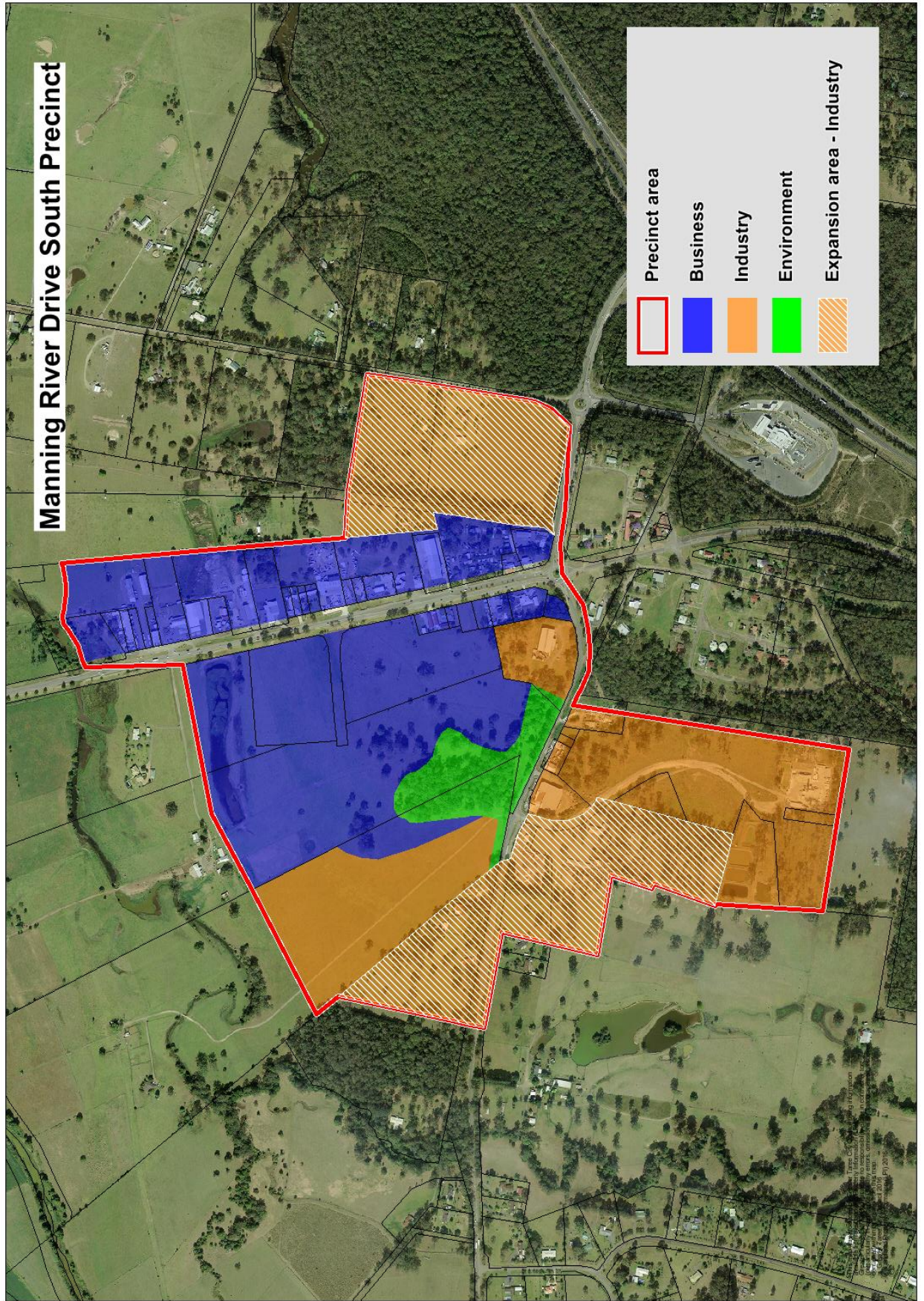
While the Northern Gateway Transport Precinct focusses on transport uses, this southern precinct will provide a commercial and industrial hub. It offers good access to the Pacific Highway and over 40ha of flood free land already zoned for development with great exposure to passing traffic (over 18,000 vehicles per day).

This precinct (refer to **Map 3**) is transforming into a desired location for bulky goods from building supplies to tractors and sheds, industrial uses and vehicle sales. Future planning controls will encourage these uses and ensure this important gateway into Taree is improved (e.g. landscaping, built form, road network, drainage). Edstein Creative Stone is an established industry located in the precinct, with the manufacturing plant shown in **Figure 4**.



**Figure 4 - Manufacturing at Edstein Creative Stone**

Currently, the effectiveness of this precinct is limited by the array of planning controls, with three different employment zones applying over the area. Consolidation of planning controls will ensure that the precinct develops in an orderly manner and infrastructure is provided when needed. Gateway landscaping and improvements will improve the look of this main entry into Taree.



Map 3 - Manning River Drive South Precinct



#### 1.1.4 Muldoon Street Precinct

**Priority: Medium**

Given its proximity to the Taree CBD and easy access for customers, this precinct will support and service Taree with uses such as bulky goods, call centres, training centres and offices, while maintaining large employment generating businesses (Steber International, Valley Industries, Eggin's Comfort Coaches). An example of a vessel manufactured by Steber International is shown in **Figure 5**.

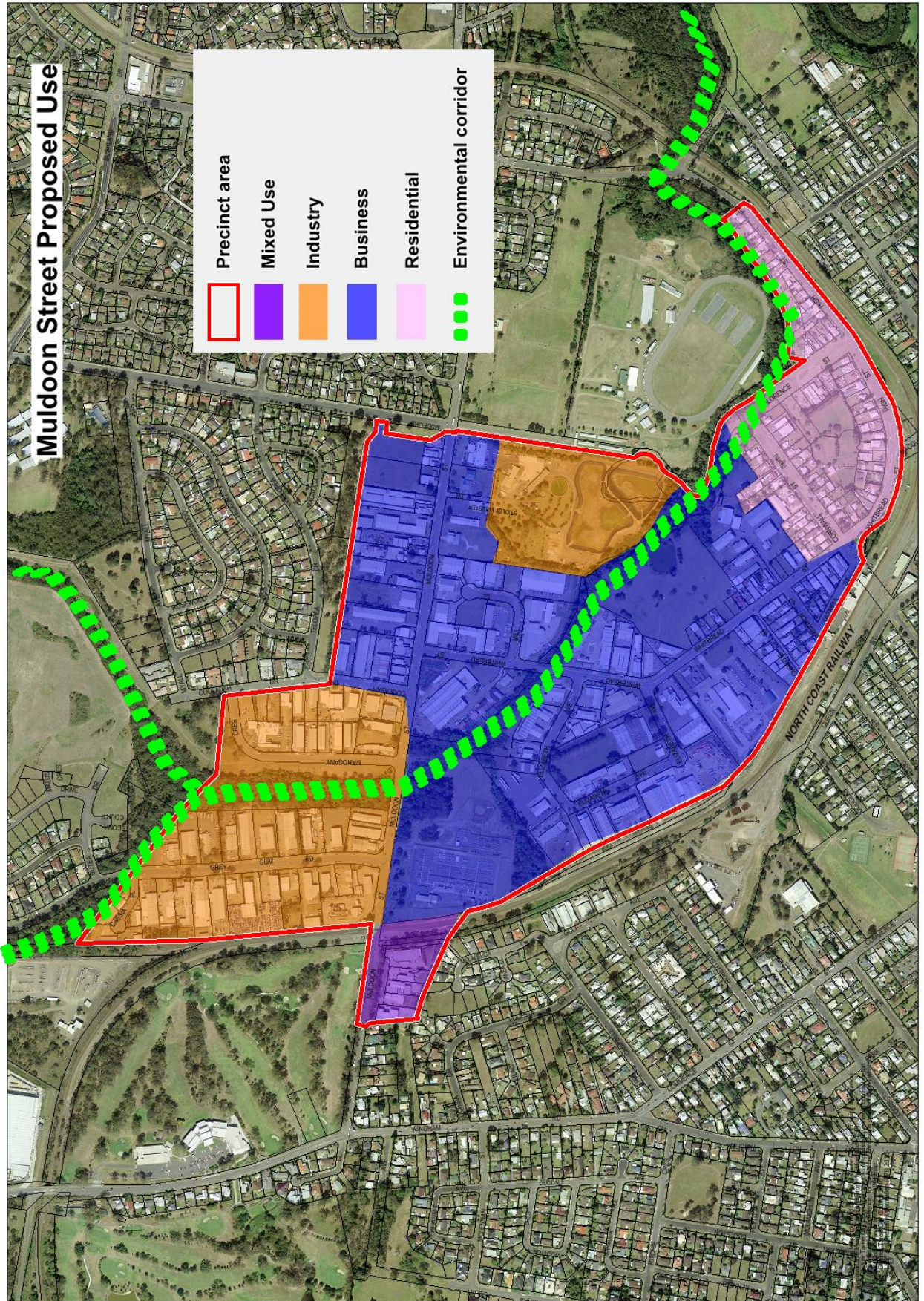


**Figure 5 - Motor vessel manufactured by Steber International**

Once the industrial hub of Taree, this precinct is in transition offering service and support businesses, while remaining home to over 70 families. Based on the existing uses within the precinct, three specific landuse categories have been identified and are shown in **Map 4**. These categories are

- industry - north of Muldoon Street (fronting Grey Gum Road, Mahogany Crescent and Coolabah Drive). The lots are large and goods are being produced and assembled on-site. MidCoast Water next to the showground is an important facility for water/sewerage treatment in Taree
- business - generally fronting Muldoon and Whitbread Street and Elizabeth Avenue. They provide a range of services for Taree including a pet barn, work clothing, carpet, rural produce, lighting, plumbing, furniture stores and timber supplies
- residential - fronting High and Florence Street. People have continued to live in this area since it was included in an industrial zone in the 1990s. This transition to industrial uses has not proceeded given the small lot size and flooding constraints.

Future planning controls for this precinct will recognise and encourage options for business diversity within these landuse categories uses by ensuring there is flexibility to match the desired outcomes.



Map 4 - Proposed Uses in Muldoon Street Precinct

### 1.1.5 Sporting/cultural Precinct

**Priority: Medium**

Taree Recreation Grounds is home to many of the sports played in the Manning Valley. Adjoining the grounds, the Manning Aquatic Leisure Centre (shown in **Figure 6**) and the Manning Entertainment Centre are hubs of activity. Currently each activity operates in isolation. Significant gains can be made by sharing resources to build upon this precinct. Multi-purpose facilities and an outdoor sporting stadium will be planned as a means to attract more sporting events to the Manning Valley.

A key driver in this precinct is the redevelopment of the Manning Entertainment Centre into an iconic and contemporary multifunctional Cultural facility that enhances the region by attracting conferences and cultural events and provides an expanded opportunities for community cultural expression and cultural enterprise.

Planning in this precinct should focus on excellence in design, construction and sustainable operation. Developing a master plan for this precinct will provide clear direction on how this can be achieved.



**Figure 6 - Manning Aquatic Leisure Centre outdoor swimming pool**

### 1.1.6 Taree Regional Airport Precinct

**Priority: Medium**

Neighbouring airports are under pressure to expand with continued growth in national flights. This pushes smaller operators, support services and general aviation out of larger airports and in so doing creates the potential for the development of niche aviation industries within the precinct. Taree Airport can offer a point of difference for small operators and general aviation with:

- easy access to flight time, given less air traffic
- a cheaper alternative to neighbouring airports
- serviced lots in the Taree Aviation Business Park that are ready for development

This precinct (refer to **Map 5**) will identify land that has the potential to support the airport in terms of:

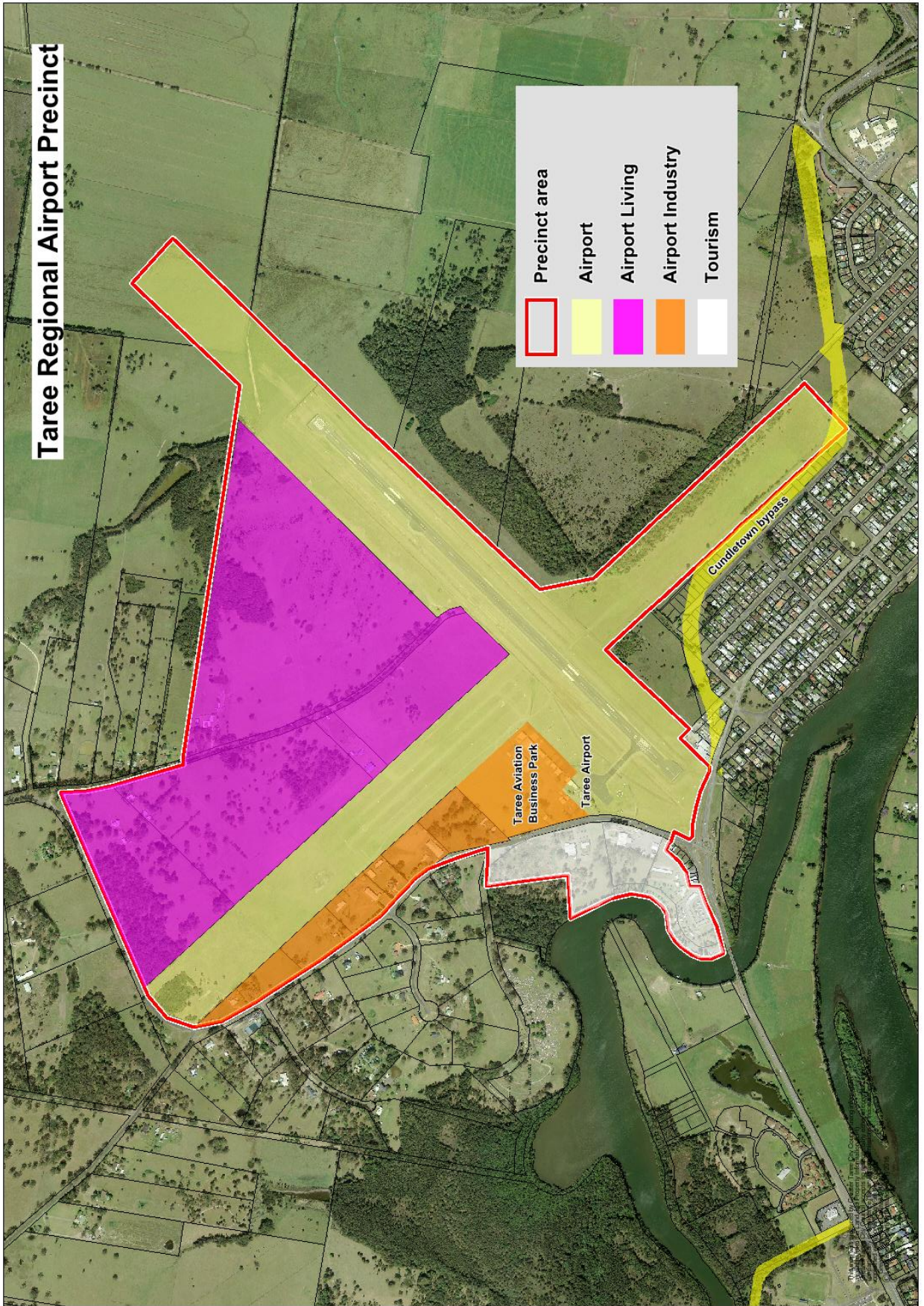
- An expanded Aviation Business Park – providing increased opportunities for general aviation being pushed out of larger centres
- Airport living – rural lots to cater for people to live/fly. Each lot would back onto the airport and provide access for planes stored on each property (as shown in **Figure 7** and **Figure 8**). This would cater for people whose living is made from flying planes or flying enthusiasts.
- Airport industry – catering for industries that have a direct nexus with the airport (e.g. aviation industries)
- Tourism – building upon the existing Dawson River Caravan Park and Airport Tavern by encouraging tourist facilities on the bank of the Dawson River. This location offers a great outlook, access to the river and is close to both the airport and Taree town centre.



**Figure 7 - An example of airport living**



**Figure 8 - An example of airport living**



Map 5 - Taree Regional Airport Precinct

### 1.1.7 Taree Central Business Precinct

**Priority: High**

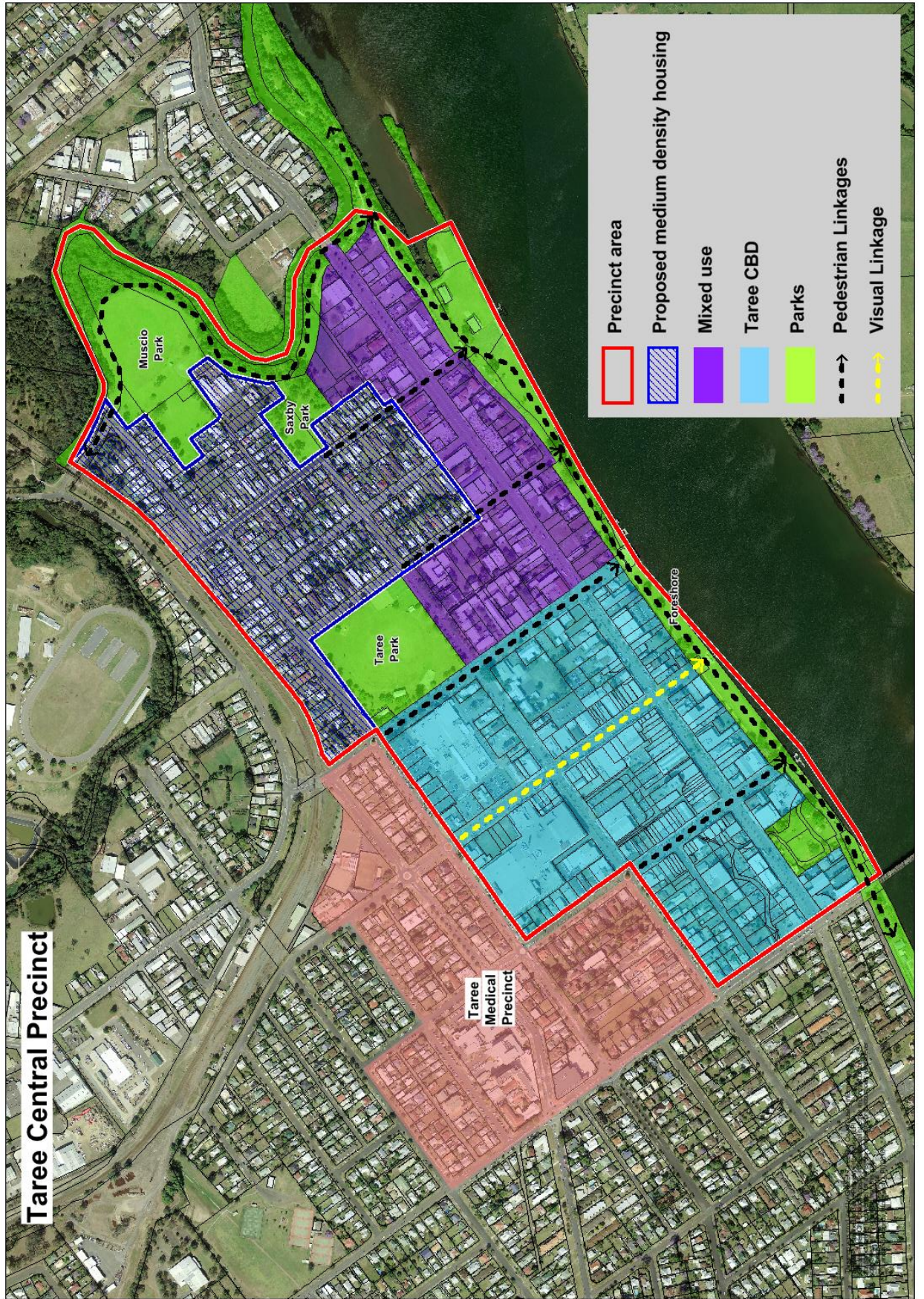
The Taree Central Business precinct includes the central business district (CBD), CBD living opportunities (medium density housing), mixed use along Victoria Street and important linkages as shown on **Map 6**.

Land in the Taree CBD will be better utilised to retain a compact and walkable centre, offering all of our shopping needs in one place. Future planning controls will enable development to go up rather than spreading out by:

- increasing height limits and removing floor space ratio controls. A six storey height limit will feasibly enable commercial uses on lower levels and residential above. Six storeys will delineate the more intense commercial activities along Victoria Street and the foreshore. Specific requirements for the treatment of the foreshore will address overshadowing and overlooking. This height will be lowered to five storeys where the Taree Central and Manning Mall are located given their increased elevation
- encouraging re-development of public car parks, parking within Manning Mall, vacant land and undeveloped sites. Currently 22% of the CBD could be developed more intensely (as evident in **Figure 9**).



**Figure 9 - Manning Mall development intensity**



Map 6 - Taree Central Precinct

Future development that fronts the foreshore will be required to activate this frontage by providing direct access. Uses that service or offer views of the foreshore such as pop up cafes will be encouraged along with high quality built form.

Town centres thrive when supported by CBD living. More units both in and neighbouring the CBD will provide more housing in walking distance to services, shops, transport and health facilities. CBD living will be accommodated in both the commercial core and extending north-east towards Browns Creek through the use of a medium density zone. Supporting uses for the residents (e.g. coffee shops or newsagents) may be co-located with either the foreshore or Taree Park. An urban design analysis will be undertaken to identify design solutions that achieve good quality built form, connectivity, safety and access to open spaces.

A catalyst site for CBD living is the land fronting the foreshore between Macquarie Street and Florence Street. Part of this site is in the B4 Mixed Use zone which is ready to be developed.

The mixed use along Victoria Street provides a support function for the Taree CBD. It is a mixture of motels, car sales yards, Taree High School and food outlets; mainly developed when the Pacific Highway passed through Taree. Current planning controls will be reviewed to ensure sites are fully utilised and residential units are permitted. It is expected that building heights will range from six storeys near the CBD down to four storeys towards Browns Creek. Any commercial expansion beyond the CBD will be in this mixed use area.

Important linkages also need to be enhanced in this precinct:

- Manning Street is an important link between the stand-alone shopping centres (Manning Mall and Taree Central) and Victoria Street. Streetscape improvements to widen the footpath, landscape and include street furniture will visually connect the centres to Victoria Street through to the foreshore (shown in **Figure 10**). In particular:
  - this important gateway to the river needs to open up and invite people to the foreshore
  - wider footpaths will encourage use by shop owners to make the street more vibrant (e.g. outdoor dining)
  - between Wynter and Albert Streets improvements to the bus stops and pedestrian crossings will improve pedestrian movement
- the foreshore provides direct access to the Manning River. Future path extensions to Cundletown will cater for both the casual walker, fitness enthusiast and pedestrian/cycle commuters to school and work. The foreshore will provide playground facilities, coffee shops and access onto the river for people living in the CBD
- Taree Park can offer a 'town green' for future residents - a central park surrounded by shops, a school and residential units (four storeys).
- Saxby Park will provide an extended backyard for nearby residents. The Browns Creek pathway will provide a path that connects to the foreshore for public to exercise or walk to work
- street connections to the foreshore will be enhanced with paths, landscaping and lighting to encourage people to the foreshore and Manning River

Successful CBD living examples are prominent in regional towns including Port Macquarie, Forster and Ballina.





Figure 10 - Street furnishings in Taree

## Direction 1.2 Provide diverse tourist experiences

Tourists want a range of experiences when planning a holiday. The Manning Valley offers traditional experiences like going to the beach and visiting National Parks, but there is so much more. Exploring the waterways is limited for tourists given the lack of tourist infrastructure like hiring boats or canoes, or going on a river cruise.

Investing in tourist infrastructure can increase the tourist experience and visitor numbers. An example is Cattai Wetlands which was opened to the public in 2013. Toilets, boardwalks and rest areas were installed. Today it is a popular place for a day trip and experienced by 2,500 visitors each year.

### 1.2.1 Investigate new tourist infrastructure

**Priority: Medium**

The coast, forested landscapes, fertile farmland, mountain backdrops and our close proximity to Sydney drive tourism growth at present. We need to take advantage of these attributes and value add to deliver the diverse range of experiences that tourists are seeking. Working with the Manning Valley Tourist Committee, tourist operators and the community provides opportunities to identify priority infrastructure that would increase the attraction of the Manning Valley as a tourist destination. Projects include:

- building a pedestrian/cycle path linking Harrington and Crowdy Head
- building whale watching facilities at Crowdy Head lighthouse
- developing Cooperook as a tourist destination with a pedestrian path linking it with Cattai Wetlands
- installing heritage markers for historic buildings
- making improvements to Bays Hill lookout (e.g. picnic facilities, signage, sculptures)
- establishing Livvi's Place in Fotheringham Park
- continuing foreshore improvements in Taree, Harrington and Old Bar that facilitate tourist activities like boat hire and stand-up paddle boards
- building on the RV friendly strategy to identify further free camping locations and parking facilities for 'grey nomads'
- reviewing LEP 2010 zones to encourage visitor accommodation and tourist facilities/businesses
- improving sporting and conference facilities to attract regional and state events to the Manning Valley
- working with the National Parks and Wildlife Service to maintain and improve infrastructure in the regions natural attractions.

### 1.2.2 Improve river usage

**Priority: Medium**

The Manning River is a significant feature of the Manning Valley, which is underutilised. To encourage better usage of the river (as shown in **Figure 11**) planning controls will be reviewed to:

- identify locations suitable for boating facilities. Plans for FIGTREES on the Manning include a marina and Browns Creek was traditionally a boating precinct
- encourage businesses along the river that enable a range of uses from cafes and restaurants to tackle shops and boat sales
- encourage businesses such as pop up cafes to operate in our foreshore parks and on the water
- encourage boat storage facilities and additional marinas at Harrington, Manning Point and Old Bar
- encourage water taxis and river cruises.

Improvements to public boating facilities along the river are being undertaken in accordance with the Manning Valley Boating Infrastructure Plan.



**Figure 11 - Water skiing in the Manning Valley**

3. Encourage a range of housing and lifestyle choices (GOAL 2)



The diversity of lifestyle choices in the Manning Valley is a strong attractor for residents - from the mountains to the beaches every lifestyle is catered for:

- Taree will remain the regional centre offering a range of health, social, educational, commercial, entertainment, cultural and transport services for citizens of the Manning Valley and surrounding local government areas
- the coastal towns of Harrington, Old Bar and the Hallidays Point cluster of villages including Diamond Beach, Red Head, Black Head and Tallwoods, are growth areas catering for both new residents and tourists
- the inland town of Wingham is a heritage country town with multiple tree change options
- twenty-eight villages offer a country experience with rural and environmental lands on their door-step.

To encourage housing and lifestyle choices, future planning needs to anticipate and accommodate change while being adaptive to the needs of residents and the industries that sustain them.

By 2036, well over  $\frac{1}{3}$  of our population will be over the age of 60 and around  $\frac{2}{3}$  of our households couple-only or single-person. A range of housing choices like townhouses, units and retirement living will house future residents in our growth areas, balanced by rural lifestyle lots supporting our many villages.

The State Government has set a target that 40% of future residential development should be other than detached houses to provide housing choice. Current planning controls are limited to the R1 General Residential zone for residential development, which does not achieve housing choice outcomes. A new medium density zone applied in the right locations will provide greater opportunities for townhouses, units and retirement living. Accompanied by increased height, higher density residential development can be achieved.

Given the coastal towns will support much of the housing choice, specific design criteria will be needed to ensure a quality built form is achieved. These types of outcomes have already been achieved in many coastal towns as shown in **Figure 12** and **Figure 13**.



**Figure 12 - Medium density housing at Tea Gardens**



**Figure 13 - Medium density housing at Forster**

## **Direction 2.1 Provide a high level of housing choice in Taree**

Over the next 20 years, the population in the Manning Valley is likely to change significantly. Our ageing population and their desire to downsize and potentially age-in-place will influence the demand for new housing. The Manning Valley is also expected to attract new residents relocating to take advantage of the environment and lifestyle on offer. In a well-functioning market, the supply of housing should reflect these shifts in the community's needs and preferences.

Given that Taree is home to 37% of residents in the Manning Valley, there must be a high level of housing choice provided. Currently the housing market in Taree is dominated by detached houses (78%) which is contrary to the growing trend for smaller dwellings and 'universal housing' that allows people to stay in their home as they age.

Providing a high level of housing choice starts with the design of new land releases that incorporate a range of allotment sizes which permit innovative house designs. Providing flexibility in planning controls to achieve design and liveability outcomes in medium density zones and activating residential living in the CBD complete the suite of options that should be made available to the current and future population.

### **2.1.1 Encourage diversity of housing choice in Taree**

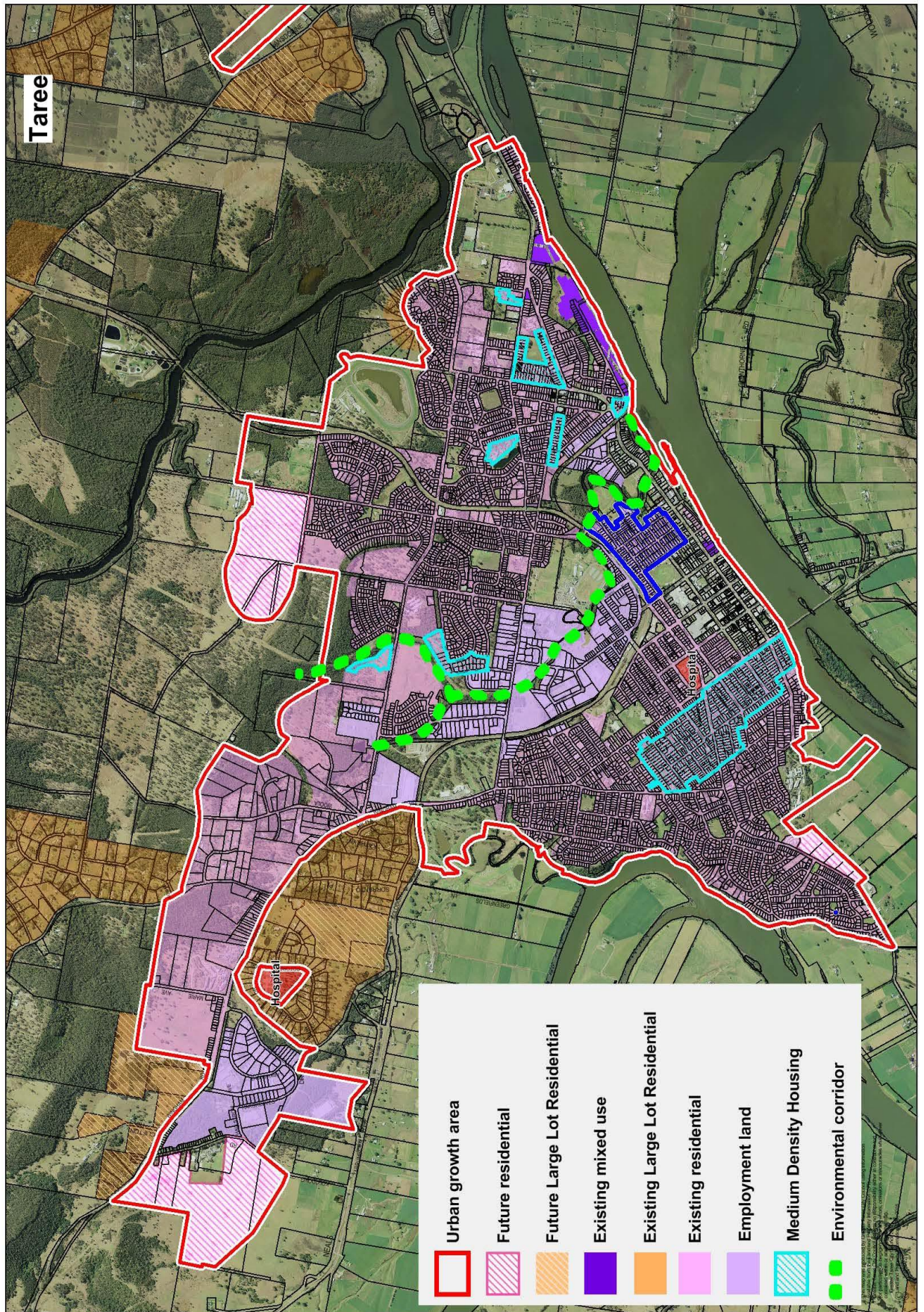
**Priority: Medium**

**Map 7** shows the residential lands in Taree. A concentrated effort to accommodate more units, townhouses and retirement living is needed. Apart from facilitating CBD living, planning controls will be reviewed to:

- improve the housing outcomes achieved in current medium density locations (west of Commerce Street and at Chatham)
- examine why no residential outcomes are being achieved in the B4 Mixed Use zone
- improve housing choice outcomes being achieved in the R1 General Residential zone.

Taree has adequate land available to accommodate residents, but there has been a slow take-up of some large parcels of zoned land. Drivers of growth need to be continuously monitored to ensure that development in Taree is not impeded.

Taree has sufficient supply of rural residential lots to meet future demand, however sites at Cundletown (fronting Lansdowne Road) and at Kolodong (fronting Wingham Road) operate as rural residential lots and need to be zoned accordingly.



Map 7 - Residential lands in Taree

## Direction 2.2 Diversify housing choice in our coastal towns and villages

Based on current population data, Harrington, Old Bar and Hallidays Point combined will house 80% of the future residents in the Manning Valley. Each settlement offers a great lifestyle, community, facilities and a beautiful setting not only for future residents, but also visitors.

These coastal towns have developed as urban suburbs, rather than embracing their coastal location. This can be attributed to the planning controls being the same as those that apply to inland towns like Taree and Wingham.

Along the NSW coast, seaside villages like South West Rocks and Crescent Head have grown into coastal destinations with a range of accommodation, food outlets, retail, activities and experiences (as demonstrated in **Figure 13**). Increasing the diversity of experiences in our coastal towns will make them more resilient and drive growth into the future.

Working with local communities, a new vision and plan is required to embrace the natural environment and the unique coastal lifestyles on offer. More detailed planning will involve urban design and height analysis to ensure that built form outcomes are of a high quality so as to enhance the character of our settlements.



Figure 13 – Example mixed use development at South West Rocks

### 2.2.1 Harrington and Crowdy Head

#### Priority: High

Expansion of Harrington is constrained by flooding, surrounding environmental lands and the coastline. To accommodate future growth, greater housing choice is required to house both residents and the growing number of visitors (over 200,000 visitors/year).

An increased population can attract more services. An aged care facility, open space improvements, medical facilities and more retail choice are all reliant on population growth in Harrington.

Opportunities to increase housing choice are shown on **Map 8** and **Map 9**. In summary they involve:

- The Beach Street shopping area being extended to provide a mixture of local and tourist facilities on the ground level, with shop top housing up to three levels above
- Residential areas bounded by Wards Creek and extending north to Ann/Granter Street (refer to **Map 8**). This area has lot sizes and road layout that can accommodate a range of housing types. Existing units in Harrington show that a four storey built form can be easily accommodated (refer to **Figure 14**)
- Beach Street west of Wards Creek (refer to **Map 9**). This area offers both great access to the foreshore and extensive views. Townhouses and unit developments (up to three storeys) would enable more residents to enjoy the coastal outlook and provide additional tourist accommodation. Lots can be consolidated to provide an adequate area for building units and enable rear access to reduce impacts on the traffic flow of Beach Street
- Reviewing planning controls for the three caravan parks to increase opportunities for park improvements by using a tourist zone
- Supporting the development of nursing home and hostel based aged care facilities.



**Figure 14 - Existing four storey units in Harrington**







Given the proximity of Crowdy Head and the relationship between the two communities, future planning must extend over this neighbouring village.

Crowdy Head offers a range of opportunities that need to be explored with the NSW Department of Primary Industries (owners of Crown Land), the local community and landowners.

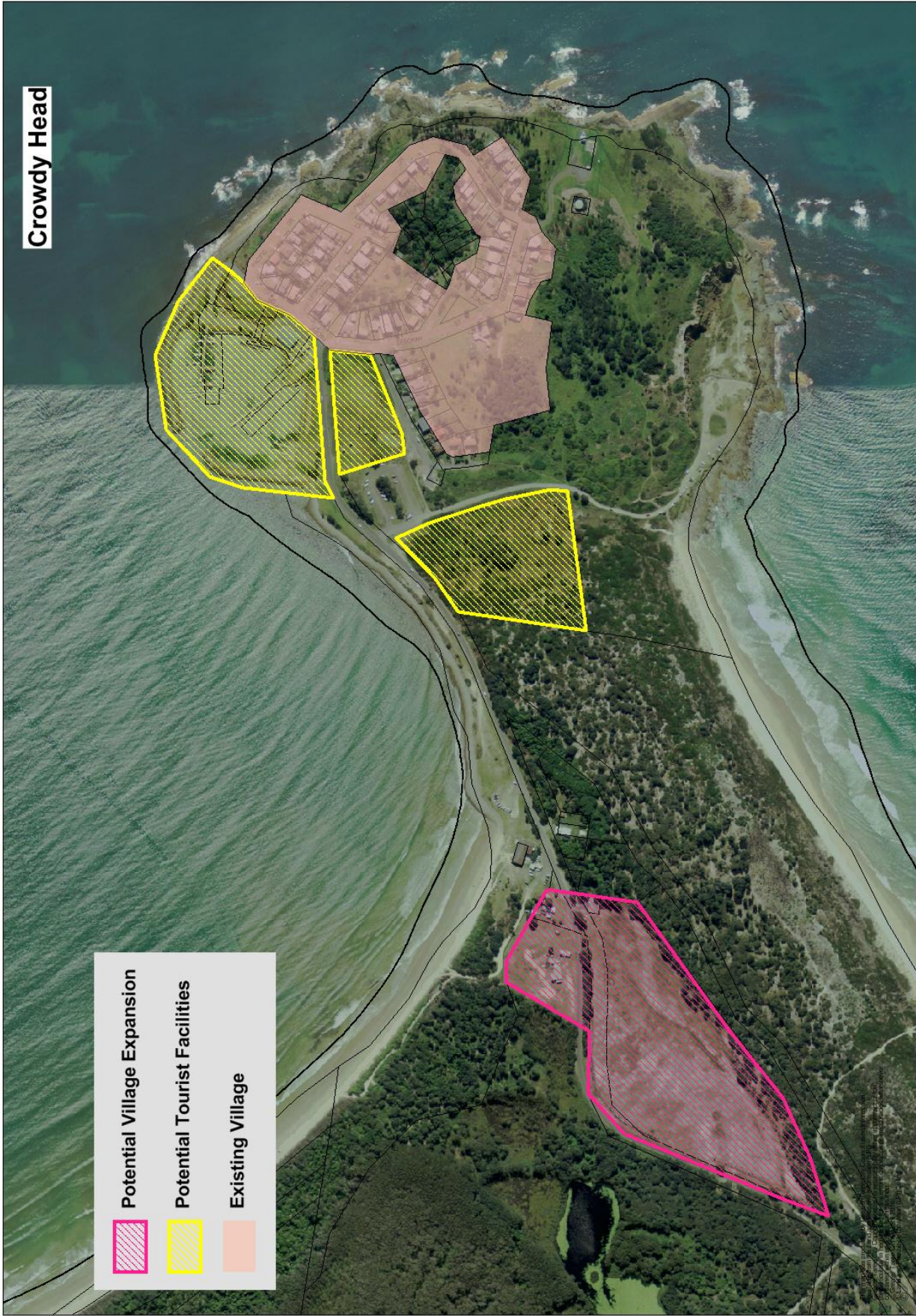
The harbour is underutilised and falling into disrepair. Tourist facilities need to be explored that take advantage of this safe mooring for boats. Fishing charters, dive schools and the fishing industry could all be catered for as was previously the case (**Figure 15**).

In support of these facilities, tourist accommodation could be explored on the Crown Land opposite the harbour and a village extension on the entry to Crowdy Head. Tourist facilities like a whale watching platform at the lighthouse and stand up paddle board/kayak hire at the Crowdy Head SLSC would increase the tourist experience. Increased growth in the village and visiting tourists would provide local employment and improve the resilience of this community (refer to **Map 10**).

Open space planning undertaken in 2015 identified improvements, resulting in the Harrington Foreshore Concept Plan and Harrington/Crowdy Open Space Action Plan. Implementation of these plans is underway. In addition, infrastructure improvements include an upgrade to Harrington Road (between Cattai Creek and Tappin Creek) and Wards Creek Bridge to re-align/widen the bridge and cater for improved pedestrian/cycle crossing.



**Figure 15 - Crowdy Head Harbour fishing fleet**



Map 10 - Growth areas in Crowdy Head

### 2.2.2 Old Bar and Wallabi Point

#### Priority: High

Old Bar is expected to experience the greatest coastal growth over the next 20 years, accommodating 2,500 new residential lots. Planning for the future of Old Bar has been extensive with a new centre identified and roads/parks/drainage planned for new residential estates. **Map 11** shows the extent of planning undertaken. An infrastructure contributions plan details the infrastructure needs and charges for new development.

Old Bar has been identified as one of the significant coastal erosion locations in NSW. Planning for Old Bar needs to consider the outcomes of the NSW Coastal Reforms expected later in 2016. Work will continue with the Office of Environment and Heritage and the community to develop coastal provisions that are based on the best available science and are flexible to meet the needs of the community.

Two locations have been identified (blue hatched area on **Map 11**) where medium density housing can be achieved:

- The proposed medium density housing precinct on Old Bar Road (refer to **Map 12**) aims to build upon the existing unit development in this location. Planning controls will be updated to enable more unit development (up to four storeys) and shop top housing in the town centre. Design solutions will be examined to ensure the built form is consistent with the coastal location
- The area previously designated for tourist development north of Old Bar adjoining Oyster Arm has never been developed. The tourist zone applied over this site restricts development potential and therefore a medium density zone is proposed to achieve the desired development outcome.

The planning controls applied to caravan parks will be also reviewed to ensure tourist facilities are permitted on site.

Wallabi Point has two remaining areas to be developed for future residential land uses and beyond these no changes are proposed.

### 2.2.3 Hallidays Point

#### Priority: High

The Hallidays Point Development Strategy 2000 provided a solid foundation for the development of this growth area into four distinct villages. **Map 13** shows existing development and potential growth areas over the four villages and the important environmental corridors that surround them.

Housing choice is limited with detached houses dominating the market. **Maps 14, 15 and 16** identify locations where housing choice can be achieved for the coastal villages.

**Diamond Beach** (refer to **Map 14**) has a number of locations where the tourist zone was used to enable tourist development. Ramada Resort is the only site that has achieved a tourist outcome on the ground. Numerous owners have identified constraints with using the tourist zone many of which stem from lending restrictions established by financial institutions. It is proposed to apply a medium density housing zone over these sites to achieve the similar built form results.

Around the shops at Diamond Beach, there has been an increase in the number of duplexes built, providing more housing choice for both residents and tourists. The larger lots and street layout accommodate this type of development. It is proposed to change the zone of this area to medium density residential to provide greater opportunity for units to be built. Given the setting, four storeys would sit comfortably in the landscape and could be designed to blend in with the coastal character of Diamond Beach.

**Red Head** (refer to **Map 15**) still has a large area of residential land to be subdivided and rezoned. The opportunity for medium density housing is limited given the topography of the landscape.

**Black Head** (refer to **Map 16**) will remain a compact coastal village. Opportunities for medium density housing exist north of the shopping centre off High Street. A large area of undeveloped land is included in the R1 General Residential zone. This site provides an opportunity to cater for the expansion of the shopping centre, medium density housing and retain important coastal vegetation as an extension of Wylie Breckenridge Park.

Existing sites fronting Black Head Road (including the tavern) provide the opportunity to enhance business opportunities.

A future residential site has been identified on the southern side of Black Head (facing Nine Mile Beach). This land is cleared and provides a suitable expansion opportunity for Black Head to be further investigated.

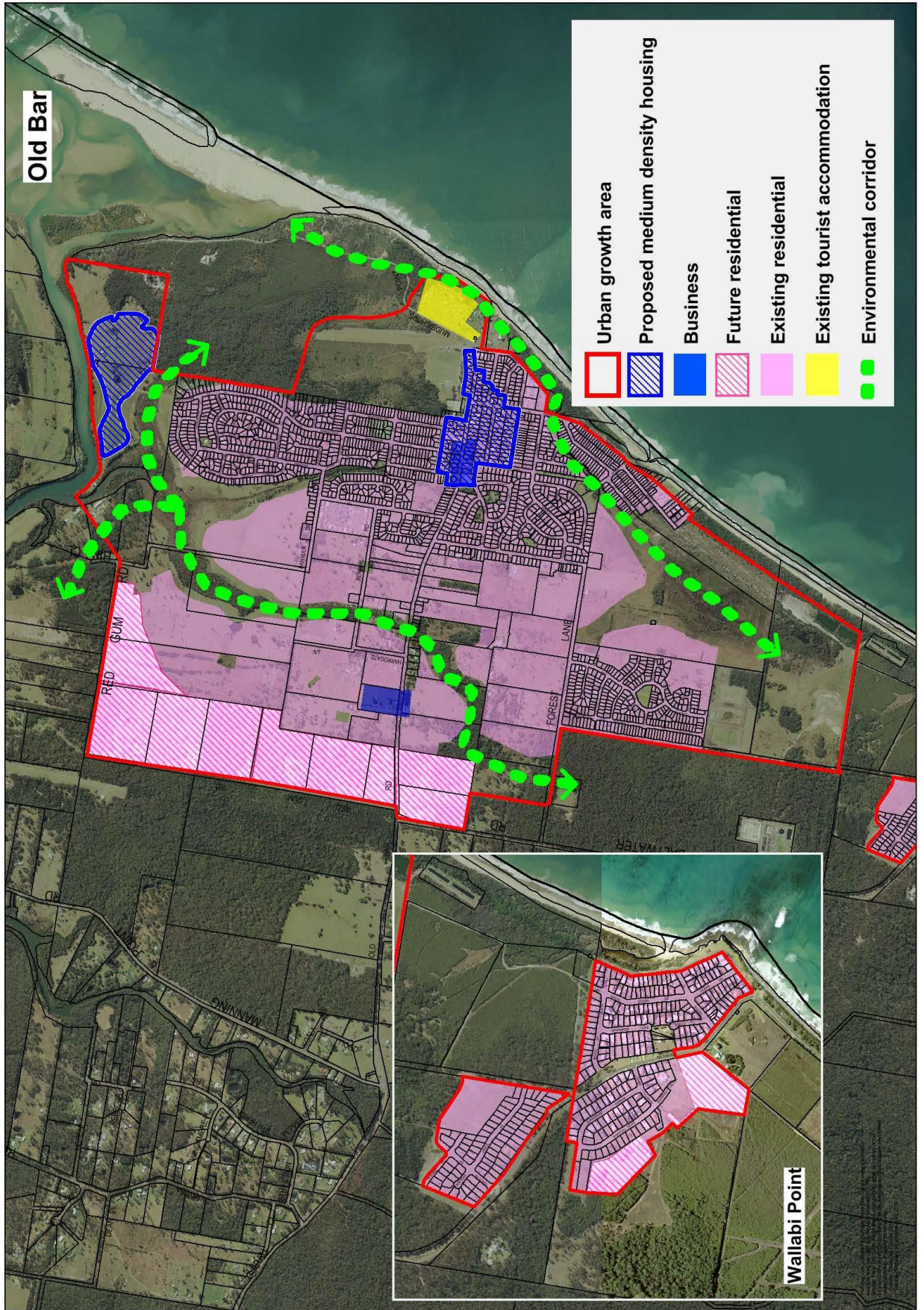
In all three coastal villages caravan parks provide important tourist accommodation, but the rural zone applying to each site is restrictive. It is proposed to apply a tourist zone to enable these parks to improve their facilities.

In addition to the smaller environmental corridors that separate the coastal villages, there are a number of regional corridors that link large bushland reserves to the coast (refer to **Map 13**). These corridors need to be protected, maintained and where necessary targeted for remediation works. A biodiversity strategy will assist to define these corridors and prioritise remediation works.

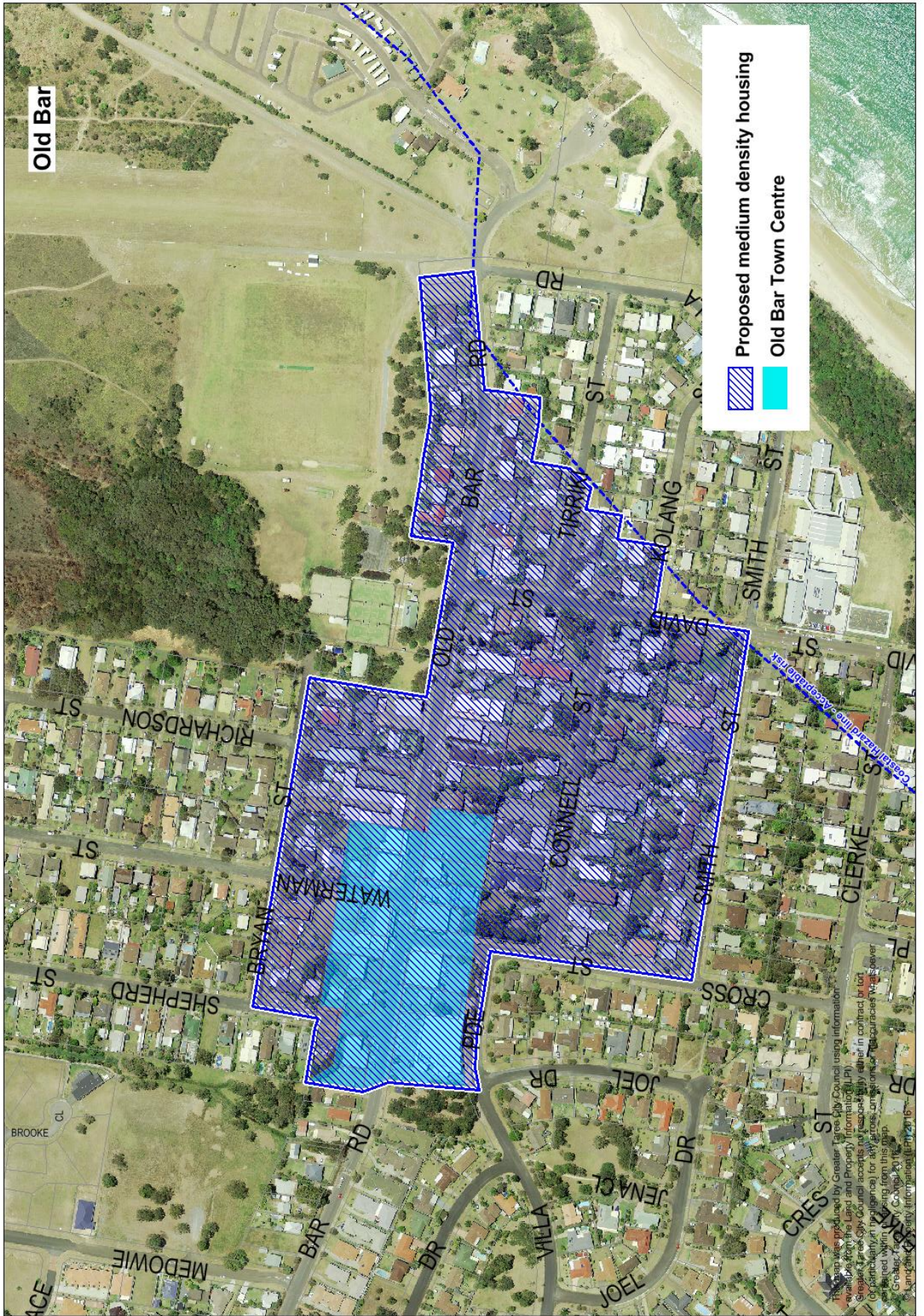
Hallidays Point has no industrial lands to service the community and as such there are no opportunities available for the establishment of uses such as storage facilities, mechanics, vehicle repairs and landscaping supplies. As the population grows, suitable sites for these uses need to be found to support the local community.

Rural residential lots (zoned R5 Large Lot Residential) are in strong demand across the Manning Valley. **Map 13** shows the existing, undeveloped and proposed Large Lot Residential locations. Only two locations remain that are not subdivided around Tallwoods. Given the environmental constraints the potential lot yield is less than twenty lots. Two new locations are proposed to address future demand (shown with brown hatching):

- along Blackhead Road sites have been selected to consolidate the existing rural residential subdivisions. These sites can be sewerred, have good access to both Forster and Taree and provide a logical extension of the existing rural residential estates
- south of Old Soldiers Road sites have been identified to provide a northern access into Diamond Beach by realigning Old Soldiers Road out of the majority of the nature reserve.



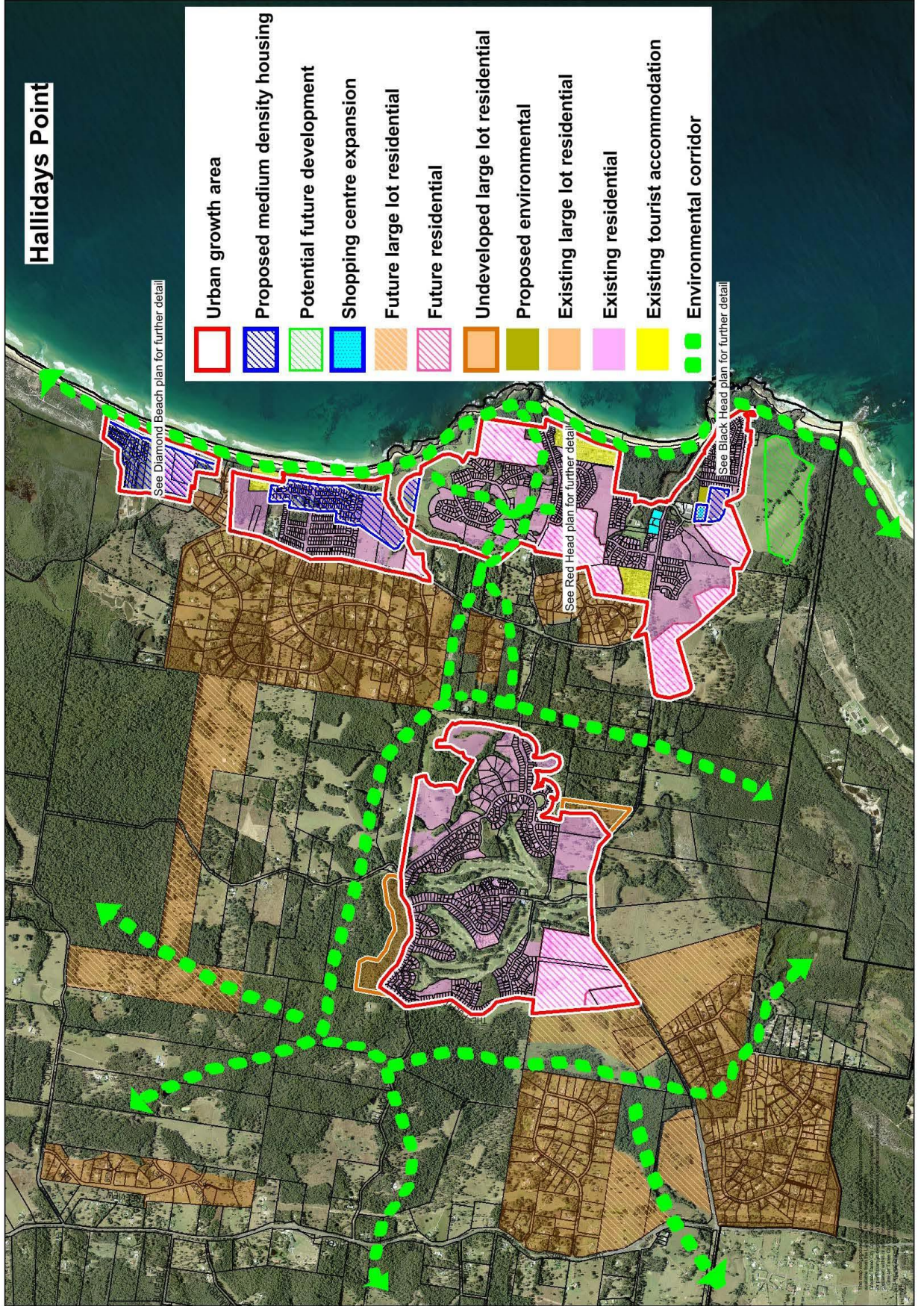
Map 11 - Growth areas in Old Bar



Map 12 - Future medium density in Old Bar

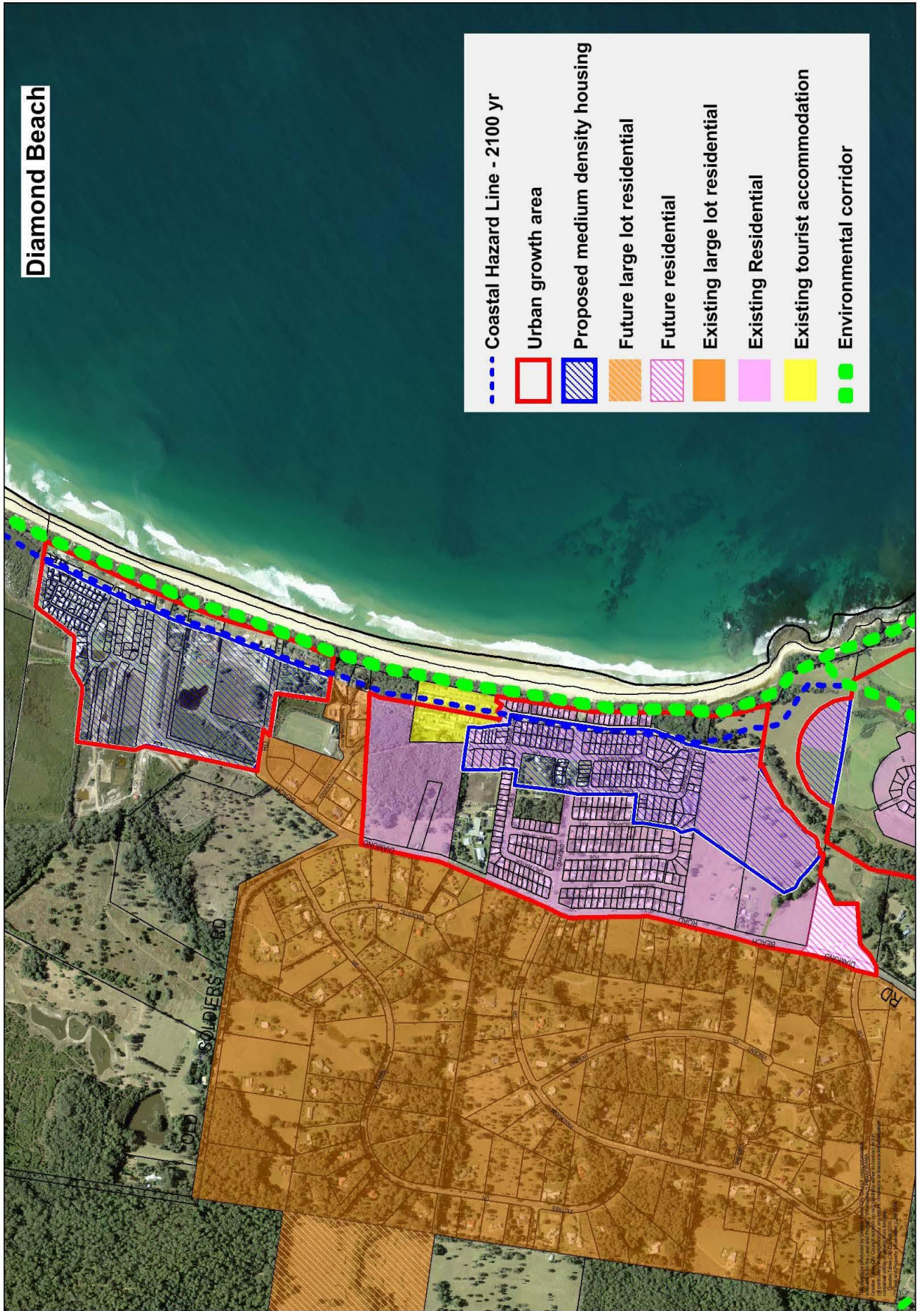


# Hallidays Point



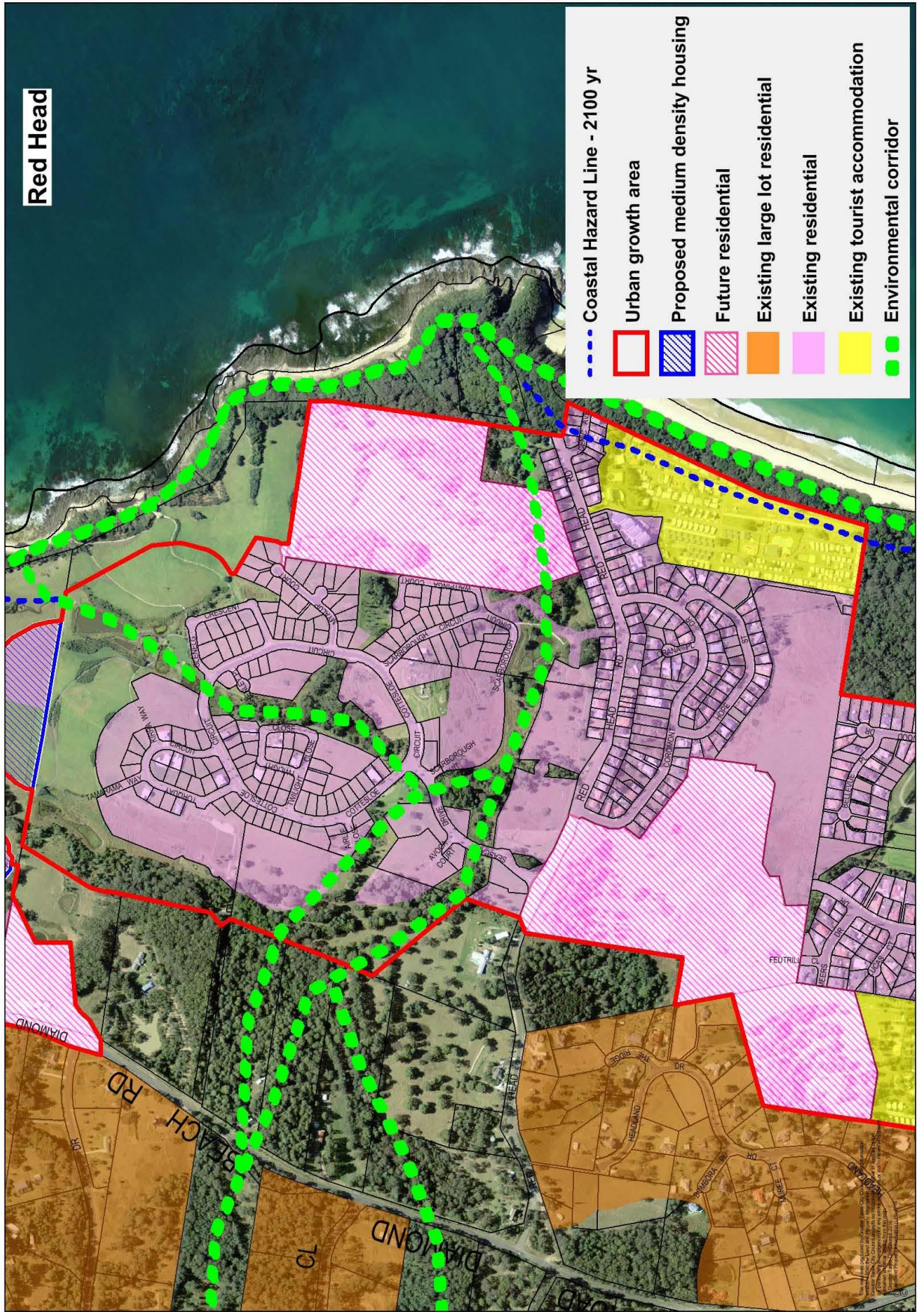
Map 13 - Growth areas in Hallidays Point

# Diamond Beach



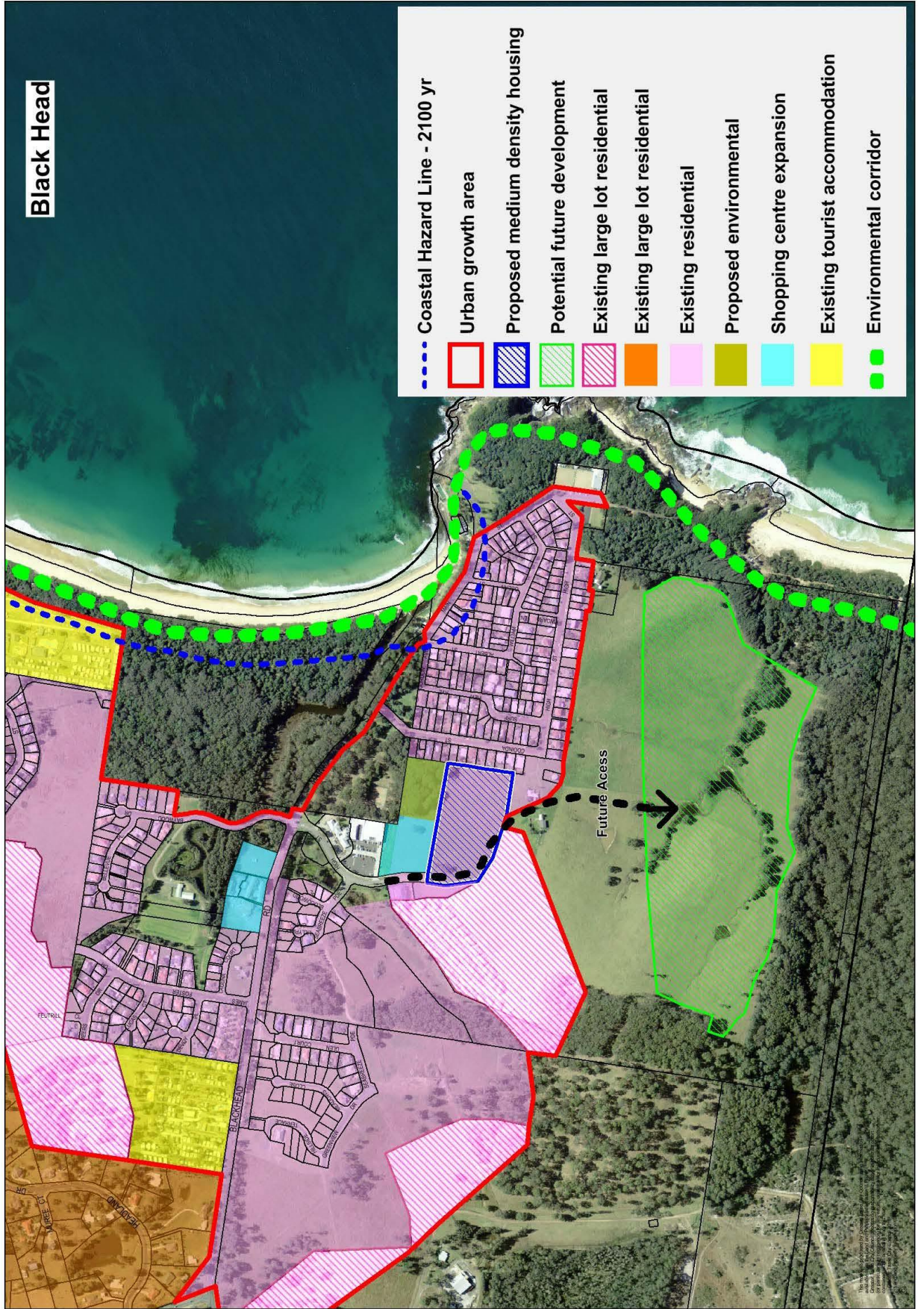
Map 14 - Growth areas in Diamond Beach

# Red Head



Map 15 - Growth areas in Red Head

# Black Head



Map 16 - Growth areas in Black Head

## Direction 2.3 Maintain sustainable growth in Wingham

With a population of 4,518 (ABS 2011), Wingham is a significant town, supported by a diverse range of businesses. Wingham Beef is a major contributor to the local economy employing over 340 people.

The town centre reflects the heritage character of the town with awning covered streets bordering a central park. The centre is vibrant offering a range of cafes and activities on the footpaths. Wingham is well serviced by four schools, a museum and a strong community. Wingham is known as the heritage town in the Manning Valley.

### 2.3.1 Wingham

#### Priority: Low

To remain a resilient community, Wingham needs to maintain and promote its heritage, support local businesses and provide a variety of housing choice.

Housing choice in Wingham is minimal with detached housing representing 90% of the housing supply. Locations suitable for a range of units, townhouses and retirement living will be identified, along with locations where the historical residential character (larger lots) needs to be retained to keep the heritage look and feel of Wingham.

Growth rates in Wingham have slowed, providing an adequate supply of residential land, particularly north of Murray Road (refer to **Map 17**).

Rural residential lots are provided on the outskirts of Wingham at Bungay Estate (south) and Bulga Rd (north). The residential market in Wingham is geared towards rural residential, providing lots typically greater than 1ha with a rural outlook.

The entry to Wingham (from Taree) has been identified as a potential residential area for over 10 years. Given the oversupply of residential lands in Wingham, this location is better suited for rural residential development. This type of subdivision would be complimentary with the rural nature of the town and provide a more suitable gateway into Wingham. In addition, the many houses that front Wingham Road (northern side) will be included in a residential zone to reflect their use. Between these sites and Kolodong Road, larger rural lots will be maintained to provide a visual separation between Wingham and Taree.

Along Murray Road there are a number of sites that operate as rural residential lots and need to be zoned accordingly.

The future upgrade of the Cedar Party Creek Bridge and the railway crossing are important to improve flood access to Wingham. The Wingham CBD Enhancement Plan outlines how the town centre can be improved. Grant funding is sought on an ongoing basis to implement these works.

## Direction 2.4 Embrace our Valley of Villages

Villages were important in the historic development of the Manning Valley, providing local facilities including halls, schools, churches, a post office and a local shop for residents and surrounding farms. Today our villages provide a relaxed country lifestyle that is nestled amongst rural or environmental lands.

Villages are recognised differently in our planning documents, based on whether the village is connected to sewer or has a community facility. It is important to apply the planning controls consistently across all villages to improve their opportunities for growth.

Each village needs to be more flexible, allowing a greater range of uses to meet the needs of residents or tourists (e.g. cafes or an art studio). Expansion beyond the current village boundaries will enable the villages to grow and accommodate more residents.

This lifestyle choice is an important feature of the Manning Valley that must be maintained and enhanced.

#### 2.4.1 Recognise the importance of our villages

**Priority: Medium**

Currently there are ten villages (refer to **Map 18**) which are included in the RU5 Village zone (e.g. Krumbach, Croki, Johns River). An additional seventeen villages have been identified (refer to **Map 18**) that look and operate as villages, but are included in the RU1 Primary Production zone (e.g. Mount George, Upper Lansdowne, Glenthorne). This rural zone prohibits uses that typically support villages like local stores or cafes. This has reduced the resilience of these small communities.

Tinonee also operates as a village, with a residential community supported by a school, shopping area and cafes. As such it is proposed to change the zone to reflect the village character of Tinonee.

Planning controls will also be changed to include all villages identified on **Map 18** in the RU5 Village zone to ensure that a range of activities are permitted to support the lifestyle choices of many residents.

#### 2.4.2 Expand our villages

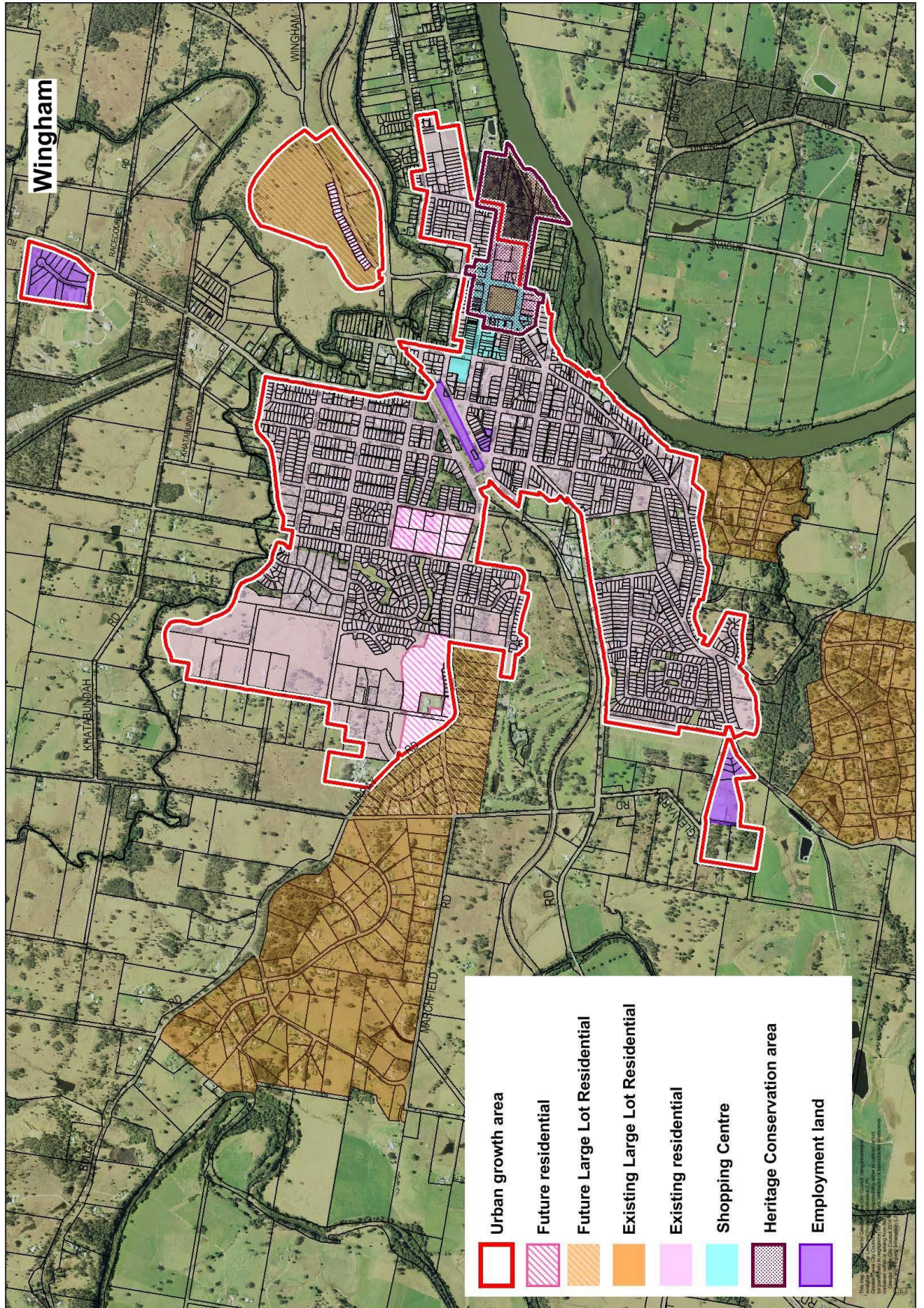
**Priority: Medium**

Only three villages (Tinonee, Coopernook and Lansdowne) have designated future residential areas to enable the village to expand (refer to **Maps 19, 20 and 21**). These villages are all connected to sewer.

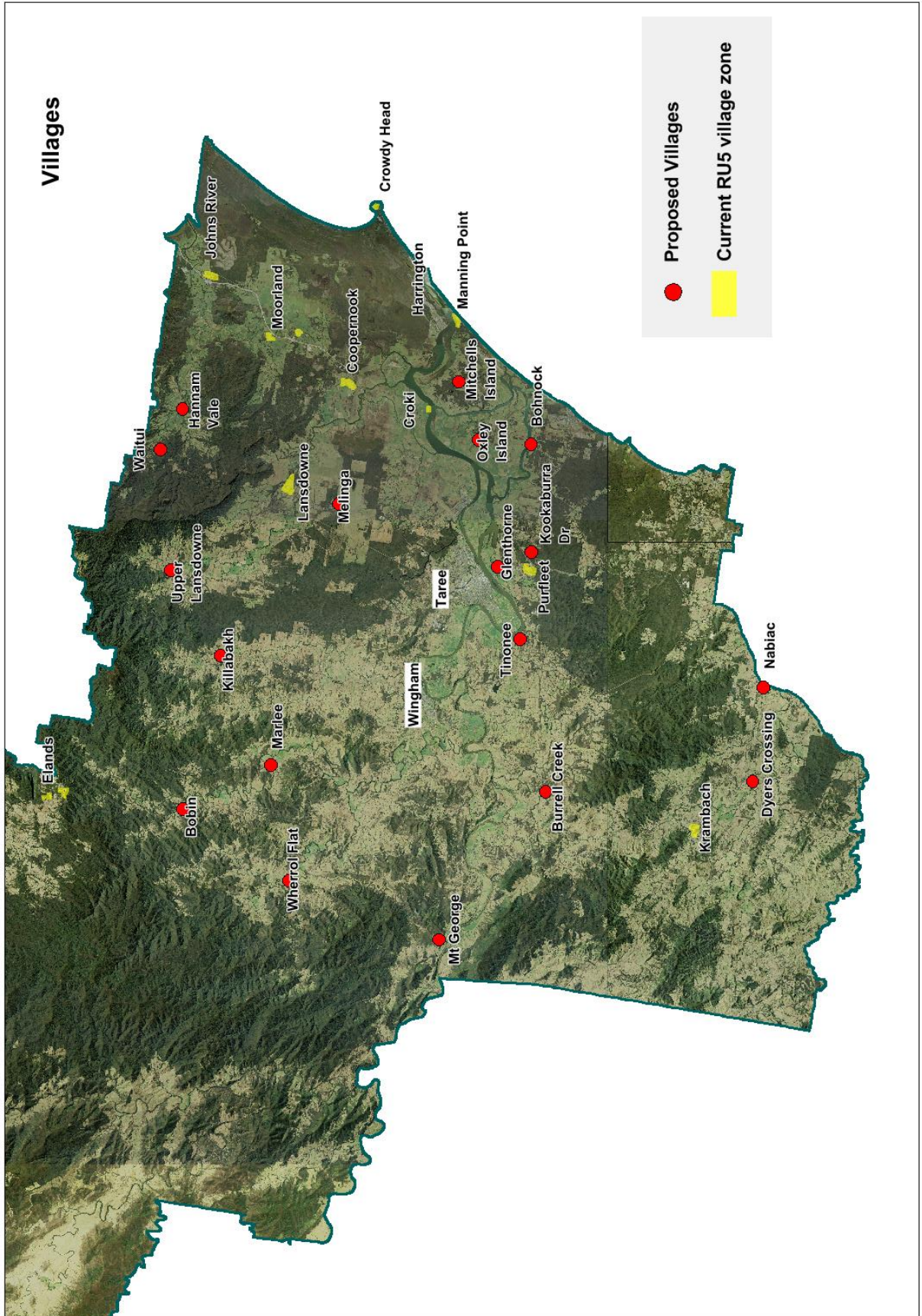
Future residential areas in Tinonee have been refined based on a decline in population growth, the rural residential lifestyle being sought at Tinonee and the landscape character of the identified lands. The Bucketts Way is a major road that creates a logical boundary for Tinonee. Any development south of The Bucketts Way would be better suited as rural residential in nature (R5 Large lot Residential) which is identified in **Map 19**.

The future residential areas for Coopernook and Lansdowne will remain unchanged.

The remaining twenty-five villages have no avenue for expansion beyond the current village boundaries, which is stifling their growth. Therefore a future expansion area for each village will be identified accordingly. Given the villages are not connected to sewer, the lots will typically be 1.5ha in area to enable on-site waste disposal.

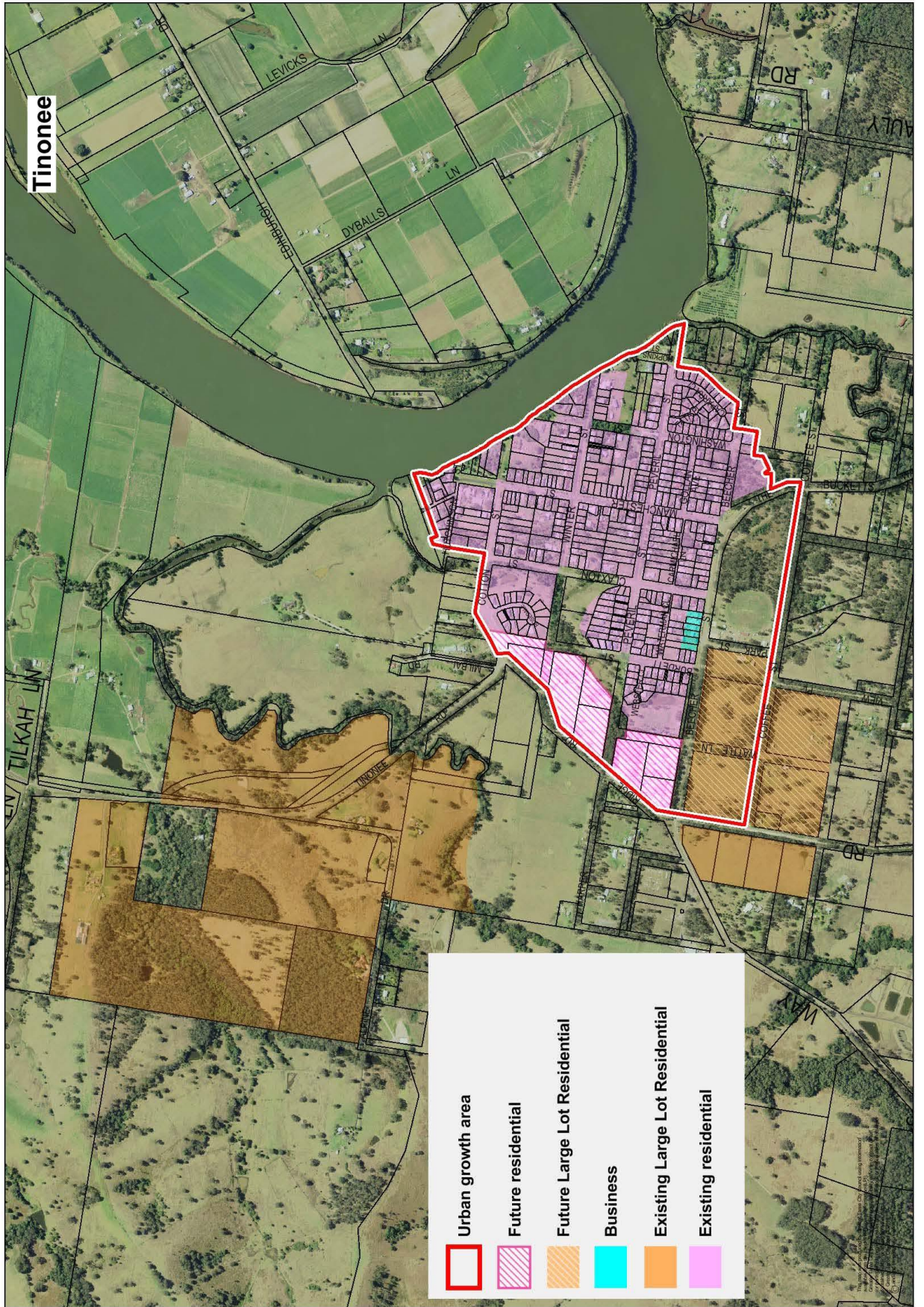


Map 17 - Growth areas in Wingham



Map 18 - Villages in the Manning Valley

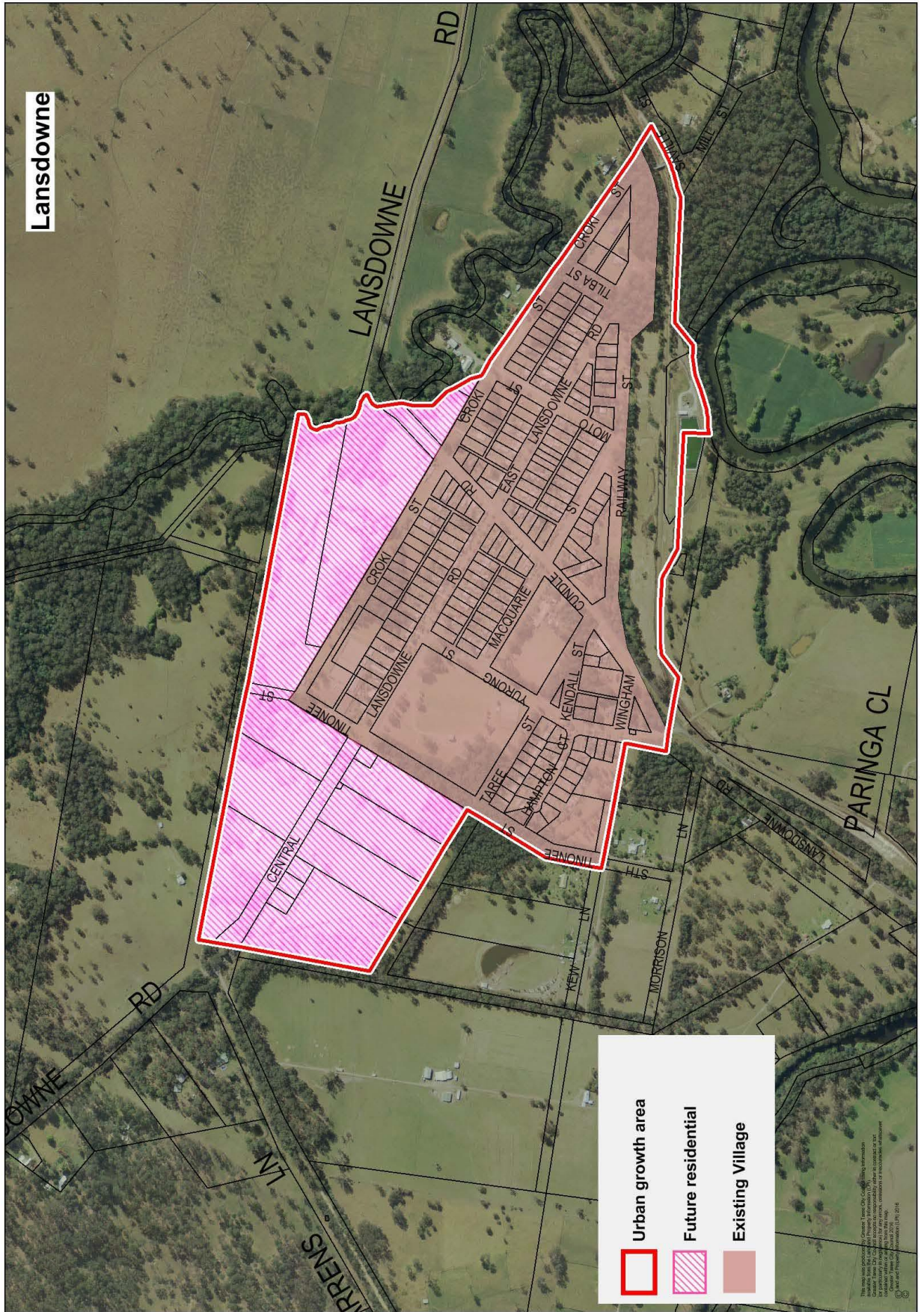




Map 19 - Growth areas in Tinonee



# Lansdowne



Map 21 - Growth areas in Lansdowne

4. Protect and connect natural environments  
(GOAL 3)



From the mountains to the beaches, the Manning Valley offers an array of unique experiences for residents and tourists to enjoy. The Manning Valley Naturally campaign successfully promotes our natural attractions, while effectively portraying the range of lifestyle choices we all enjoy.

The Manning Valley is spread over 3,753km<sup>2</sup> and is bordered to the east by 50km of coastline and to the west by the Great Dividing Range. Over 66% of the Manning Valley is covered in natural vegetation, 24% of which is included in twenty-five National Parks, Nature Reserves and State Forests. Important environmental corridors provide for fauna movement from the mountains to the coast, connecting with these significant parks and forests (refer to **Map 22**).

The Manning Valley has an extensive system of waterways, made up of five catchments (refer to **Map 23**). The primary catchment is the Manning River (area of 8,420km<sup>2</sup>), which is the sixth largest catchment on the NSW coast. The other catchments within the Manning Valley are Wallis Lake, Khappinghat, Stuarts River and Hastings.

The Manning River is a significant natural feature being the only double delta river in the Southern Hemisphere (entrances at Harrington and Old Bar). Descending down 1,500m from the Great Dividing Range, it meanders 261km to the coast and has 14 major tributaries including the Barnard, Dawson, Lansdowne and Gloucester Rivers. Once busy transport hubs of our past, they now offer great lifestyle, recreational and business opportunities. This makes the health of our river systems a key priority for the whole community.

Our unique natural setting also provides a number of challenges. We have some of the worst acid sulfate soil hotspots in NSW, coastal erosion at Old Bar and an extensive floodplain; all of which are being researched and managed by Council in partnership with the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage and community groups (refer to **Figure 18**).

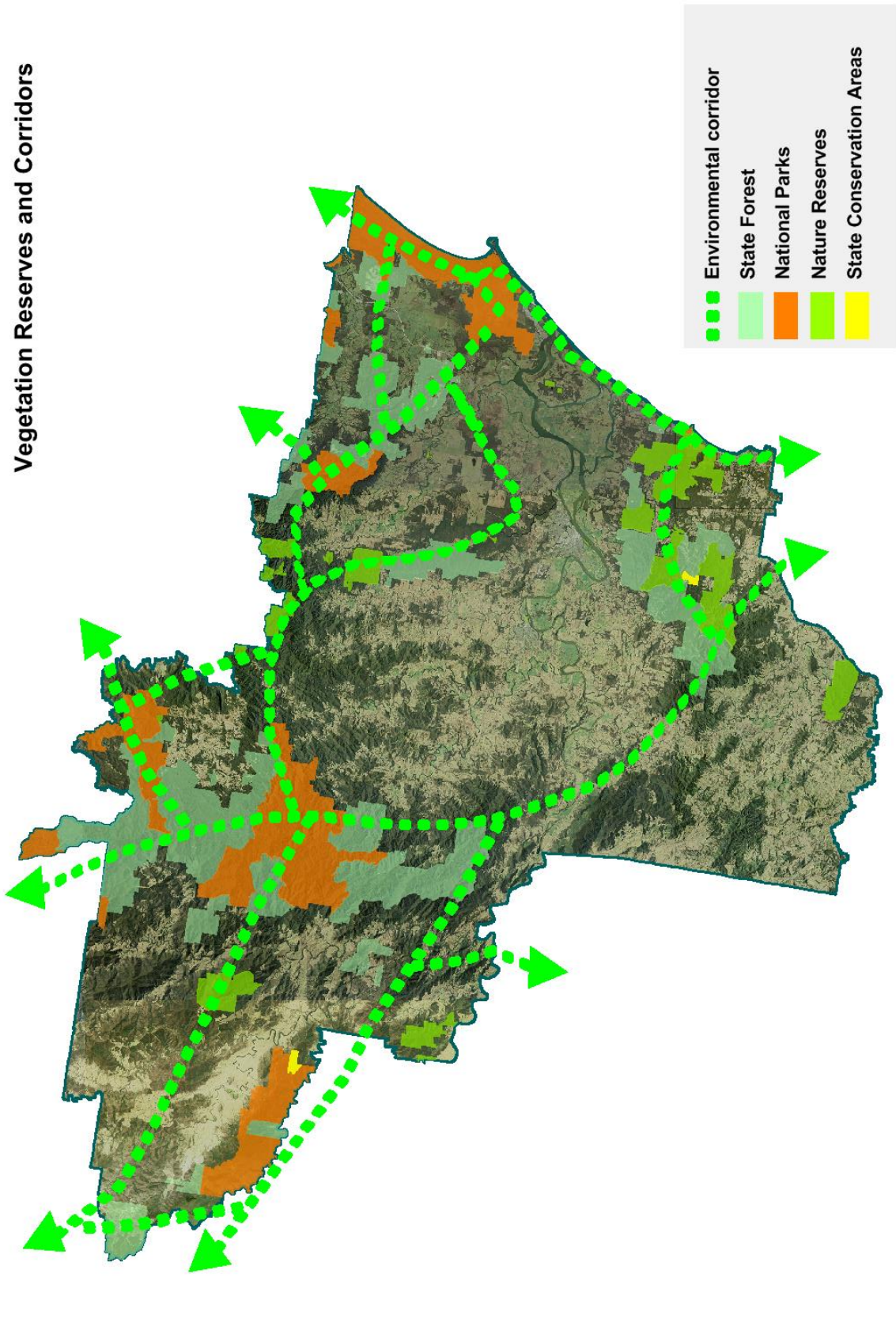
Volunteers work together with Council to restore bushland and educate the community about the importance of a healthy environment.

Our environmental work is well recognised, receiving the Green Globe Award in 2015 for best Natural Environment Sustainability project in NSW (Big Swamp Project).



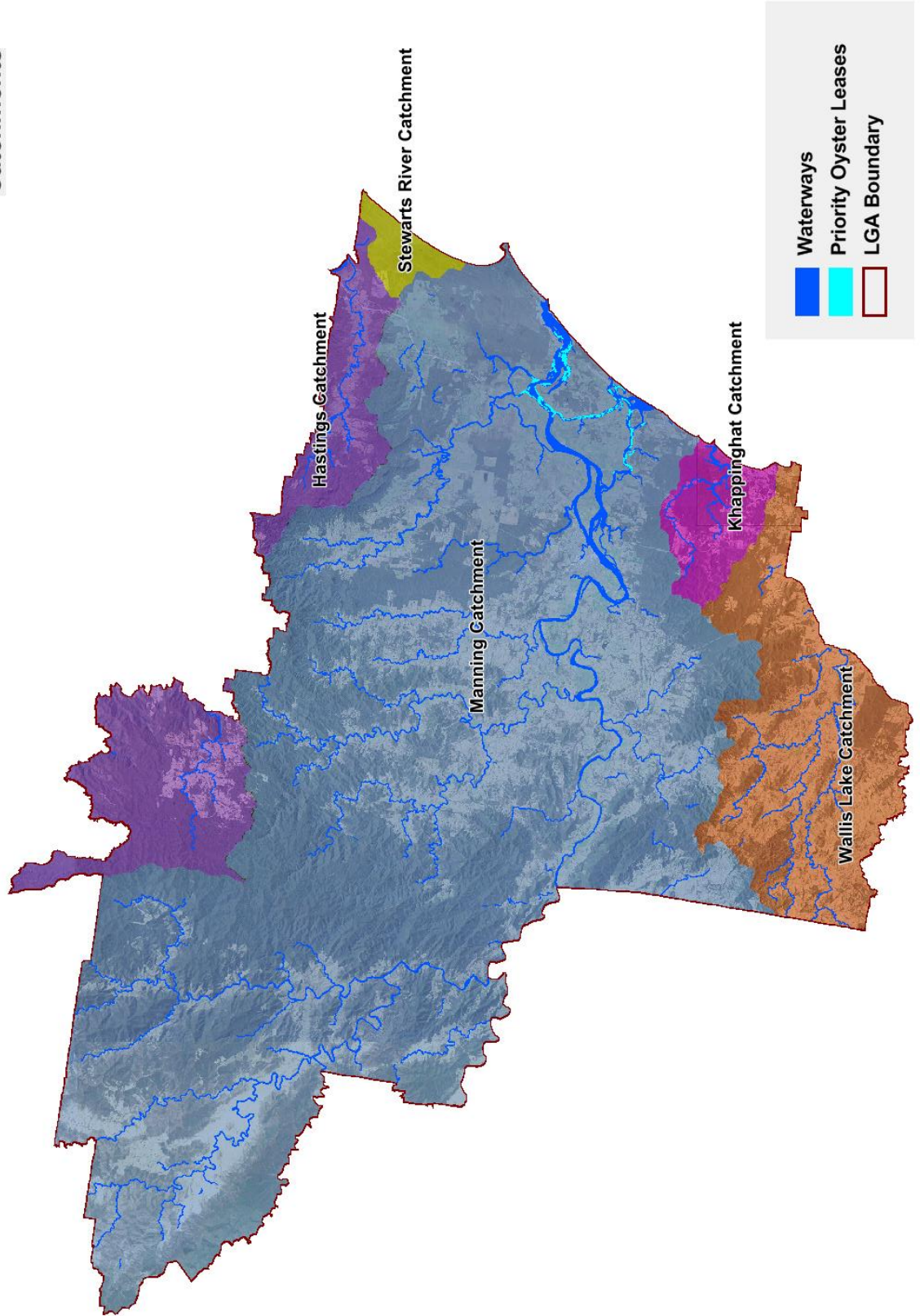
**Figure 18 - Sunrise at Cattai Wetlands**

Vegetation Reserves and Corridors



Map 22 - Vegetation Reserves and Corridors

# Catchments



Map 23 - Water Catchments

### Direction 3.1 Protect our natural environment and its biodiversity

The introduction of the Environmental Levy in 2014, provided much needed funding to improve the management of our beaches, waterways, rural land and bushland. An Environmental Action Plan (EAP) guides how the levy funds are spent.

The EAP focuses on six key environmental challenges being acid sulfate soils, degradation of rivers, estuaries and wetlands, loss of biodiversity, resource consumption and soil degradation.

The health of the Manning River captures a number of these challenges and was identified as a high priority by the community. In response, 50% of all funding raised through the environmental levy is allocated to projects that achieve improvements in water quality and estuarine health. Already, successful results are being achieved.

Key projects to improve water quality in the Manning River target the impacts of acid sulfate soils. Acid sulfate soils are naturally occurring on our floodplains, with priority ranked sites shown on **Map 24**. Problems arise when the soils are removed from a wet environment by lowering the water table (e.g. drains) or farming/construction activities. The primary impact is an increase of pH in our waterways as a result of acid plumes which often result in fish kills. In most cases the impacts are seen over a long period where the health of the waterway deteriorates and impacts become more evident. This is the case with the oyster industry, which is significant in the Manning Valley (refer to **Map 23**). Over the last 10 years, there has been a decline in oyster leases in the Manning River near these hot spots, because the acidity of the water weakens the oyster shells. Both the Cattai Wetlands and Big Swamp projects are in response to one of the worst acid sulfate soil hot spots in NSW.

#### 3.1.1 Proactively manage Cattai Wetlands

**Priority: High**

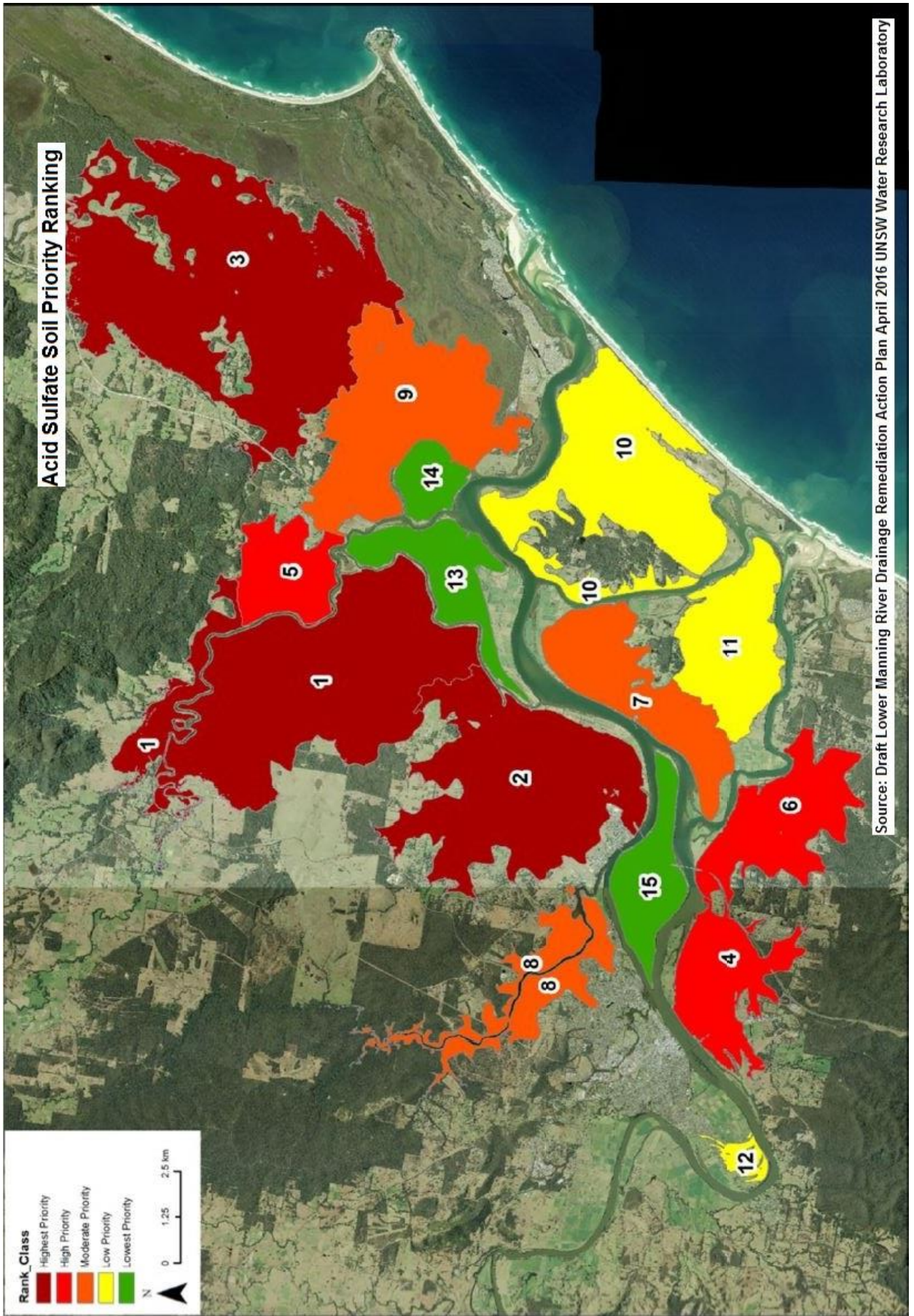
Cattai Wetlands (refer to **Map 25**) is east of the Pacific Highway near Coopernook. What started as an environmental restoration project to address acid sulfate soils, has grown into a significant natural asset. Cattai Wetlands is home to over 170 species of birds and 176 native flora species. As described by one visitor, this 509ha site is “the hidden gem in the Valley”.

After 10 years of restoration works, installing facilities and walking tracks; Cattai Wetlands is now the Manning Valley’s premier environmental site. A tourist destination for day-trippers, a world renowned bird watching site and an educational resource (as shown in **Figure 19**).

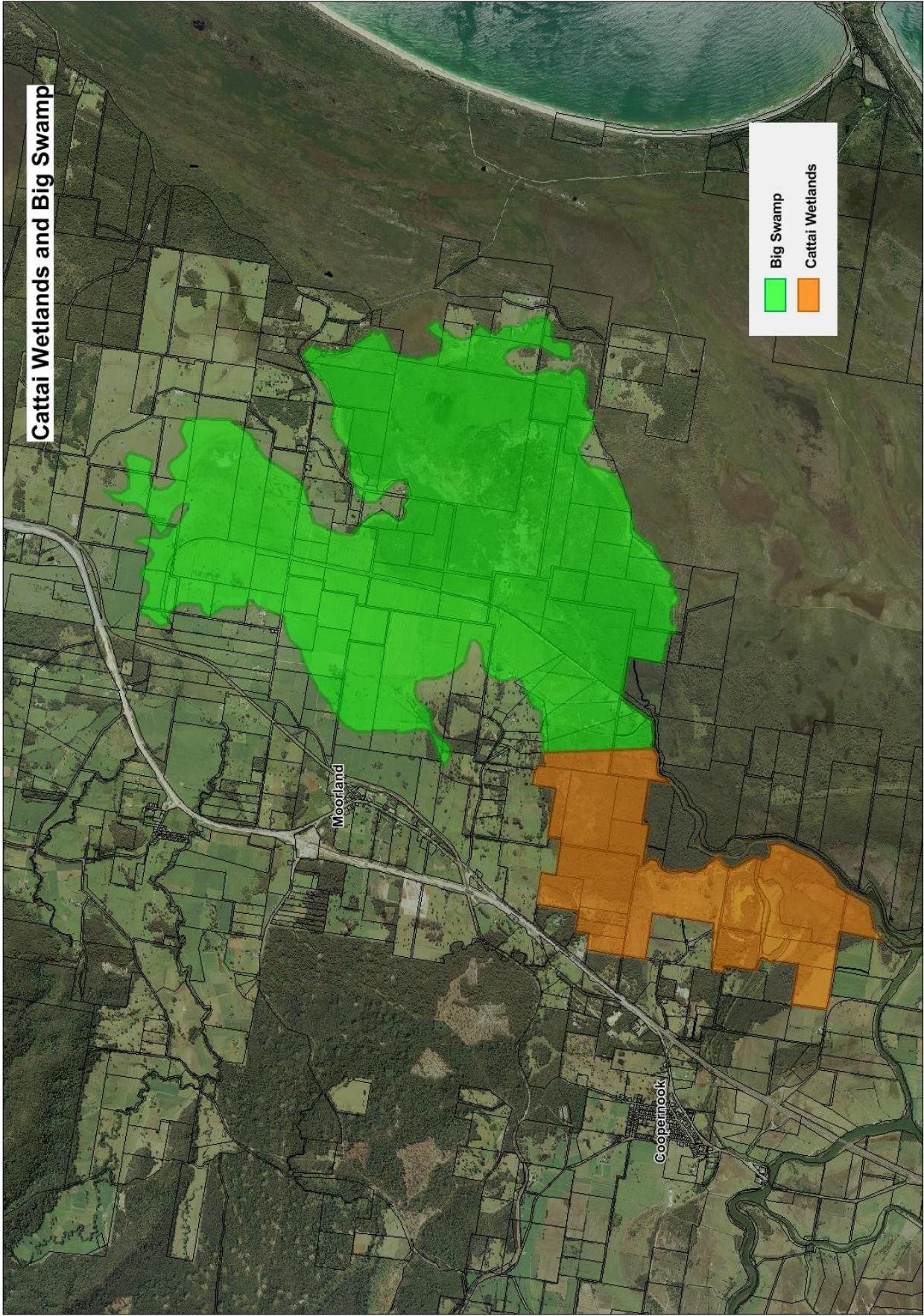
Continued improvements to Cattai Wetlands include:

- regular water quality monitoring to ensure pH levels are maintained or improved
- installing a bird hide, boardwalks and information signs to improve the visitor experience
- promotion of the wetlands as an outdoor classroom covering a range of topics like acid sulfate soils, restoration projects, local Aboriginal culture and coastal wetland ecosystems
- increasing opening times to seven days a week from 1 July 2016
- purchasing and remediating neighbouring degraded sites to provide tourist linkages to Coopernook and modern eco-centre facilities





Map 24 - Acid Sulfate Soil Priority Ranking



Map 25 - Cattai Wetlands and Big Swamp



**Figure 19 - Education at Cattai Wetlands**

### 3.1.2 Continue the rehabilitation of Big Swamp

**Priority: High**

Big Swamp is immediately north of Cattai Wetlands (refer to **Map 25**). The site covers around 2,000ha and includes the man-made Pipeclay Canal, which in the past had water quality similar to that of battery acid.

Progressively, Council has purchased key sites and undertaken remediation works to restore the natural drainage regime, by filling in or shallowing drains. Re-wetting the soils reduces the release of acid, improving the quality of water entering the Manning River. Recent results have indicated improved water quality with a rise in average pH levels and the return of fish to the canal.

To-date 700ha have been purchased and rehabilitated by:

- converting 80ha of land into a tidal wetland
- filling 14km of drains
- removing floodgates and levee banks
- constructing two significant shallow tidal drains
- reducing the groundwater depth over 620ha of land (saturating the acid soils preventing its mobilisation into waterways)
- implementing a monitoring program with the University of New South Wales' Water Research Laboratory.

Continued implementation of the Big Swamp project will involve the purchase of key sites, their remediation to reduce acid runoff and ongoing management to maintain fire trails, weeds and the drainage system.

### 3.1.3 Improve the health of the Manning River

**Priority: High**

In addition to the acid sulphate soil projects undertaken at Big Swamp and Cattai Wetlands, extensive river bank stabilisation and restoration works are undertaken throughout the Manning River catchment to improve water quality.

The river banks and tributaries are prone to erosion as a result of vegetation removal and stock access from historic farming practises. Installation of rock fillets along rural river frontages is effective in protecting eroding riverbanks (shown in **Figure 20**). The rock fillets prevent wave energy from boat wash and wind waves from reaching the river banks. The establishment of mangroves behind the rock fillets further stabilises the riverbank. They also create fish habitats which contribute to the ecosystem and help sustain fishing on the river. The end result is a healthier catchment. Working in partnership with landowners these bank stabilisation projects will continue as an effective means to improve water quality in the Manning River.



**Figure 20 - River bank stabilisation along the Manning River**

Discharge of water from urban environments into waterways can significantly impact on water quality. Browns Creek is a prime example of the environmental harm that can be created from discharging into a creek and how it can be improved. Since the late 1930s the creek suffered from industrial and sewage discharge, urbanisation and vegetation clearing. The direct discharge of major pollutants into the creek in the 1980s and the impressive restoration work of the volunteer group, Friends of Browns Creek, has improved the health of the creek. Browns Creek is now home to two flora and sixteen fauna threatened species.

Historically gross pollutant traps (GPT) have been used as a mechanism to improve the quality of stormwater entering waterways. The GTP in Browns Creek was recently renovated (as shown in **Figure 21**). GTP's are however limited in their results and application and a significant body of work is required to address the impacts of urban runoff within our catchments. This work will commence with the preparation of a detailed Water Quality Improvement Plan to reduce sediment, nutrient and gross pollutants from entering our waterways.

The *State of the Manning Report Card* reports annually the water quality of the Manning River. The Manning River received an overall grade of B which placed it in the top half of all estuaries in NSW in terms of ecological health. Environmental Levy projects will continue to improve the quality of the Manning River.



**Figure 21 - Renovated Browns Creek Gross Pollutant Trap**

#### 3.1.4 Protect and enhance biodiversity in the Manning Valley

**Priority: High**

The Manning Valley contains diverse natural environments, many of which are significant including:

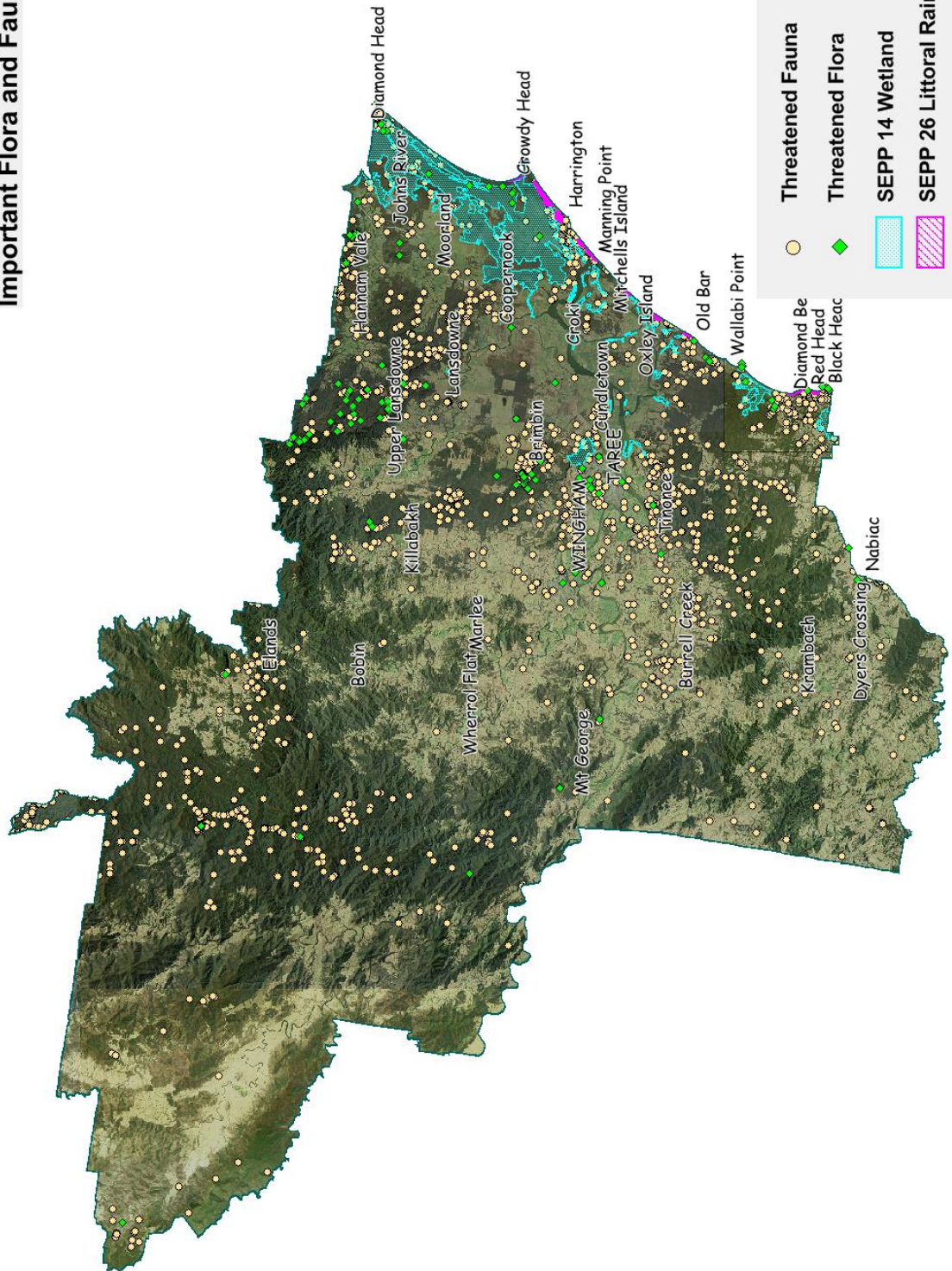
- nine endangered ecological communities listed under the NSW Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995; six of which are found on the coastal floodplains
- a number of threatened species including 86 fauna, 39 flora and an endangered population of the narrow-leaved red gum
- 1,850 native plant species, 10 of which are endemic to the region, such as the critically endangered Yellow Donkey Orchid.

**Map 26** shows the location of the state significant coastal wetlands and littoral rainforests that have a high level of protection in the Manning Valley. Sightings of threatened flora and fauna are good indicators of important habitats. These sightings occur predominately on the well vegetated ridgelines and along the waterways and correlate with the vegetation reserves and corridors shown on **Map 22**.

The use of this information in isolation is limited, and to address this short coming a biodiversity strategy is proposed. The strategy will identify and assess the diversity of habitats and their connections. Priorities will be set in terms of areas in need of protection and areas to be targeted for investment to improve connectivity and resilience. The biodiversity strategy will provide well-researched data to:

- inform planning decisions for development. A biodiversity map and planning controls will be included in LEP 2010
- target future investment in environmental management. This will ensure funds are spent in priority locations where the greatest environmental benefit can be achieved.

# Important Flora and Fauna



Map 26 - Important Flora and Fauna

### 3.1.5 Foster improved partnerships to manage our environment





**Priority: Medium**

There is a strong commitment to volunteering in the Manning Valley, with many people actively improving our natural environment. The environmental levy has enabled us to better engage, support and partner with community and industry groups, and other government agencies to address local environmental issues. **Table 1** shows the range of groups that contribute towards the protection and enhancement of our natural environment.

Partnerships with the Green Army, Novaskill, Conservation Volunteers Australia, TIDE as well as other landcare/coastcare groups have provided practical hands-on experience to locals in the fields of bushland regeneration, horticulture and construction. They have constructed boardwalks, grown native seedlings and regenerated bushland areas, which are significant contributions to our natural environment.

These partnerships need to continue to grow as we move into new priority locations across the Manning Valley.

**Table 1 - Community partners in our environment**

Taree Indigenous Development & Employment (TIDE): bush regeneration and design of Aboriginal cultural heritage interpretive signage for Cattai Wetlands 	Hunter Bird Observers Group: conducting regular bird surveys at Cattai Wetlands 	Friends of Browns Creek: water quality improvement projects at Browns Creek	Manning River Oyster Farmers Association: Pelican Bay Riverbank Restoration Project
	Manning Wetlands Steering Committee: input into the Cattai Wetlands and Big Swamp projects	Water Research Laboratory (UNSW): remediation of acid sulfate soils at Big Swamp	Mid North Coast Dairy Advancement Group (DAGS) & Dairy Australia: dairy effluent management
Manning Landcare: environmental restoration of Schoolhouse Gully at Wingham	Conservation Volunteers Australia: Green Army team at Cattai Wetlands	Taree Landcare: tree planting at William Wynter Park and Kolodong Reserve 	Hallidays Point Landcare: weed control within littoral rainforest areas
Farquhar Inlet Management Group (FIMG): maintenance dredging within the Manning River estuary	Harrington Lions Club: assisting the running of World Wetland Day celebrations at Cattai Wetlands	Mid North Coast Weeds Coordinating Committee: coordination of regional weed management activities	Harrington Chambers of Commerce & Men's Shed: enhancement of the Harrington Lagoon foreshore
Tidy up Taree: renovation of the amenities block at Endeavour Place, Taree	Hunter Local Land Services: contribution to regional environmental management projects	Community volunteers: assistance in running Council's community plant nursery	Koalas in Care: planning of projects which protect the local koala population 

### 3.1.6 Reduce the prevalence of noxious weeds

**Priority: High**

Noxious weeds are increasingly a threat to our natural environment. Left unattended weeds can reproduce quickly, outcompete native species and reduce the environmental quality of the Manning Valley.

In 1998, it was estimated that 65% of weed species in Australia resulted from garden escapes in our urban areas (e.g. Lantana as shown in **Figure 22**). In 2015, research indicated that this has grown to around 90%. Effective management of new invasive weed species is crucial to ensure that native vegetation can establish and thrive throughout the Manning Valley.

The most effective means of limiting the spread of weeds is to prevent their escape from gardens in our towns and villages. A program of inspections is undertaken each year to firstly identify the noxious weeds and then work with landowners to remove them.

Noxious weeds entering our rural lands impact on the productivity of the farmland. We need to be vigilant to firstly identify weed incursions, then eradicate the weeds before they become established and impact farm productivity. Where there are large areas of established weeds, the priority is to reduce their spread. Undertaking weed eradication programs over larger areas with multiple owners can be cost prohibitive.

It is important that Council continues to reduce weed infestations to maintain the biodiversity of the Manning Valley. This is achieved by undertaking inspections of both rural and urban areas. Inspections of markets and nurseries also assists to ensure that noxious weeds are not mistakenly sold as garden plants. Continued education activities assist to keep the community informed of the extent and type of weeds present in the Manning Valley.



**Figure 22 - Lantana**



5. Explore opportunities to optimise the use of rural lands (GOAL 4)



Historically rural lands have been the backbone of the Manning Valley with strong dairy, beef, poultry and timber industries (for example, 25% of the milk in NSW is still sourced from the Manning Valley). The most recognisable trends in agriculture across the Manning Valley have been a reduction in timber production and the number of dairies (following deregulation) and significant growth in poultry (free range egg production), with seven farms now operating in the Manning Valley. In addition, organic/boutique farms and horse studs have also increased.

While there has been a reduction in dairies, milk production in the Manning Valley remains high due to improved techniques and increased farm sizes mainly through leasing or the purchase of neighbouring properties. Other new rural industries include blueberries, tomatoes, cheese, flowers and alpacas (see **Figure 23** and **Figure 24**).

There has also been a significant increase in owners of rural lifestyle allotments, with a large number of residents choosing to 'tree change' (see **Figure 25**). These owners are often reliant on off farm income and while their land remains in production it can not be considered as profitable agriculture. In many cases land owned by rural lifestyle owners is leased to neighbouring farmers or they raise livestock/horses as a hobby or secondary income. These lands serve an important rural purpose, but need to be considered differently to farmland which supports families through a profitable agricultural enterprise.

Rural lands also contribute to the scenic backdrop of the Manning Valley. Located on sloping well-vegetated sites and along waterways, they contain almost a third of the vegetation in the Manning Valley.



**Figure 23 - Alpacas in the Manning Valley**



**Figure 24 - Cheese in the Manning Valley**



**Figure 25 - Rural lifestyle at Hannam Vale**

#### **Direction 4.1 Identify significant agricultural land**

The extensive fragmentation of rural lands across the Manning Valley has been a result of ill-informed planning controls over the last 30 years. Consequently, some of the best agricultural lands have been subdivided to such a degree that they may no longer be used for agriculture. Understanding how rural lands are used and what their value is to the rural economy is a key piece of work that is required to be undertaken to inform future planning decisions.

It is not a case of simply mapping agricultural land classifications or constraints, which provide good baseline data, it is about understanding a complex system of social, economic and environmental drivers which influence the production capacity and the level of profitability of agricultural enterprises on rural lands.

Accepting the changes that have taken place in agriculture and lifestyle choice over the last 50 years is also a key factor in understanding what has value now. Much of this change has been significant (e.g. deregulation of the milk industry, reduction in access to sources of timber) and has materially affected how rural land uses are undertaken in the Manning Valley.

#### 4.1.1 Defining our rural lands

##### Priority: High

Agricultural lands mapping undertaken by the NSW Department of Primary Industries in 2000 identified four agricultural classes of land across the Manning Valley. The classes were defined as quality cropping lands (Class 2), good grazing land (Class 3), land suitable for grazing (Class 4) and land suitable for light grazing (Class 5). There were no lands in the Manning Valley considered to be highest quality cropping lands (Class 1). Class 1-3 lands are considered the prime agricultural land.

**Table 2** shows the breakdown of agricultural land classes in the Manning Valley. The results are significant with less than 6% of the Manning Valley being included as Class 2 and 3 – prime agricultural land. **Map 27** shows the location of these lands. Typically, prime agricultural land is located on floodplains where the soils are alluvial and the land is relatively flat.

**Map 28** shows land suitable for grazing (Class 4) and light grazing (Class 5), which covers approximately 70.5% of the Manning Valley. These lands are located in the valleys which lead down from the ridgelines to the higher quality floodplain and contain many of our valued rural landscapes. A biodiversity strategy (see **Section 3.1.4**) will assist in identifying the habitat and corridor values of these lands.

**Table 2 - Agricultural classifications**

Class	Character	% of Manning Valley	% of dairy farms	% of poultry farms
1	Highest quality cropping lands	0	-	-
2	Quality cropping lands	0.4%	12%	-
3	Good grazing land and pastoral improvement	5.5%	49%	14%
4	Grazing land	28.5%	38%	71%
5	Light grazing land	42.0%	1%	14%
State Forest/ National Park/ Urban/ Water		23.6%	-	-

Understanding where key rural producers (dairy and poultry) are located and how land is fragmented around them is a key factor in defining our rural lands.

**Table 2** and **Maps 27** and **28** indicate where dairy and poultry farms are located based on the class of the land.

This data indicates that 61% of dairies are located on Class 2 and 3 lands and 39% are located on Class 4 and 5 lands. Dairies tend to cluster together on the productive lands which can provide a competitive advantage in terms of milk collection and processing. The large number of dairies on Class 4 land supports the grazing role of these lands. Class 4 land is also generally more affordable than Class 2 and 3 lands.

Poultry farms are predominately located on the Class 4 lands, given soil quality is not a high priority site requirement. Poultry farms are however located in close proximity to freight routes, along good access roads, and on flood free and flat land, which is indicative of their location in the Manning Valley (shown in **Figure 26**).



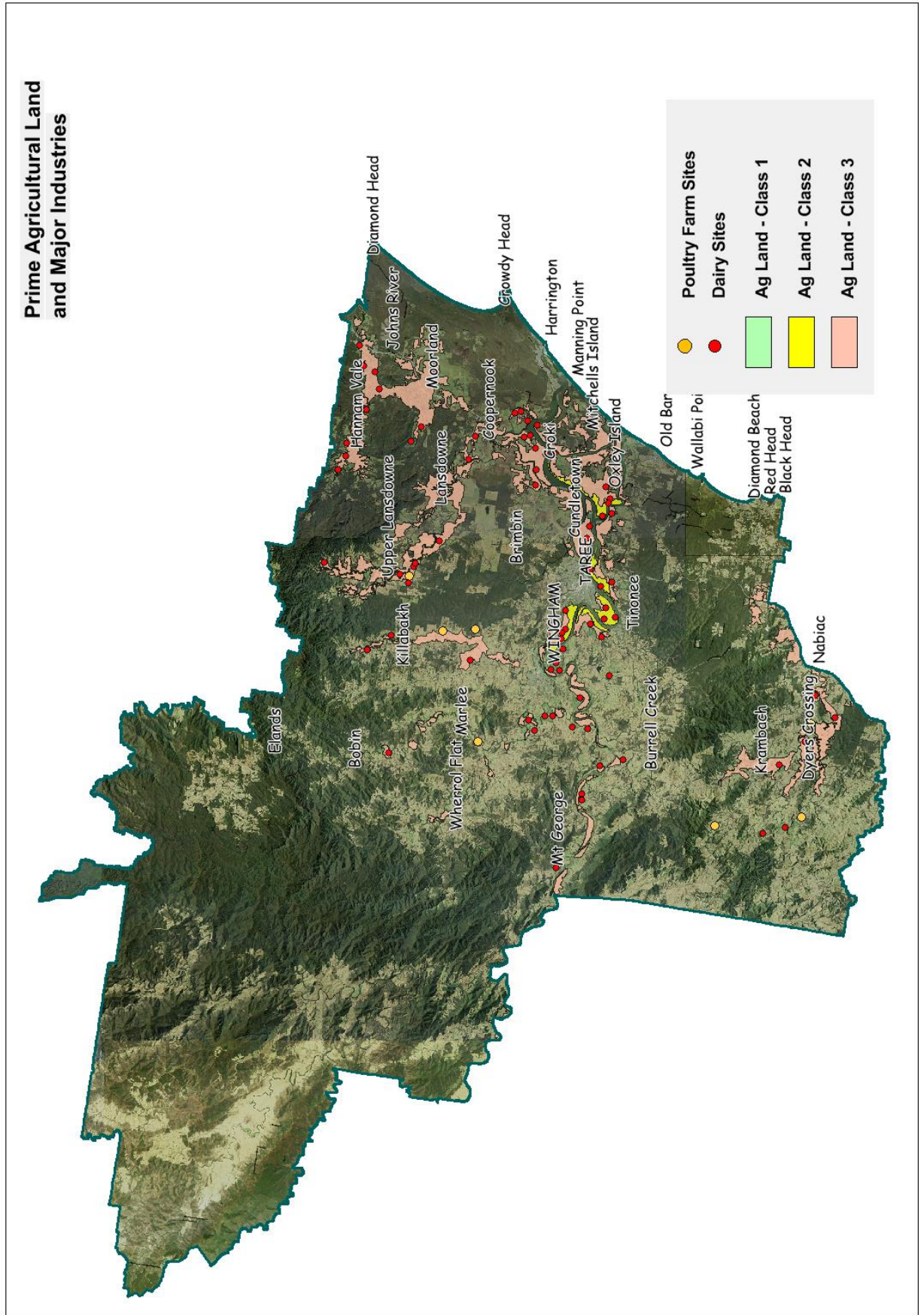
**Figure 26 - Poultry in the Manning Valley**

An important trend to consider is the changing nature of farming. Along the NSW coast more intensive agriculture has occurred on smaller parcels of land (20ha) where owners grow produce like blueberries, strawberries, tomatoes, turf and flowers. These producers require good access to markets, flat land and a good water supply. Some of these types of producers are at Taree West, Wingham, Coopernook and Pampoolah.

To this end the fragmentation of rural land is an important indicator of how the land has been used. Significant and extensive fragmentation of rural lands has occurred in the Manning Valley over a long period of time as a result of planning controls which were less restrictive. The result is a mixture of holding sizes across the rural landscape as indicated in **Table 3** and on **Map 29**.

In this regard, it is important to note that the RU1 Primary Production zone has a minimum lot size of 40ha, yet almost 5,000 holdings (62.2%) are under 10ha and 6477 holdings (81.5%) are under 40ha in size. By comparison, the RU4 Primary Production Small Lots zone has a minimum lot size of 20ha, yet 345 (51.8%) holdings are less than 10ha. This shows the level of fragmentation in both zones and suggests that the land has nearly reached its full subdivision potential. For example in the RU1 Primary Production zone, less than 9% of the holdings could be subdivided.

**Prime Agricultural Land  
and Major Industries**



**Map 27 - Prime Agricultural Land and Major Industries**



**Table 3 - Area and number of holdings in RU4 and RU1 zoned land**

Holding area (ha)	RU4 Primary Production Small Lots				RU1 Primary Production			
	Total holding area (ha)	% of total holding area	Number of holdings	% of number of holdings	Total holding area (ha)	% of total holding area	Number of holdings	% of number of holdings
0-10ha	1355	10.97%	345	51.80%	11839	4.64%	4946	62.27%
11-20ha	1373	11.12%	107	16.07%	11333	4.44%	732	9.22%
21-40ha	2695	21.82%	121	18.17%	24600	9.64%	799	10.06%
41-75ha	1696	13.73%	47	7.06%	40164	15.74%	771	9.71%
76-120ha	1385	11.21%	22	3.30%	29416	11.53%	320	4.03%
121-200ha	1378	11.15%	16	2.40%	28964	11.35%	196	2.47%
>200ha	2470	19.99%	8	1.20%	108791	42.65%	179	2.25%
	<b>Total area: 12352</b>		<b>Total: 666</b>		<b>Total area: 255107</b>		<b>Total: 7943</b>	

**Map 29** shows the extent of the fragmentation across the Manning Valley. It is clear that the smaller holdings are concentrated around the towns and villages and extend up the valleys along road linkages in a classic ribbon pattern. These smaller holdings typically accommodate rural lifestyle rather than rural producers.

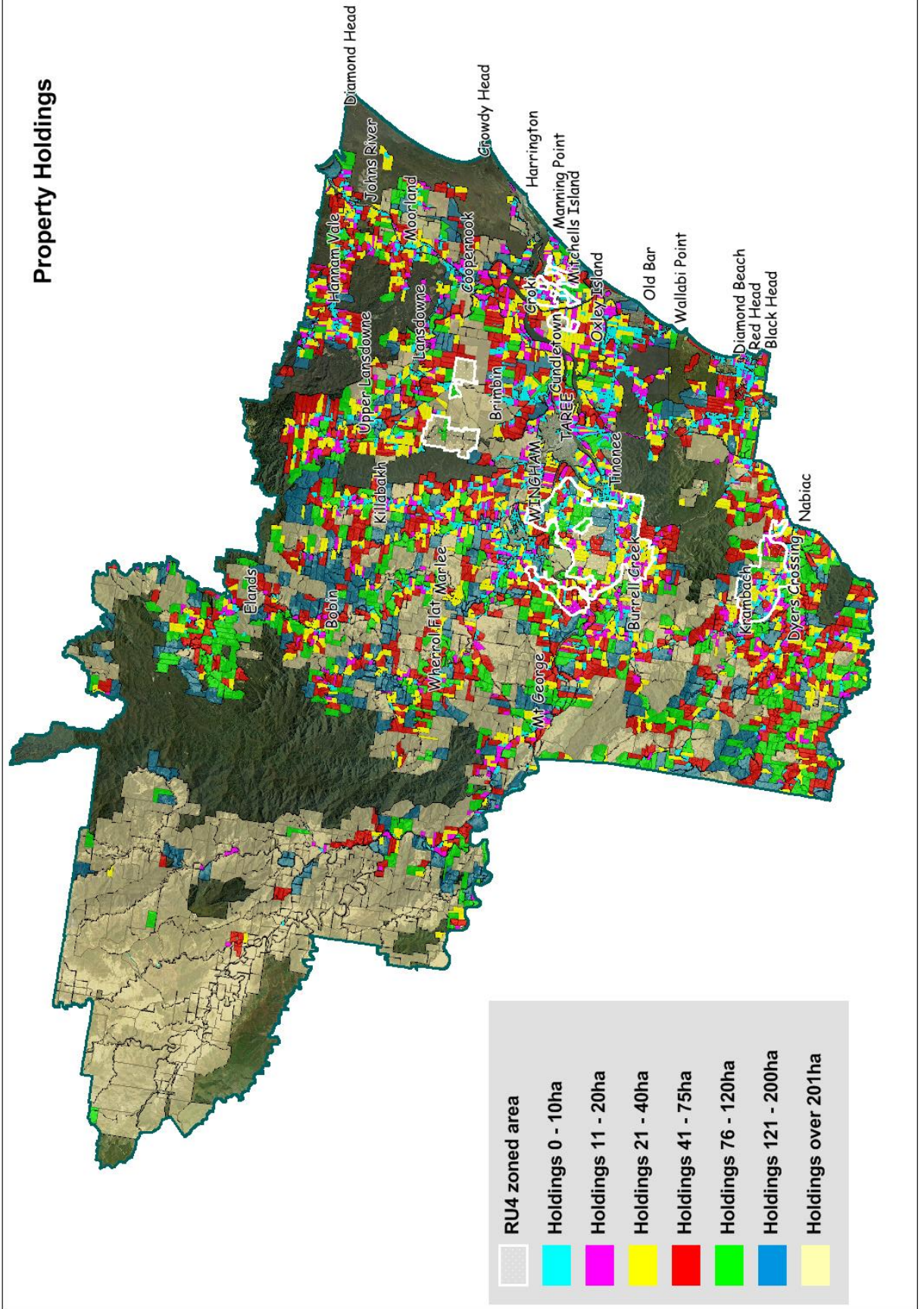
It is also noted that many of the holdings greater than 120ha are located in the north west of the Manning Valley where road linkages are limited. Typically, these larger holdings incorporate steep hills and ridgelines and are well vegetated. This reduces their productivity as rural holdings as well as the potential for further subdivision.

In the Manning Valley it is definitely the case that one size does not fit all and while we have good baseline data further analysis is required to define and determine the best options to maximise the use of rural lands. This analysis should include but not be limited to the following issues:

- Maintaining a right to farm
- Rural succession planning
- Maintaining productive agricultural land
- The influence of banks/borrowing capacity on rural land management
- Managing rural conflict
- Sustainable land management in a variable landscape
- Supporting land uses that enable a diverse range of rural enterprises
- Minimum lot sizes and allotment averaging
- The history of fragmentation and the current demand for a range of rural lifestyle choices.



# Property Holdings



Map 29 - Property Holdings

## **Direction 4.2 Provide opportunities to maximise the use of rural land**

Primary production is extremely sensitive to a range of external factors including climate, regional, state and federal economies, as well as local and global commodity market conditions. Given these financial sensitivities and the resultant impacts on the wider regional economy, flexibility is needed to permit diversity and allow landowners to both retain farms, but also invest in other activities that are compatible with the rural landscape.

The minimum subdivision size within an LEP has a substantial impact on rural asset value. If the land can be subdivided, and the resultant lot has a dwelling entitlement, the land value is significantly higher – sometimes double. The zoning of the land and its proximity to village/urban areas also affects the value of the land and therefore, the ability to borrow against it. The vast majority of farmers now have few, if any off-farm assets, leaving them asset rich and cash poor.

Banks have a lower lending value for rural property, as opposed to residential property. Generally this relates to the liquidity and purpose of the asset – and residential property is more liquid than farming property. Lending value for farming property is up to 70% of the valuation/market value, whereas it is up to 80% for residential and rural residential properties. Other factors which influence borrowing capacity are asset value, the ability to service debt, and the equity a landowner has built up in a property.

Farming business structures have traditionally centred around family partnerships, and as such, the ability to fund intergenerational succession planning is increasingly difficult. When many existing farmers began their businesses, superannuation was uncommon, and as farmers of the older age group are unlikely to have had off-farm employment, no contributions have been made on their behalf. Superannuation is also not compulsory for (farm) business owners, and profits which could have been set aside as superannuation, have usually been reinvested in the farm to improve productivity or pay debt.

As a result, the farmer relies on their asset – the farm, for their superannuation, and if unable to sell part of the farm to realise the value, is forced to sell the farm in its entirety, and ultimately leave the farming industry early. Alternatively, they are forced to continue on the farm with reduced productivity until they are able to bequeath it to their children. In the Manning Valley, succession planning for the next generation is critical from a very early stage due to the cost of land and the inability of children to purchase the property from their parents upon retirement.

The lifestyle requirements of a changing population have also seen the demand for larger properties over 40ha diminish. This is reflected in significant fragmentation which has been discussed above. Planning provisions which enable the next generation to farm alongside their parents as they approach retirement – perhaps on a smaller scale without inheriting significant debt, is important in supporting agricultural viability in the Manning Valley into the future.

The success of intergenerational change within the farming industry is clearly dependant on flexibility in LEP provisions. This flexibility is required not only in terms of subdivision and minimum lot size but also in the types of uses which are permitted in the rural zones. Providing more flexibility and options increases rural social diversity within the Manning Valley. This includes diversity in age, education, income, social and political background equating to a more progressive rural community, while also supporting the continuation of productive traditional family farming practices.

#### 4.2.1 Develop innovative rural planning controls

**Priority: High**

Current planning controls over the rural lands are limited to just two land use zones. These zones cover almost 70% of the Manning Valley. The result is that the zone often does not reflect the value of the land or its use.

Better delineation of rural land use zones will ensure the right values of the land are protected and that the use of the land is appropriate. There are four zones that can apply to rural lands:

- RU1 Primary Production zone - used for most types of commercial primary industry production, including extensive agriculture, intensive livestock and intensive plant agriculture, aquaculture, forestry, mining and extractive industries. The zone is aimed at utilising the natural resource base in a sustainable manner and is applied to land where the principal function is primary production
- RU2 Rural Landscape zone - used for commercial primary production that is compatible with ecological or scenic landscape qualities that have been conserved (often due to topography). The land may be suitable for grazing and other forms of agriculture, but the uses are more limited and differ from Primary Production land due to landscape constraints. This zone is currently not used in the Manning Valley
- RU4 Primary Production Small Lots zone - used for commercial primary industry production, including emerging primary industries and agricultural uses that operate on smaller rural holdings. This zone was applied in the 1980s to three locations - Bootawa, Dyers Crossing and Brimbin - where much of the land was important farmland. Of the 12,800ha in this zone, over 94% has been subdivided. Instead of achieving intensive agricultural uses, rural lifestyle lots resulted. Historically, outcomes consistent with the intent of this zone have been achieved closer to towns and villages
- E4 Environmental Living zone - generally intended for land with special environmental or scenic values, and accommodates low impact residential development. Recently applied to Brimbin, it could be extended over locations like Elands.

These zones have been applied differently across NSW as shown in **Table 4** below.

From the work undertaken to date it is clear that the planning controls for rural lands need to significantly change to better reflect the value of the land and how it is used. These changes as indicated above need flexibility not only in terms of subdivision and minimum lot size but also in the types of uses which are permitted in the rural zones

Specifically, the:

- RU1 Primary Production zone will be reviewed and emphasis will be placed on applying it to the most valuable agricultural lands. The land uses within the zone will also be examined to provide diversity and the minimum lot size will be reviewed to test its applicability against the level of fragmentation which has already occurred
- RU2 Rural Landscape zone will be applied to less valuable agricultural lands where lifestyle choices are the key driver and not agricultural enterprises
- RU4 Primary Production Small Lots zone will be applied where fragmentation has been the greatest, typically clustered around towns and villages

- E4 Environmental Living zone will be applied where fragmentation is clustered around towns and villages where there is environmental or scenic value.

When applying new rural zones, the dwelling entitlements for rural lands will be reviewed to provide clarity on whether existing dwelling entitlements should be maintained or restrictions lifted to promote better usage of lands. Rural dual occupancy (detached) will also be supported as will the establishment of a range of new tourist and rural enterprise uses to invigorate this sector of the economy.

**Table 4 - Minimum lot size applied to rural lifestyle lots in NSW**

Council	Primary Production (RU1)	Rural Landscape (RU2)	Primary Production Small Lots (RU4)	Environmental Living (E4)
Greater Taree	100/40ha	-	20ha	600ha
Great Lakes	-	40ha	-	-
Gloucester	100ha	-	-	-
Port Macquarie - Hastings	40ha	100ha	-	450m <sup>2</sup>
Kempsey	40ha	40ha	8ha	40ha
Port Stephens	40ha	40ha	-	10ha
Lake Macquarie	-	20ha	1ha	2ha
Yass	20/70ha	80ha	16ha	16ha
Byron	40ha	40ha	-	-

#### 4.2.2 Facilitate a broad range of rural activities

##### Priority: Low

The location of the Manning Valley, in particular its access to Sydney/Newcastle markets and its desirability as a location for ‘tree changers’ provides significant opportunities for growth in alternate rural enterprises. Just as ‘Manning Valley Naturally’ encourages visitors to the Manning Valley, a promotion strategy is required to stimulate rural investment. Such a strategy would:

- encourage rural support industries (e.g. milk powder or baby food) to relocate to the Manning Valley to leverage off our dairy sector
- develop partnerships between rural producers to market their goods and target tourists (e.g. farm-gate businesses and farmers markets). A successful example is Taste Orange and the Macleay Valley Food Bowl
- explore rural training facilities
- investigate the viability of upgrading the cattle saleyards to again become the regional hub for cattle sales
- trial new produce lines suitable to our climate and soil conditions
- encourage industries that support hobby farms (e.g. boutique abattoir to handle goats, sheep and pigs)
- encourage rural tourism and farm gate sales

The strategy is intended to be developed in consultation with the Manning Valley Business Chamber with the assistance of a number of Government and key stakeholder groups.

## 6. Where to from here

The Manning Valley Local Strategy is a draft document. The next stages involve:

- consultation on the draft strategy
- Council adoption of the final Manning Valley Local Strategy
- NSW Department of Planning and Environment endorsement of the strategy
- implementation over a four year period

Delivery of the strategy involves making changes to the planning controls within the *Greater Taree Local Environmental Plan 2010* and the *Greater Taree Development Control Plan 2010*. These changes will be made in consultation with the community.

The Local Strategy will be reviewed in five years to ensure the actions have been completed and outcomes are being achieved on ground. The State Government target of achieving 40% housing choice in new housing will be monitored to see whether the changes proposed lead to this outcome.

